

Art in America

David Diao Details His Painting on the Cover of Art in America



*David Diao, whose painting Bauhaus Still Looking to De Stijl (2018) appears on the cover of the Fall issue of Art in America, is **profiled** in the magazine. From his studio in New York, Diao told A.i.A. the backstory of the piece, shown below in full.*

You might say that what I do is image mongering. I'm looking for things that have a metaphorical meaning or a history, and I use them as subjects for my work. My desire is for my abstractions to have a backstory that is historically related, something that is not just abstract. I like my work to have a narrower meaning, especially since 1984, when I painted *On Our Land* [which pairs the Palestinian flag with an abstract pattern derived from a Suprematist drawing by Ilya Chashnik]. That was the first painting I did after not working for a few years, and then I quickly moved on to Malevich.

I often revisit my work if I think its ideas are still good. I made a version of this painting in 1987 called *Bauhaus Looks to De Stijl*. This one is called *Bauhaus Still Looking to De Stijl*. On the left is the profile icon of the Bauhaus designed by Vilmos Huszár. On the right is the *Red Blue Chair* by Gerrit Rietveld with all the black struts taken out. I'm happy that it can be seen as a face.

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Tanya Leighton

The profile icon is in almost every book on the Bauhaus, and the chair I got from a poster for the Israel Museum. They have a lot to do with each other, historically. People in the Bauhaus became De Stijl members—Huszár was even involved with De Stijl. And I've always thought of Rietveld as being as important as any artist, even though he's known as a chair designer and an architect. I actually have five Rietveld chairs. In the 1960s, I traded an artist named Gary Hudson my Moroccan rug for his *Red Blue Chair*, and the *Berlin Chair* that I reconstructed [for several other paintings] was by a guy who worked with Donald Judd. They're all copies, however.

I like to use color, and color is oftentimes the subjective element in my work. I want the colors to be visible and good-looking. All my work could refer to monochrome painting, because I make a ground before I do anything on top of it. In the chair, there's actually a blue plane that's hardly visible. I made the background blue to substitute for the missing blue of the chair in the image. In this case, there's some incident in that background—it's not absolute flat blue.

I made a lithograph version of this image [in 2019]. I liked this image enough that I wanted to have more versions of it out in the world. And I think humor is a great thing to have, because this isn't life or death. I do have a light-hearted approach to this.