

Art in America

EXHIBITIONS THE LOOKOUT



David Diao

at Postmasters,
through Mar. 11

54 Franklin Street

In “HongKong Boyhood,” his twelfth solo show at Postmasters, painter David Diao (b. 1943) evokes a lasting sense of personal and cultural dislocation induced by early ruptures in his upbringing. At age six, he fled Communist takeover of his family home in Chengdu (his grandfather was a Nationalist general). From six to twelve, he lived as a quasi-refugee in British-run Hong Kong. In 1955, he came to the US, eventually establishing himself as a well-regarded New York artist (showing with dealers like Tony Shafrazi and Paula Cooper) and a founding member of the Whitney Museum International Study Program staff.

The twenty-two works in this show are rather schematic, featuring large fields of flat acrylic color and occasional collage elements. Some are maps, their land mass relationships as much psychological as geographic. Some reproduce emblems of exile (the logo of the True Light Lutheran Church, a blackboard at Elvy’s Private English School). And others use inscriptions or silk-screened photo images to make implicit points about transcultural conditioning. Under the UK royal coat of arms, for example, we read: MY PRIZE FOR POETRY RECITATION WAS A BOOK ON THE HISTORY OF ENGLAND. American Dream in Hong Kong (2016), arguably the show’s summa, is a map of the Hong Kong territory with two separate photo images superimposed: one depicting the young Diao in a rodeo T-shirt, the other his then-neighbor, the famed actress Li Lihua, done up as a cowgirl. —Richard Vine

Pictured: David Diao: I was caned by the Headmaster 1, 2016, acrylic and silkscreen on canvas, 78 by 60 inches. Courtesy Postmasters, New York.