

What to See in N.Y.C. Galleries Right Now

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TRIBECA

David Diao

Through March 12. Postmasters, 54 Franklin Street, Manhattan; 212-727-3323; postmastersart.com.



Recent abstractions by David Diao, behind Gerrit Rietveld's 1923 "Berlin" chair, whose components provide their forms. Postmasters; Echo Sniderman

A century ago, Marcel Duchamp presented everyday objects — a urinal, a shovel — as “readymade” art. An “assisted readymade” was a found postcard of Mona Lisa with a mustache added; a “reciprocal readymade” was supposed to take art, like a Rembrandt, and put it to work as an everyday ironing board.

In David Diao’s 14th Postmasters solo show since 1985, the 79-year-old artist takes an everyday object that already derives from art and uses paint to turn it back into the kind of art it derives from. It’s something like a “readymade assisted reciprocal readymade” — the art equivalent of a skater’s triple axel.

The not-so-everyday object that Diao based his work on hangs from the Postmasters ceiling: It’s the “Berlin” chair conceived by the Dutch designer Gerrit Rietveld in 1923. Built — uncomfortably — from eight rectangular planks of white, gray and black wood, it’s a functional riff on the Constructivist abstractions that Russian painters had just developed. Diao has taken Rietveld’s functional components and used them as forms in some new abstract paintings.

In one, the chair’s eight shapes are placed vertically, in rigorous order, like bars in a bar-graph. Another piles them messily on top of each other, evoking the dynamic compositions of the Constructivist El Lissitzky.

But these aren’t Duchamp’s “antiretinal” exercises in artistic irony. Diao’s sleek surfaces are gorgeous and complex, like the plaster walls in a palazzo. His colors and compositions are thrilling.

His “conceptual” paintings truly give retinal pleasure.

-BLAKE GOPNIK