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AROUND THE GALLERIES

Leaps: sober to sarcastic

When mere gray is more than gray

For his second show at Daniel Hug Gallery, **Gaylen Gerber** shows eight paintings from the last three years. Each one is a monochrome gray. They remind me of Robert Ryman's — although the similarity is structural, not stylistic or visual.

Ryman began with a simple premise — a painting is pigment on a flat surface affixed to the wall — and extrapolated it in myriad inventive, surprising and unusually satisfying ways for the next 40 years. Chicago-based Gerber is doing something similar: He begins with the idea that no painting stands on its own, existing instead in a complex perceptual matrix, and he spins it in variable ways.

Since no painting is an island, Gerber makes his work in tandem with other artists. He gave gray monochromes of various sizes to Heimo Zobernig, Tyson Reeder and B. Wurtz. Zobernig made abstract alterations to the surfaces, emphasizing the canvas as a physical object. Reeder added whimsical surfer imagery, asserting Gerber's work as a material support.

Wurtz attached colorful kitchen pot-scrubbers along the top edge and dangled another on monofilament from the bottom. Gerber's austere gray square assumes an uncanny metallic sheen, like a favorite cooking pot, simply through the inescapable force of eccentric juxtaposition.

In an apparent first, Gerber has also solicited assistance from an artist unaware of the cooperative effort. (Gerber dislikes the term "collaboration," since each artist works independently.) He painted over a tall rectangle of thin wallboard, screened with Daniel Buren's signature wide stripes and affixed with screws to the gallery wall, in his own logo-centric gray monochrome.

You wouldn't know the stripes are there without scrutinizing the bland surface and noticing subtle shifts in reflected light. Gerber absorbs Buren's art as a support for his own, and the effect is uncommonly agreeable.

Daniel Hug Gallery, 510 Bernard St., Chinatown, (323) 221-0016, through Saturday. www.danielhug.com.

daniel hug gallery
510 Bernard Street
los angeles, ca 90012
tel. 323-221-0016
fax. 323-343-1133
www.danielhug.com