



DAVID DIAO

Berlin Chair in Pieces

January 29, 2022 - March 5, 2022

Postmasters is thrilled to announce *Berlin Chair in Pieces*, an exhibition featuring thirteen new paintings by David Diao. This will be the artist's 14th solo show with the gallery since 1985.

David Diao, December 18, 2021

"Gerrit Rietveld's *Red/Blue Chair*, 1918 is an icon of modernist design. It is the first image that comes to mind when one thinks of the De Stijl movement. He has made many other chairs almost as iconic. One that has especially interested me is the *Berlin Chair*, 1923. It is made of eight rectangular planks of painted wood: two black, one dark grey, one medium grey, one light grey and three white. That these pieces make up a nice run from black to white and combined with color grounds go toward a long standing goal of paintings that combine color with black and white. I have made reference to several of Rietveld chairs, but these recent paintings based on the *Berlin Chair* have allowed me to be more productive in coming up with different examples.

Instead of depicting the chair whole, I have in every instance deployed the eight disassembled components in various ways but always as the complete set so they add up to the chair if reassembled. The first ones were set either in formation or scattered, or piled on monochrome grounds. Then the eight pieces were arrayed around an imaginary circle or describing a square. Wanting to make matters more complex, the pieces were put upon 2 color and 3 color grounds. The next steps have the pieces on checkerboard and opposed square grounds.

There is a famous wall and sliding doors at the Katsura Villa in Kyoto that have a checkerboard pattern. Positioning the chair components against such a background may be a stretch but, in some way, it brought Rietveld to Japan. Placing the eight pieces as a circle on top of an opposed square ground resulted in a big surprise. The BMW logo emerged.

Without being told, one would not know that these paintings refer to the *Berlin Chair*; they could be just abstract geometric hard edge paintings. Since 1985, if not earlier, I have sought to question that abstract painting has no referent other than itself. Almost all my work has a back story."

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Since his emergence in New York in the 1960s, David Diao has always been one of the greatest critics of western abstract painting by being one of its greatest practitioners. From his long running dialogue with postwar giant Barnett Newman, Diao has now reached back, once again, to Rietveld and de Stijl, to question the very foundations of European modernism, while making the powerful case for the relevance of his own work. Diao continues to show new paths forward from the art history he has helped to create.

— Greg Allen