

## Exhibition Guide

### **Ding Yi *Appearance of Crosses***

**Second Floor Galleries, 23 November – 22 January**

This is the first UK exhibition of work by Chinese artist Ding Yi, born in Shanghai in 1962. The artist has continued to live and work in the city, graduating from the Department of Traditional Chinese Painting, the Fine Arts Academy under Shanghai University in 1989.

Ding Yi's early work was figurative but has developed into abstract painting. One of the few prominent abstract artists in China, he became preoccupied with the use of grid structures and the repetition of a simple cross. Ding Yi has been using this symbol as the basis of his work for over ten years and this exhibition is a selection of twenty works dated from around 1990.

The artist uses a variety of media including oil, charcoal, chalk and ball-point pen, applied directly onto a range of materials such as cardboard, linen and canvas. In the early 90s, his work tended to be hard-edged due to the use of masking tape and a ruler, using mainly primary colours, for example *Appearance of Crosses 1991-3*, (1991) and *Appearance of Crosses 1992-15*, (1992). Ding Yi uses numbers to title his paintings, leaving it up to the viewer to interpret the work as they wish.

By the late 90s, Ding Yi preferred to paint with acrylic onto tartan material. This fabric brought a new depth to his work, the characteristic lines and colours providing a dynamic background, giving him the option to follow the pattern or go against it. The artist stopped using rulers or set squares at this time and instead worked meticulously by hand to criss-cross the picture plane. Whilst still remaining very precise, these works have a spontaneous quality due to the free-flowing brush strokes. These pieces also involve a wider variety of colours including orange, indigo blue and violet, for example *Appearance of Crosses 2004-2*, (2004). Ding Yi's most recent pieces demonstrate another progression in colour. The artist mixes acrylic paint with a fluorescent pigment and uses metallic paint to produce his most bright and vibrant work to date, taking inspiration from the glowing neon lights of Shanghai at night.

The physical technique lends a mantra-like, meditative feel to Ding Yi's work. The repeated manual brush strokes are similar to Buddhists' repetitive movement of prayer beads or chanting whilst in a state of meditation. Critics have discussed how the process of repetition acts as a spiritual healing process, both as psychological and physical therapy; a way to return to tranquillity, cultivate the mind and soothe the soul. Art writers have also made reference to the influence of 'Taoism', a Chinese philosophy, in Ding Yi's work. 'Tao', pronounced 'Dow', is a popular way of life in China, with 20 million followers. It places emphasis on a peaceful, calm and serene life; referring to a power which surrounds and flows through all things, living and non-living, to 'nourish the balance of the Universe'. Ding Yi's works are beautiful and thoughtful; quite unlike any other painting being made today.