



Gaylen Gerber
September 17 – November 30, 2004

Donald Young Gallery is pleased to present an exhibition of new work by Gaylen Gerber.

For a number of years Gaylen Gerber has been making contextual works of art that range from easel sized works to situation-specific works that duplicate a pre-existing exhibition wall. He then often exhibits another representation (usually another work of art) on top or in front of his work so that his work literally becomes the background against which the other art is perceived. In this exhibition, Gerber has included 13 works produced in cooperation with 14 different artists; each work is completed on top of one of his signature gray *Support* or *Backdrop* canvases.

Gerber is interested in the normative aspects of visual language: the way we, as part of a shared culture, accept certain forms, colors, etc. as institutional or 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. His paintings are positioned so that they will highlight these relationships by representing the often invisible normative aspects of visual language, suggested by their original “neutral” gray color as well as by the casting of the other artists’ works as the figurative elements to Gerber’s ground.

In this way Gerber’s works appear to follow the conventions of painting in a way that suggests that it is a model of painting rather than an individual expression. His work references visual norms; it can only be seen to have particular meaning when it is understood in relation to the images and activities that occupy the space in front or on top of it and that diverge from its conformity. Gerber’s work draws attention to the process of differentiation between value or meaning and the lack of it. In choosing to juxtapose his work with works by other artists, Gerber is establishing an exchange between their practices and his, drawing attention to the necessity of a customary ground for the perception of difference.

The large work *Backdrop/Everybody*, which plays a central role in this exhibition, is a re-representation of a work originally realized in cooperation with M&Co in Copenhagen in 2002. Gerber’s large painting is sized to match one of the exhibition walls of Copenhagen’s Charlottenborg Exhibition Hall. M&Co’s *Everybody* was reconfigured and painted directly on top of Gerber’s *Backdrop* so that Gerber’s painting became its

support. M&Co's *Everybody* billboard was originally installed in Times Square in New York in 1992 as the area began to be redeveloped. "It was about the attitude we wanted the street to have," said Tibor Kalman of M&Co. "the idea is that the street is you, and you are the street." Like M&Co, Gerber's practice addresses an inclusive impulse to potentially open up the work to everyone, as is evidenced by the varied nature of the works that he has produced with other artists, some of which are included in this exhibition.

In the Copenhagen exhibition the painting was displaced outside the museum to make it more accessible to everyone. In this exhibition Gerber has displaced this work once again, this time indoors in Donald Young Gallery, and he has situated it in a way that reinforces it as also a context for other representations. Gerber's painting *Backdrop/Everybody* remains exactly the size of the wall in the Copenhagen museum, re-presenting it as a traditional pictorial support that acts as the background to literally everyone. When M&Co's *Everybody* was originally shown in Time Square, it included a row of chairs that were fixed to the billboard's surface, inviting viewers to sit down and actively become part of the piece. When Gerber realized *Backdrop/Everybody* in Copenhagen, he invited the collaborative group N55 to substitute their log seats for the chairs.

Gerber's choice to re-present *Backdrop/Everybody* here reflects his interest in paradoxical expressions. As Gerber sees it, *Everybody* was meant to represent everyone, but at the same time no single viewer (or practice) can take in the entirety of every person. Viewers who encounter this painting may be inclined to see it either as a discrete object hung on the temporary wall that supports this exhibition or as an imaginary proposition (a background against which to see everyone), and what Gerber would like to stress is the relationship between these two positions.