

Gaylen Gerber
Rowley Kennerk Gallery
May 7 – June 6, 2009
1190 N. Peoria Street 3C
Chicago, IL 60607

Rowley Kennerk Gallery is pleased to present its second exhibition of works by Gaylen Gerber.

In this exhibition, Gerber presents five artworks in a modified exhibition space that confuses easy distinctions between object and context and heightens awareness of visual perception in a way that questions how we differentiate what we are looking at from what surrounds it.

Gerber is interested in addressing ideas surrounding perception and particularly the role of context in perception. Gerber's own work often acts as the contextual ground for the expressions of other artists. For this exhibition, Gerber continues to examine the role of the contextual ground in the interpretation of art but also specifically foregrounds the background as an expressive element itself.

In previous exhibitions Gerber has focused on the normative aspects of visual language: the way we, as part of a shared culture, accept certain forms, colors, etc. as institutional, or we take them for granted as neutral common ground. These visual norms act as grounds for all other forms of expression and we use them to register difference and create meaning. Gerber's own work is often positioned so that it highlights these relationships by representing the frequently invisible normative aspects of visual language, suggested by their "neutral" gray color as well as by the casting of other expressions as the figurative elements against this ground.

Gerber's work typically begins as a gray monochrome that is created by Gerber. He then normally situates these grounds as the material support for other artists' work. For example, in *Support/ Bermuda Shorts*, Tyson Reeder painted his work directly on top of Gerber's ground. In the resulting artwork we witness Reeder attempting to match Gerber's gray, and then to obscure it, and ultimately to incorporate it. This exchange between image and ground in this work showcases the fragility of both Reeder's image and the unexpected conditional quality of Gerber's *Support*.

In *Backdrop/About Blindness #2*, Gerber describes the structuring of an artwork through perception and illuminates the role of the contextual ground in determining value. Rémy Zaugg's painting *About Blindness #2*, employs complementary hues in the realization of its text and ground. The effect is that each color interferes with the clear expression of the other, frustrating retinal perception and opening perception on another level. In the final artwork Zaugg's

painting is sited directly on top of Gerber's colorless *Backdrop* which mirrors the physical and psychological effect of the painting. When we see Zaugg's painting, everything else, including Gerber's *Backdrop*, becomes its ground. Conversely, when we consider Gerber's *Backdrop* as an expression, the individual distinction of Zaugg's painting is lost and it is seen as a part of the background of Gerber's work.

Gerber further conflates differences between image and ground by bringing into play both the color of the light and the color of the room to suggest a further porosity in the elements of the exhibition, questioning both the implicit neutrality of the ground and emphasizing the fluid quality of the relationship between expression and ground. For example, when we try to "see" *Support*, a work by Gerber in which he applied his monochromatic ground to one side of a transparent souvenir from Daniel Buren's in-situ work *Crossing Through the Colors*, it's uncertain whether the color perceived is contained within the artwork or in the exhibition space. As we try to differentiate this element from its situation, everything, including the whole of the exhibition context that would normally become its background, remains in the foreground of our perception and understanding. Conversely, when we focus on the work, it's unclear exactly where the context ends and the artwork begins. By heightening and even confusing perception Gerber returns us to an individual visceral experience that suspends easy apprehension.

Recognizing the shifting relationships between deviation and the normative ground is at the heart of Gerber's exhibition and draws attention to a central aspect of perception, which is that to perceive something at all you must first be able to distinguish it from its background.

Gaylen Gerber has exhibited widely. Recent solo exhibitions and cooperative projects include: The Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean, Luxembourg, Luxembourg; The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois; Neues Museum Weserburg Bremen, Bremen, Germany; Kunsthalle Bern, Bern, Switzerland; and the FRAC-Bourgogne and Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon, France.