

Gaylen Gerber

WALLSPACE

619 West 27th Street
January 12–February 9

Since the late 1980s, Chicago-based artist Gaylen Gerber has coated square canvases in a lusterless gray and lent them to fellow artists, inviting them to intervene atop his own intervention. In his latest show, Gerber continues his series of “Supports” yet inverts its signature strategy: This time, the works of others—a Joe Colombo pipe, two Lucio Fontanas, and four artifacts by unknown African craftsmen—provide the ground for his familiar act of painting over. Collaborations with Heimo Zobernig and Liz Deschenes round out the installation, which is best viewed as a deft, drily humorous relay with art’s recent past.

From one work to the next, Gerber alternates his usual gray with a thick kaolin-like white, creating a two-toned palette that redoubles WallSpace’s white walls and charcoal floor. At the front of the gallery, he subjects a wooden headdress from Guinea to a uniform blanch, then props it vertically on a stand. More intriguing than Gerber’s varnish is the wood’s splintered topography, which echoes the dimpled surface of one of the room’s columns. These slow-to-emerge accords, coupled with Gerber’s modest scale and spare installation, transform the gallery’s ostensibly neutral shell into a palpable, obtrusive presence. Spend enough time with the show, and floor vents, ceiling pipes, and light fixtures become difficult to ignore, provoking questions about the frames—institutional, discursive, and otherwise—against which Gerber’s project becomes meaningful.

Lucio Fontana, the painter whose theatrical slashes and stabs materialized the space behind the picture plane, makes a fitting ally for Gerber’s literalization of support as subject. Two multiples of the Italian artist’s “Concetto Spaziale Cratere” (Spatial Concept Formation), both 1968—porcelain cast in rounded rectangles and punctured in the center—hang on opposing walls: The first is lumpy and finished in Gerber gray; the second is smooth and painted white. On the intervening wall, Zobernig’s contribution, *Support/Untitled*, 2004, finds Gerber’s matte monochrome topped with a level field of white. Viewed from an acute slant, Zobernig’s seemingly uninflected overlay opens into two tones—one dim, the other nacreous—that skirt each other in haphazard geometries. Layering Gerber’s neutral with the art world’s own (white being the default background for modernist display), Zobernig’s conceptually complex yet aesthetically restrained gesture sums Gerber’s practice in a single canvas.

— Courtney Fiske



Gaylen Gerber, *Support*, 2013, oil paint on *Concetto Spaziale Cratere*, Lucio Fontana, 1968, cast and hand-punctured porcelain, 15" x 11 1/2" x 3".