



December 7 - January 25, 2020

David Diao

## *Studios and Sales*



David Diao, *Sales*, 1992 (detail)  
25 paintings, 20 3/4 x 14 3/4 inches each

David Diao's *Studios and Sales*, an exhibition of one new and one old work, is an exquisitely resonant snapshot of an artist's practice spanning over 50-plus years. It comprises a series of 25 paintings from 1992 documenting his yearly sales, and a new, large painting depicting the footprints of all the studios he has occupied since 1964.

*I made the 25 small paintings in 1992 to document my sales record from 1968 on. Red dots are affixed to each canvas enumerating the number of paintings sold in each year. The number of dots fluctuate from year to year. Many paintings are devoid of any dots.*

*In 1991 I made a painting titled 'Studios' which diagrammed all the spaces I lived and worked in since coming to New York in 1964. A few years ago I moved to a new studio. I decided to make an updated version that incorporated this and a sold country property that had missed inclusion in the earlier version.*

The group of *Sales* paintings was first shown at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Dijon the year they were made. *Studios* was completed recently. Both works are two-dimensional dataviz manifestations that predate current immersive and interactive versions, and offer, though graphic substitutes, private and vulnerable personal information.

Diao painting his sales records is the opposite of bragging; sensitive and extremely personal, the alternating lean and fat years have a built-in implication of failure. Like On Kawara's date paintings, these deadpan, neutral depictions of facts are coupled with the emotionally desaturated representations of the spaces that were the sites of his creative life.

David Diao's work combines painting, theory and critical reflection. Since the mid-eighties he pioneered the unconventional use of information, a pre-digital visualization of data as a resource of expression in art where graphs, diagrams, directories, charts and logos are stand-ins for traditional modernist form of representation. A deft master of paradox, Diao is known for his extraordinarily sensual surfaces jarringly interrupted by vinyl appliqué.

In his essay *Escape from Flatland: David Diao's Handmade Visualizations of Information*, Michael Corris writes: "In Diao's work, the modes of data or information visualization stand in for a conception of objectivity, and that these structures—coupled with a specific type of painting process and a particular kind of subject matter—function to reshape the meaning of subjectivity in art."\*

There are three contemporary forces that collude to render this show—and Diao's broader engagement with painting—so timely:

1. **TMI and The Spectacle of Voyeurism:** Our culture of fascination with other people's affairs, intensified by the intentional or coerced oversharing of personal information, utterly transforms our interactions with the world, whether in social media or IRL.
2. **The Commoditization of Our Data:** Big Data, small data, mega-data, personal data, the flood and form and exploitation of data alters the way we construct meaning.
3. **Art Market Validation:** However skewed or criticized, it is undeniable that in this moment, the clanging bell of speculative market performance is drowning out other measures of value, success and historical importance.

Revealing everything, he ends up sharing nothing. *Sales* and *Studios* are both peripheral, the external parameters of a life of artmaking. In the end, David Diao, one of the greatest contemporary painters, is not letting you in. An artist who cold-delivers sensitive personal facts finally has history catching up to him.

\* Corris, M. (2018) *Escape from Flatland*. In P. Tinari (Ed.), *David Diao: Diao Deqian* (pp. 39-50). Ullens Center for Contemporary Art: Beijing