

## Deconstructing Gerhard Richter Mania, Postmasters Offers a Playful and Surprisingly Affecting Essay in Exhibition Form



Photo by Kyle Chayka

David Diao, "Wealth of Nations," 1972

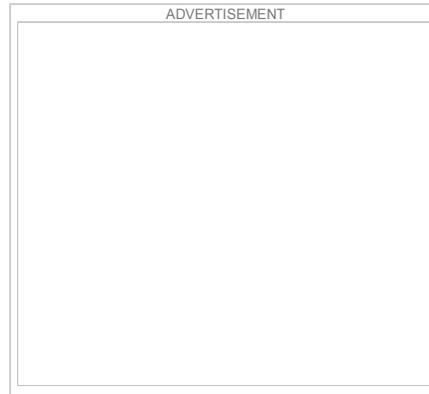
by Kyle Chayka

Published: June 5, 2012

Gerhard Richter, that German hero of brainy painting, is in the process of being canonized by both art history and the contemporary art market. "The art world always needs a clear top end," observed dealer Thaddaeus Ropac to Art+Auction magazine after the artist's photo-based paintings began to hit individual auction marks of \$15-20 million. "The art market instinctively decided Richter should be the one."

But what exactly makes Richter suitable for the task of leading the upper echelons of contemporary art? Such is the question posed by Postmasters gallery's archly critical exhibition "Richteriana," which, rather than poking fun at the master's work, honestly examines how the canonical current has removed Richter's oeuvre from its original context and turned his name into a stock ticker label to watch rise and fall. A collection of work deriving from Richter's practice or adopting similar strategies, the show confronts the slippery difficulties of the art-historical canon, and the reasons why one artist might be crowned over another.

“Richteriana” can be divided into the pieces that merely bear visual or conceptual similarity to Richter’s and more intriguing interventions that directly examine his privileged position in the art world, confronting our Richter fetish. Fabian Marcaccio’s acrid, gnarly paintings made of rope and silicone anesthetize the power of their violent subject matter through abstraction, much the same as Richter’s photo-paintings. Rory Donaldson’s digitally altered photos bring to mind the directional blurs of the German’s squeegee abstractions.



Art-world archaeological prankster-in-residence

Greg Allen uncovered documentation of early photo paintings that Richter subsequently destroyed and revived them with the help a Chinese painting replication factory. The results are paintings of photos of paintings of photos. The gesture is dryly satirical but remains ambiguous: Allen’s contributions rely entirely on Richter for their substantial visual power, and seem to be driven more by the impulse of a fanboy rather than a saboteur.

These artists can’t help but fall into Richter’s gravitational field, but painter David Diao provides a strong dissenting voice to the art history engine. Diao’s abstract paintings, including the striking “Wealth of Nations” (1972) on display at Postmasters, were made through a sweeping process similar to Richter’s, though Diao actually *preceded* Richter. “Synecdoche” (1993), a reproduced essay by critic Benjamin Buchloh on Richter’s work that Diao has defaced with his own name and images of his work, is a one-man subversion of the canon and an insertion of the self into historical narrative. The piece is angry and unsettling, a brief window opening to reveal art’s rumbling discontents. Diao’s 1972 painting haunts Richter’s absent work like a specter representing the flip side of fame.

“Richteriana” won’t do anything to unseat Richter from his throne, but then it isn’t meant to. (If it were, including a female artist or two might have been a start.) Though Diao comes closest to rewriting the critical record, in the end, it’s not up to him. There may come a time hundreds of years hence when the show is acknowledged as the beginning of the end for Richter mania by art kingmakers of the future, but for now it remains a small protest.

***“Richteriana” runs through June 16 at Postmasters Gallery***

---