

*Eldorado*

Gaylen Gerber (first installation)

Mudam - Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean

July 1 – November 20, 2006

Walking a tightrope between the collection, I. M. Pei's architecture and his own work, Gaylen Gerber's exhibition spreads over the two large wings of the first floor and is configured according to the dissonant symmetry of the building.

Shifting relationships are concentrated on Gerber's *Supports* and *Backdrops*, paintings on top or in front of which the artist installs the works from the Mudam collection or produced in collaboration with other artists. As a support open to collaboration, Gerber's work throws light on the way that we, as part of a shared culture, accept certain forms, colors, etc. as institutional or take them for granted as common ground. By positioning his paintings as the "neutral" ground against which we see other works of art, Gerber shows that the manner art is displayed can draw our attention to ways of interpreting, registering difference and creating meaning.

The *Backdrops* – wide gray paintings made to fit the architecture – put in motion a play between figure and ground reiterated throughout the exhibition. The text on Rémy Zuagg's *Le Monde voit (N.T.8a1)* can be translated as "and if I start to speak, the world would cease to exist" This painting is hung directly on top of Gerber's *Backdrop*, thus suggesting a dilemma central to perception, which is that to perceive something you must first differentiate it from its background. Both figure and ground, Gerber's painting is a discrete object in itself and could be understood as the world Zuagg's work refers to.

In *Galerie Max Hetzler (detail)*, Stephen Prina's text "we represent ourselves to the world" is positioned as a figurative element to Gerber's *Backdrop*. The text is literally painted across the painting, which is experienced both as an object in the room and the background to the text. Prina's text then winds its way off the painting's surface until it reaches the suspended stairway. Then, from the inside of the museum, one reads the text from the back, reversed. In a sense, this puts the viewer in the same position held by the *Backdrop* painting, as though he or she is behind the text, serving as its ground.

In the smaller *Support* paintings Gerber first paints a more traditionally scaled canvas grey, and then he gives the painting to another artist who creates a work on top of his. Gaylen Gerber celebrates the unifying role of art by suggesting that meaning does not

come from a single work or exchange but from the interaction of works, thus becoming a metaphor for the entire *Eldorado* exhibition.