

THE BROOKLYN RAIL

MAY 11, 2018

DANIEL RICH: *Never Forever*

by Barbara A. MacAdam

PETER BLUM | APRIL 13 – MAY 26, 2018



Daniel Rich, *Athens*, 2017. Acrylic on Dibond, 80 × 80 inches.
Courtesy the artist and Peter Blum Gallery, New York. Photo: Etienne Frossard

Clear, bright, and crisp, Daniel Rich's recent paintings might also be viewed as eerie and unstable. They point in many directions, alluding to a complicated array of predecessors and contemporaries, from Mondrian to Thomas Demand to Diana Cooper, as well as to architectural, political, social, technological, and material matters.

Everything is deceptive in this show of ten recent paintings, appropriately titled *Never Forever*. Images that appear as precise as photos are actually built from cut-out stenciled pieces of photographs. Each segment is painstakingly painted by hand with layers of pigment until it is absolutely opaque.

PETER BLUM GALLERY

What results is a mosaic, composed in such a way that you can connect the colors at will and establish a rhythm, not entirely unlike what happens in a Mondrian painting. The works are painted in acrylic on Dibond, a material commonly used for signage, and each color is assigned a numeral, so a relationship is established and there is consistency throughout. This body of work is ultimately the opposite of computer-generated art, but it bears a resemblance to it with the compositions' apparent precision and flat unmodulated computer-screen tones.

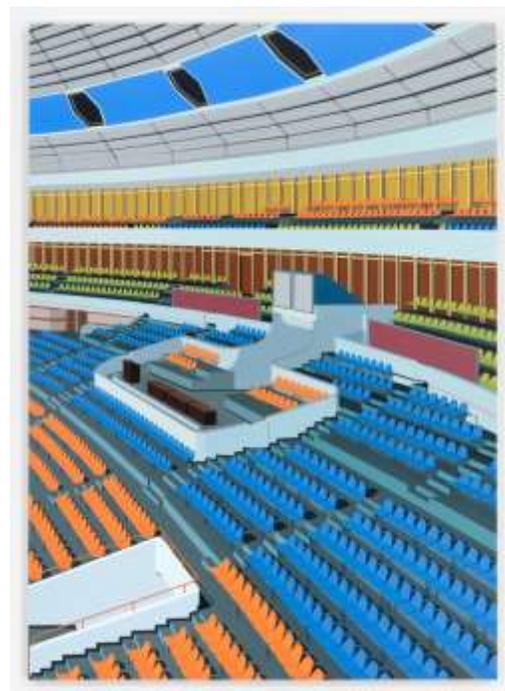
Rich uses color as language to convey excitement, relationships, mood, and a sense of place but also to inspire nostalgia. We may associate the colors with cartoons, toys, and games—as well as gum and candy. Rich also color-codes works, such as *Stadium, Pyongyang* (2018), as a kind of shorthand for story-telling. Here the stadium negates individuality—with the invisible public subsumed into one or another primary color. Central to the picture is the powerful, albeit vacant, podium to be mounted by the supreme leader.

Rich's images are based on current news reports, gleaned from newspapers as well as from found imagery and subjects pulled up from Google searches. The randomness of many of the chosen images contrasts with the formal geometric and graphic effects.

The compositions are often political in content and European in flavor, hinting at Rich's roots as the German-born son of British parents. He lived in Ulm until he was nineteen and then moved to the United States. There is a stunning salute to the Bauhaus stairwell at Dessau depicted by hand with elegant precision yet accompanied by an ominous shadow on the landing. That's the German contradiction—the seductively modest design amid the allusion to fear. As for America, Rich offers the creepiness of an Amazon storage warehouse, where the colors of the books' spines are the only hint of substance, and sterility prevails.

Absent the human figure we have little sense of proportion or human relations. The content is elusive throughout. At the same time, there is a sense of anomie amid the cheerfulness and lucidity of design.

There's an adventurous quality to Rich's endeavors, ranging from Escher-esque perspective plays in the cityscapes, introducing uncertainty at every entry point to the sharply depicted cut-out-based fake interiors of a Thomas Demand composition to a Diana Cooper-style color-coded NASCAR stadium. And quite striking, too, is the Cézanne-like cubistic tumbling back and forth in the cacophony of buildings in Rich's *Athens* (2017).



Daniel Rich, *Stadium, Pyongyang*, 2018.
Acrylic on Dibond, 84 × 60 inches.
Courtesy the artist and Peter Blum Gallery,
New York. Photo: Etienne Frossard

PETER BLUM GALLERY

As with a Rubix Cube, where the tiles can be endlessly shifted to establish new relations, and like Legos constructions, Rich's paintings relate to cityscapes and politics as highly fragmented and variable based on how they are viewed. In other words, all perspectives and situations are subject to change and reinterpretation. And above all, there is the sense that the whole enterprise could fall apart at any instant. Therein lies this most delicate of balances and Rich's rare ability to portray the potential for dissolution within extreme order.

CONTRIBUTOR

Barbara A. MacAdam

BARBARA MACADAM is Editor at Large at *ARTnews*.