

ARTFORUM

500 WORDS

David Diao

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David Diao, 1971-A, 1971, acrylic on canvas, 7' 6" x 12'.

Paintings by the New York-based artist David Diao were recently featured in the 2014 Whitney Biennial and were the subject of a colloquium this past March at the Université de Strasbourg. His latest survey exhibition, "David Diao: Front to Back," curated by Richard Klein, is on view at the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum. The show, which coincides with the fiftieth anniversary of the institution, runs from July 13 to September 21, 2014.

WHEN RICHARD FIRST PROPOSED THIS EXHIBITION, I thought we would focus on paintings I made in 2005 about the Glass House and architecture in New Canaan, Connecticut. He quickly rejected this as too predictable. As there is no brand new work I felt ready to show, he decided to present a survey going back to my beginnings. While the gallery space is not huge, it does include the museum's entryway, which gave us a good start when thinking about how to install the show. I had made a group of paintings in the 1990s that ask how one might image and document a life as an artist. They take the form of curriculum vitae, sales records, studio visits, and critical reviews, all organized as orderly charts that might serve as introductory wall labels for a retrospective. I had in mind an ordinary, yeoman artist but did use data gathered from my own middling career for the task at hand. For a long time I did not think I was doing autobiography. The work was shown 1991 under the title "...for a real allegory," as a direct reference to Courbet's painting of himself in the studio surrounded by his milieu. At the Aldrich, I am finally showing the CV painting, *Résumé*, as a wall text, which is how it was first imagined to be. This work is in three separate panels and twenty-two feet long—too lengthy for the intended wall. Richard came up with the brilliant solution to break up the three panels with the first on the left side and the other two conjoined on the right side of the double glass doors leading into the gallery. It is almost as if the painting—whose subject is the twenty-two-year exhibition history of the artist being shown—has parted to admit the visitor into the show.

I am also pleased to be showing several squeegee paintings from 1971 and '72 that I haven't seen in over forty years. In the late '60s, the allover paintings I had been making were simply getting bigger and bigger in size without the increase in scale that I had sought. One solution, I thought, was to increase the size of the actual mark; to have a one-to-one relationship between mark and canvas, as if a giant had made the mark. I was also determined to go against Clement Greenberg's advice to painters to cut off and crop the painted canvas in order to find the final work. Instead, mine indexes everything that happened on it. The streets of SoHo were littered each night with cardboard tubes from the rag trade. These became the readymade scrapers with which I would spread the paint. I found I was able to control a cardboard tube of approximately five feet by inserting an electrical conduit into the tube and leaving a length exposed as a handle. I would scrape, roll, or drag repeated layers of paint across the entire canvas in swaths I could manage until something happened to my liking.

With this show I also have the added pleasure of employing a few works as evidentiary proof against specific canonical chronologies and events that I have been written out of. For instance, in *Synecdoche*, 1993, I collaged Benjamin Buchloh's catalogue essay from a Gerhard Richter catalogue with my own squeegee works: Wherever his name appears in the text, I crossed it out and replaced it with my own. Some would say that what I do is unseemly, that one should not toot their own horn. I guess it's a ridicule that I chance for what I perceive to have been a wrong.

Also on view in the show is *Double Rejection*, 2012. This work images the Philip Johnson-designed boardroom at MoMA as well as my painting *Triptych*, which was brought there for possible acquisition in 1972, yet was ultimately rejected (as was Johnson's eventually destroyed architecture). By bringing these paintings together again, I hope the show enlivens my old work and offers the public not a hearsay or fabrication—as so often is the case with art history—but a fact.

— As told to Lauren O'Neill-Butler