

# Gaylen Gerber

BACKDROP / THE WORLD STAGE: INDIA – SRI LANKA



When I was asked to contribute something to *Annual Magazine* I immediately thought about describing a project of mine at the Rhona Hoffman Gallery in 2010.

The genesis of the project was Rhona's exhibition of Sol LeWitt's *Wall Drawing #530s-tilted forms (A, C, F, G, I, K, M, N,)* (2010) which inspired me to revisit an idea about context that has occupied me over the course of my career. I understood that at the exhibition's end, LeWitt's wall drawings would remain *in situ* but painted over, with other artist's work installed on top of them. While it's common for contextual artworks like LeWitt's to be subsequently painted over rather than removed after an exhibition, this layering of artistic expressions also recalls some of my earlier exhibition strategies in which I often added only a painted monochromatic *Backdrop* (1998) to an exhibition situation, usually canvas over a wooden stretcher that was the same size and shape as the wall it represented. Adding this kind of ground behind an existing situation allowed me to insert my work into the flow of activities in a way that both looked back to the gallery's exhibition history as well as forward towards all the subsequent exhibitions that would follow my intervention.

At the Rhona Hoffman Gallery, I painted a monochromatic *Backdrop* directly over Sol LeWitt's wall drawings. My painting then became the background for Kehinde Wiley's work, which was the next exhibition in the gallery.

Positioning my work so that it is seen as in between things, i.e. between exhibitions and between artists, allowed me to make visible the role of the ground in creating meaning as well as to consider it as an expressive element in itself.

Conflating the normal white ground of the gallery's walls and the monochrome that I identify as my artistic expression draws attention to the permeability of these elements, questioning the implicit neutrality of the ground as well as emphasizing the fluid quality of the relationships between expression and ground. LeWitt's wall drawings become a background for my painting, which in turn become a ground for the Wiley paintings. This suggests that Wiley's paintings too must be understood as grounds against which other expressions will be perceived at the same time as they are expressions in and of themselves.

This layering of relationships was embellished by the character of LeWitt's and Wiley's practices. For me, seeing these two disparate expressions joined is one of the more valuable aspects of art.

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