

LOS ANGELES

## Gaylen Gerber

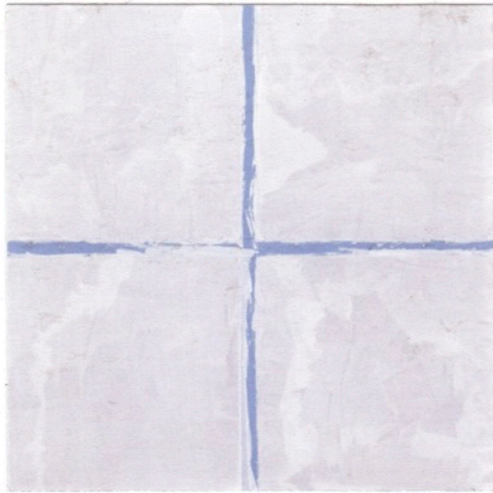
DANIEL HUG

Over the course of his career, Chicago-based artist Gaylen Gerber has consistently pursued a project at the intersection of painting and its historical and architectural contexts. No other painter I can think of, with the notable exception of Daniel Buren, has taken the notion of a painting's "support" so literally. In previous shows at Daniel Hug, Gerber deployed a large, flatly painted gray "backdrop" of stretched canvas that nearly covered a long wall of the gallery. This was designed to allow for the intervention of other artists—Tom Friedman and Joe Scanlan in 2003; Remy Zaugg, B. Wurtz, and Adrien Schiess in 2005—participating at Gerber's invitation.

Some critics have noted the generosity of Gerber's project, though the opportunities he presents arrive with strings attached: However subtle and deadpan their portent, these uninflected supports are surely provocations *posing* as gifts. Gerber has defined these collaboratively produced objects as two works sharing the same physical space resulting in a new, third work—an idea indebted to Sergei Eisenstein's notion of analytical montage as a sort of pileup rather than a juxtaposition, and to Roland Barthes's "Third Meaning." One could also regard it as a form of creative subletting: Gerber shares authorial credit with his coconspirator(s), as well as money from gallery sales, but the project is ultimately his own.

In Gerber's recent show, the backdrop had been replaced by seven discrete canvases. Each panel was painted a flat gray, the color wrapping around to the sides of the stretchers. These were then handed over to Heimo Zobernig, Tyson Reeder, and Wurtz (again). With three of "his" four small, square canvases, Zobernig quietly undermines the supposed neutrality of the gray support by applying a cooler coat of gray in one case, and whites (one cooler, one warmer) over another pair of canvases. The fourth painting is divided by strips of blue masking tape into four thinly brushed white quadrants.

In *Support/Untitled #3*, 2004, Wurtz repurposes six cheap plastic dish-scrubbing pads to amend a square gray support: Five are attached by metal rods to the top of the canvas in an asymmetrical arrangement while one dangles below it with the aid of a length of fishing line, perfectly centered. While interjecting some color into the work, albeit with economy and deadpan humor, Wurtz's scrubbers might allude to the sterile appearance occasionally present in Gerber's project (for example, in Zobernig's monochromatic retorts): What remains uncertain is the possibility of "fouling up" Gerber's project, conceptually or otherwise. Taking a very different approach, Reeder seemingly struggles to reproduce the gray ground in the small landscape-format *Support/Dead Van*, 2006. A slather of errant attempts in shades of



Gaylen Gerber, *Gaylen Gerber with Helmo Zobernig*, oil on canvas, 27 x 27".

gray "became" a dirty snowbank in which a van—reminiscent of the Mystery Machine from *Scooby-Doo*—painted with a tropical vista on its body, appears to be stuck, providing a humorous metaphor for one artist's arduous attempt to cruise through another's "paradise."

The biggest surprise in the show—especially given the parameters of Gerber's project thus far—was *Support*, 2006, a "souvenir" salvaged from Buren's 2006 exhibition "Crossing Through the Colors" at the Arts Club of Chicago and painted over in Gerber gray. The thin Plexiglas sheet was mounted flush against the wall; Buren's signature stripes were visible—texturally—through the gray covering only when one was standing to the side of the work. Gerber pays tribute to his forebear, for whom painting has always been defined as an act of negotiation with its context, while also positioning him as an unwitting accomplice. Buren never considered this installation relic as an actual work of art, so with this "unspeakable compromise," in which the relic becomes a "work"—and a commodity—Gerber aggressively ups the ante and marks a strategic shift away from subletting toward squatting.

—Michael Ned Holte