

POSTMASTERS

postmasters 459 w 19 street nyc 10011 212 727 3323

fax 212 229 2829

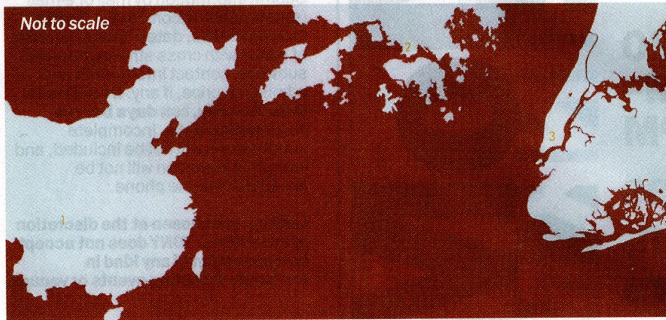
postmasters@thing.net

Time Out
New York

February 5–11, 2009

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David Diao, “I lived there until I was 6...”



★★★★★

Postmasters Gallery, through Feb 21 (see Chelsea)

Mining his past, painter David Diao has created one of his most compelling bodies of work to date. The show is centered on his lost family home in Chengdu, China, seized when Diao, his grandparents, father, aunts and uncles fled the Communist takeover in 1949 on a day's notice. The 35 paintings on view reflect the memories of a six-year-old child and the recollections of his relatives, who left an affluent life and prominent house with only one suitcase in hand.

Starting out as a minimal, abstract painter in the 1960s, Diao changed course in the mid-'80s, becoming a postmodern formalist, referencing Kazimir Malevich's Constructivist canvases, Alfred Barr's modernist

timelines, Barnett Newman's Abstract Expressionist masterpieces, and his own personal history and desires. Diao's current show is a culmination of sorts, where the past is eloquently sifted and every gesture is highly considered.

The exhibition begins with *I lived there until I was 6...* and ends with *A Chinese Without Chinese Education*. In between are paintings that offer remnants of a stolen past, a loss that's both personal and universal. All of the paintings allude to a tennis court on the Diao family property, which serves as a stand-in for the entire estate. Taken over to be the headquarters of the *Sichuan Daily* newspaper, the house was demolished before Diao could return, and no photographic records exist. What remains is a persistent memory, poetically conveyed on canvas.

—Paul Laster