

## SAINT LOUIS

## Gaylen Gerber

### WHITE FLAG PROJECTS

Chicago-based artist Gaylen Gerber's recent installation at White Flag Projects presented a group of his photographs in a constantly changing environment of color and light. The walls of the irregularly shaped gallery were painted in gentle tones of gray, yellow, and amber, while the windows and skylights were covered with colored gels, turning the atmosphere into a rich pastel bath. Centered on each wall was a square, black-and-white gelatin print under a sheet of Plexiglas, most of them color tinted. Three of the photographs "show" something (flowers, a beach house, and a shabby landscape); the other two appear blank. (They are, in fact, snapshots of a clear sky on a bright day.)

Gaylen Gerber, *Clear Sky/Green Area*, 1998/2009, Ilfochrome print, charcoal, Plexiglas frame, 31 1/2 x 31 1/2".



The installation presents perceptual conundrums at every turn. The tinted, glossy, Plexiglas frames reflect everything—the viewer, the gallery's staircase and walls, and the other photographs—confounding attempts to read the individual images. The ambient light changes continually, causing colors and shadows to bleed into one another. In

short, it was impossible to focus on one item in the gallery without everything else infringing on it—which, as it turns out, is the gist of the installation: Rather than a presentation of discrete artworks, Gerber's project is an exercise in visual contingency.

Gerber has spent the past several years engaged in collaborations with other artists (notably, at the Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean, Luxembourg, with Kay Rosen, Sam Salisbury, and Remy Zaugg, among others, in 2006, and with Heimo Zobernig, Tyson Reeder, and B. Wurtz at Daniel Hug Gallery in Los Angeles in 2007), often constructing monochrome wall

panels on which other artists are invited to work, resulting in tangled distinctions between backdrop and foreground, support and subject, art and decor. At White Flag Projects, Gerber has engineered a more thorough, minimalist, extended situation, in which his own photographs, dating from the early to mid-1990s, are adjuncts to the shifting terms of the gallery context. The Plexiglas surfaces play a significant role in this operation, enriching the gallery's overall coloring, mirroring the surroundings, and gesturing beyond the immediate work. Indeed, the sheets are retooled souvenirs from French artist Daniel Buren's 2006 installation at the Arts Club of Chicago, *Crossing Through the Colors*, whose materials were recycled after the show closed.

Buren's presence in this installation adds to the host of conceptual, not to mention ontological, questions Gerber raises about content, framing, and what we are seeing. Spend enough time in the gallery and some answers eventually shake out. A pair of photographs labeled *Untitled (Clear Sky)*, 1991–2009, for instance, simultaneously contain the flat opacity of the photographic surface and the infinite depth of what they represent—that is, nothing and everything. Indeed, the framing function isn't actually served by the transparent Plexiglas, but rather by the gallery itself. As to what we're looking at, Frank Stella's 1966 Minimalist motto still applies: "What you see is what you see."

—Ivy Cooper