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David Diao's "Neighbor 1950-1955," from 2016. David Diao and Postmasters Gallery

David Diao spent nearly six years in Hong Kong before migrating to the United States in the 1950s and this experience left an indelible mark, which he unpacks in “HongKong Boyhood” at Postmasters. Part 1950s textbook, part postmodern pastiche, the spare, colorful canvases here narrate the story of Mr. Diao’s childhood but also the climate of colonial rule in the post-World War II period.

Canvases include painted versions of maps, a timeline and a Best Western logo, since a hotel occupies the site where Mr. Diao’s family lived; that family included his grandfather, a retired Chinese Nationalist Party general. One diptych features the smiling face of Li Lihua, a film actress who lived in the building next door. But if proximity to a movie star implies a privileged upbringing, two other works titled “I was caned by the Headmaster” (2016) and featuring a cropped photographic image of a schoolmaster flexing a switch in his hands, offer a deft assessment of Hong Kong under the British, from a child’s point of view.

Mr. Diao has approached his childhood with fondness and honesty. And yet, there is momentum in these works: Hong Kong was always a way station for Mr. Diao’s family, which was intent on going West. Hovering between two worlds — the news release is printed in English and Chinese — the show also connects the past with the present, since there are an estimated 65 million migrants currently on the move. In this sense, Mr. Diao’s experience, while particular and interesting, is no longer extraordinary.

Martha Schwendener