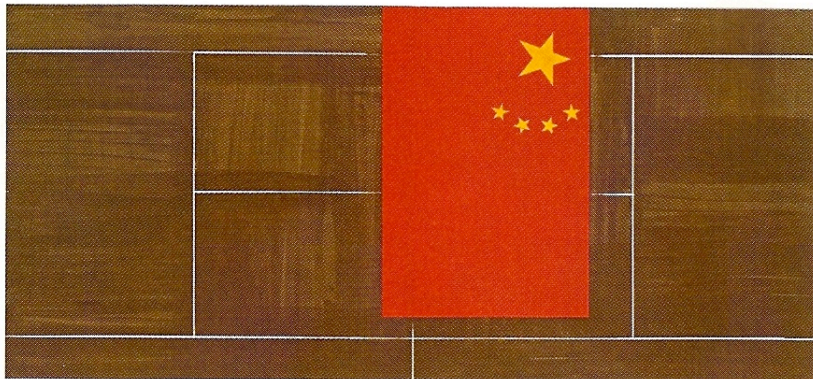


David Diao: *Red Star Over Tennis Court*, 2008, acrylic and marker on canvas, 36 by 78 inches; at Postmasters.



Mira Schor: *The Professor*, 2008, oil on linen, 16 by 12 inches; at Momenta Art.

me the hard sell. Soon after the show closed, the shanty was moved to the Brooklyn Navy Yard, where it will remain for one year. For \$199.99, I could buy a week-long stay; for \$599.99, I would also get, after the shanty's disassembly, one of the 52 individual pieces of which it had been made; \$8,999.99 would buy me a piece cast in bronze. London's binder detailing the sales made the offer very tempting: suddenly I found myself thinking how nice it would be to have a daybed made of cinderblocks and salvaged wood in my apartment. The glossy photos of a smiling young couple with a baby happily occupying the shanty didn't hurt either.

It's easy to dismiss Kirk's installation as frivolous; will anyone who buys a timeshare (when I visited in late February, a number of prime, holiday weeks had already been sold) actually live in it? Unlikely, given that the bathroom is a bucket tucked behind a flap of cardboard, and running water is dependent on rain. But Kirk and her salespeople are on to something. While the housing crisis may not have hit New York as hard as Florida and Michigan, any of us might be headed for a shanty sooner or later. At least the Brooklyn Navy Yard has harbor views.

—Leigh Anne Miller

## DAVID DIAO POSTMASTERS

David Diao's recent exhibition was tightly focused and autobiographical. Thirty-five canvases of various sizes, all from 2008, filled the gallery's two rooms. Consistent with the artist's established idiom, the

canvases are monochrome fields with added elements—here including maps, diagrams and inscriptions in English and Chinese. The diversity of format and imagery extends to surface treatment: Diao typically builds up layers of acrylic, laid on with a knife and burnished, to achieve effects that can resemble encaustic or translucent glass.

The show's title, "I Lived There Until I was Six . . .," set the stage for an account of politically forced displacement. In 1949, Diao and most of his family fled their home in Chengdu, China, just before the Communist takeover of the city, leaving almost everything behind. A smallish painting (18 by 28 inches) titled *One Suitcase per Person* lends a tone of urgency. Diao grew up in New York, where he has been painting since the late 1960s.

In 1979, he returned to Chengdu. The family house, requisitioned decades earlier as offices for the *Sichuan Daily*, had been torn down that year. No photographs or plans remained. Many of the paintings deal with Diao's attempts to recapture a sense of the house and its surroundings. The "house" was actually a complex of structures incorporating gardens and a tennis court, the latter furnishing the show's most evocative (and repeated) motif. Several canvases (up to 6½ feet in the largest dimension) replicate a tennis court's format and linear markings. From the dimensions of a regulation-size court, one can deduce the compound's imposing scale. (The image has a personal significance, as well: *Death on Tennis Court*

memorializes Diao's father, who died in 1990 playing tennis in New York.) Nonidentical floor plans of the house, derived from the imperfect memories of aunts and uncles, appear in several paintings, as do maps and a site photo from Google Earth.

The exhibition's largest canvas was *Timeline* (13 feet wide), which sets out historical and family dates from 1930 to 2008. At the top, a band runs from left to right in dark blue up to the 1949 founding of the People's Republic, and red from then on. It laconically lists (in English) wars and major turning points (Long March, Cultural Revolution, Tiananmen, Sichuan earthquake . . .). The painting's lower zone is deep gray with family dates in pale blue. Diao's grandfather built the Chengdu house in 1932-36. It stood 43 years. On the wall above *Timeline*, two small canvases bracketed the house's history, each inscribed with a single Chinese character translated in its title: *To Construct* and *Demolish*.

A witty conceptual play with references to other artists (among them Barnett Newman, Malevich, Warhol and various modernist architects) has long been a source of pictorial variation for Diao. Here, two works featuring a ginkgo leaf nod to Ellsworth Kelly, and the two contiguous orbs of *Balls* (while counting as a tennis reference) bring Jasper Johns to mind, as do the floor plans, the recurrent use of gray and the acute attention to surface. The two strands that constitute Diao's heritage converged here in an off-beat and engrossing show.

—Elizabeth C. Baker