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Support Group: Kathryn Andrews, Gaylen Gerber, Mateo Tannatt / Pauline

Cottage Home Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
ANTHONY CARFELLO

Support Group: Kathryn Andrews, Gaylen Gerber, Mateo Tannatt / Pauline was initiated by the three titular artists and organized by Michael Ned Holte at the behest of Thomas Solomon Gallery. The exhibition takes place in a cavernous former movie theater-turned-gallery-co-op in Chinatown, called Cottage Home.¹ The projects presented by the three catalysts lead to what might best be termed a "meta-exhibition." By final tally, *Support Group* emerges as an nineteen-person, multimedia show separated into three distinct, multi-part installations that riff off one another and operate both within and outside of the gallery

architecture, with elements of each extending the exhibition out into the landscape of Los Angeles and into other genres.

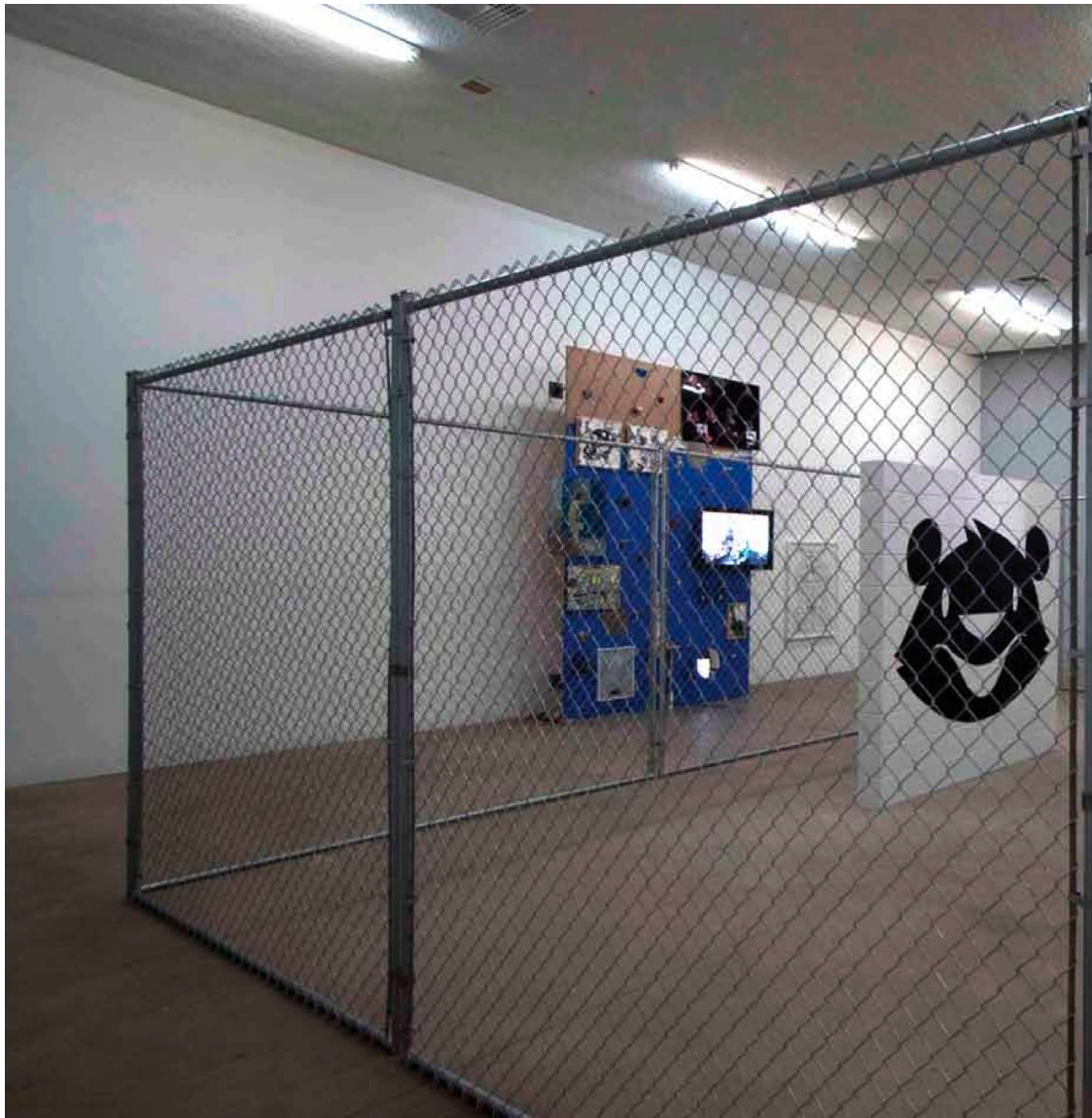
The many layers and connections of *Support Group* begin with a self-referential pun on its title. In each series of Gerber's *Supports* and *Backdrops*, he generously extends an invitation to other artists to produce or exhibit their works upon and in relation to his large, gray surfaces.² Participating artists are then in a position to affect the whole presentation of both works. In this exhibition, curator Holte's approach is similar; he establishes a context for opportunity. Holte invited the artists to determine the layout of the show, stating in his press release, "The artists participating in 'Support Group'... provide the primary context—if not the only context—for the show." "Supporting" artworks and other artists is inherent to the

1. Cottage Home hosts exhibitions presented by Thomas Solomon, Kathryn Brennan Gallery, and China Art Objects.
2. Gerber often uses canvasses, but has employed other materials that refer to the site of exhibitions.



KATHRYN ANDREWS, *Gaylen Gerber*, 2010. PAINT ON BILLBOARDS, 174 X 204 IN. COURTESY OF DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY, LOS ANGELES, AND THOMAS SOLOMON GALLERY, LOS ANGELES. PHOTO: ANTHONY CARFELLO.

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art practices of Tannatt and Andrews, as well. Both are concerned with the formal effects of presenting information via installations, and each run exhibition spaces—Pauline and Apt. 2, respectively.

Upon approaching the gallery along Cottage Home Street, viewers encounter Andrews's ham-handed, ironic proclamation: "it's all about..." and "gaylen gerber!" The red, cursive lettering is superimposed upon a red chain-link fence pattern on two large, horizontal billboards on the building's façade. Situated on the front desk directly inside the gallery is an exhibition catalog from an earlier manifestation of Gerber's gray Supports at the Renaissance Society in Chicago. Next to the catalog is a text by theater impresario Paul Sills, which lays out the components of a theatrical "fun house" experience that would have "audience-players" navigating a complex of narrative options presented by "actor-guides." The actor-guides are improvisational actors aiming to include their audience in the action to the point of giving the production over to them.³ The billboards and texts could be described as keys, or links in a chain of signs (literalized in a recurring chain-link motif) that viewers receive as they move through the show. These links offer occasion for viewers to start making connections between its pointed gestures.

To the right of the entrance, on bookshelves designed by Tellef Tellefson, Tannatt's *Lean Zines* (2010) displays geometrically mangled copies of the horror film magazine *Fangoria*. In another Tannatt piece nearby, *Hand of Culture (Glow in the Dark)* (2010), a detached monster costume hand rests on a metal stand; its extended index finger points into the exhibition. For the duration of *Support Group*, Tannatt's Pauline Film Production Company takes up residence in the private upper gallery of Cottage Home (which originally served as the movie theater's projection booth). Their intention, as described on the list of works, is to produce a horror movie.⁴

Following *Hand of Culture*, viewers enter the large main gallery, which is bathed in flat, gray light. As part of Gerber's presence

in *Support Group*, lighting gels cover one of every two fluorescent light tubes above the entire space. The second part of Andrews's central installation, *Friends and Lovers* (2010)—a twenty-four by thirty-three foot cage of chain-link fence in which two eight-foot concrete brick walls are positioned facing each other—dominates the room. The inward facing, brick walls are painted white. Each contains the same large, cartooned bear's face stenciled in black, which has been appropriated from the signature *Awesome Bear* series of Phil Lumbang III, a local artist. (Lumbang's street murals appear throughout the city, and a bear image nearly identical to that used by Andrews appears on a nearby building at Alameda Street, north of Sixth Street throughout the run of *Support Group*.) Three walls painted in Gerber's signature gray wrap Andrew's installation, and the eerie quality of Gerber's murky fluorescents evokes Tannatt's implied horror flick.

On paper, Gerber doesn't have any art objects in the show. The gray light gels and paint refer directly to his practice, and he was fully involved in the exhibition's organization. However, the gallery's list of works does not include his name. Instead, on the very last page, it reads: "The exhibition includes: latex paint and transparent lighting gels." With Gerber's presumed contribution here, viewers are directed to focus on the "backdrop" of *Support Group*, while they try to decipher the unclaimed gels and paint. Gerber's gestures in *Support Group* may lead viewers, especially those previously familiar with his practice, out of the show to a concurrent exhibition in the same neighborhood, *Autumn Ramsey / Tyson Reeder at Actual Size* Los Angeles, which Gerber clandestinely co-curated. Or they may cause viewers to seek out a separate Gerber artwork sitting in the Bernard Street office of Thomas Solomon, which is a re-purposed fragment of a Daniel Buren project.

Through such movements in and around Cottage Home, *Support Group* offers viewers an opportunity to explore their affect on the viewing of an exhibition. "Affect," as defined by anthropologist Kathleen Stewart in her

3. Paul Sills, "A Monster Model Fun House," *The Tulane Drama Review*, 10.2 (Winter, 1965): 224–28. Paul Sills (1927–2008) co-founded Chicago's Second City Improv Theater in 1959 to put the teachings and theories of his mother, Viola Spolin (1906–1994), into professional practice. Spolin is the author of the essential handbook *Improvisation for the Theater: A Handbook of Teaching and Directing Techniques* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1963). Sills edited a third edition of the book published in 1999 after Spolin's death.
4. Personal conversation with Thomas Solomon.

LEFT: MATEO TANNATT, *Monster Model: Blue Screen Version*, 2010. STEEL, WOOD, PAINT, HARDWARE, DVD, VIDEO PROJECTOR, VARIABLE DIMENSIONS. COURTESY OF THOMAS SOLOMON GALLERY, LOS ANGELES, AND MARC FOXGALLERY, LOS ANGELES. PHOTO: ANTHONY CARFELLO.

PRECEDING SPREAD: INSTALLATION VIEW OF *Support Group: Kathryn Andrews, Gaylen Gerber, Mateo Tannatt/Pauline* AT COTTAGE HOME GALLERY, 2010. COURTESY OF THOMAS SOLOMON GALLERY, LOS ANGELES. PHOTO: GAYLEN GERBER.

5. See Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 2.
6. Daniel Buren, "Beware!" ("Mise en garde!"), in *Konzeption/Conception*, translated by Charles Harrison and Peter Townsend (Leverkusen: Städtischer Museum, 1969), quoted in Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz, *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 140–149.

book *Ordinary Affects*, is "the varied, surging capacities to affect and be affected that give everyday life the quality of a continual motion of relations, scenes, contingencies, and emergencies."⁵ These moments, which allow viewers to identify and establish the way *Support Group's* myriad links operate, are made paramount by the show's organizers through methods of repetition and improvisation.

Gerber's paint and lights bring attention to the gallery's physical space. With his horror film references, Tannatt points to the site's history as a former movie theater. Their moves, along with Andrews's, might seem tediously self-referential, or to be site-specific for the sake of site-specificity. However, by actively following the many, varied links, and recognizing the way their attention is focused, viewers begin to understand what is at the core of the *Support Group* effort. The repetition of connections, as a method in itself, leads to what Daniel Buren called the "cancel[ing] out through lack of importance."⁶ Seeking to bring attention to an artwork's presentation rather than to its inner narrative, Buren theorized that repetition adulterates and counters the experience that viewers have with an artwork. Viewers of *Support Group*, then, are able and encouraged to move past the practices of the three principle participants to their own process of viewing the exhibition and ultimately to the act of viewing in general.

While the installations of Gerber and Andrews deal more with opening up the physical and communicative situation at Cottage Home, the remainder of Tannatt's installation, located at the far end of the gallery, points to the contextual situation of art viewing and further emphasizes how viewers move through this process. While not billed as such, *Monster Model: Blue Screen Version* (2010) is a collaboration with fourteen other artists, all in the context of the Paul Sills text presented at the entrance. Entitled *A Monster Model Fun House*, this work presents two videos, a sound piece, paintings, sculptures, photography, and collage. These items are situated on, in front of, and behind a large section of plywood made by Tannatt and Piero

Golia to resemble an indoor rock-climbing wall that has been partially painted with the same hue of blue used for the bluescreen compositing process in film production. Just as there are many ways up a climbing wall, there are many routes with which to navigate *Monster Model*. Correspondingly, the Sills text proposes that theater's subjective experience, and the potential of such experience, is rooted in the choices that the "audience-players" are encouraged to make, thereby influencing their ability to affect and be affected.

At first, though, *Monster Model* is oddly similar to the traditional group show. Viewers may move from work to work, for example from Alex Klein's gentle and aptly metaphorical photograph, *The Brick and the Balloon* (2010), to Leigh Ledare's video *The Gift* (2010). In *The Gift*, a woman who appears at first to be a pornographic actress, but is in fact Ledare's mother, receives instructions from two directors behind the camera. Throughout the nearly ten minute video, the actress is directed on how to feel: how she should enjoy a diamond necklace or be aroused by pulling a nylon stocking up and down her leg and over again. Viewers are forced by the monitor's position to squat down to the floor, further emphasizing Tannatt's direction of the viewing experience. Viewers are made even more aware of their acquiescence to this system by the "blooper" scenes that transpire when, for example, the actress falls over while positioning herself for a spanking.

Vishal Jugdeo's *Pauline and the Biz* (2010) is a screenplay reading combined with amateur radio show acting and witty voiceovers presented on wireless headphones. The narrative of Jugdeo's work features a personified "Pauline" (in a nod to Tannatt's film company of the same name) as a former sex worker trying to break into the film industry. The wireless headphones free viewers to walk around the gallery space, which essentially detaches the work from its *Monster Model* context, and thereby allows for a less predetermined art experience.

The inclusion of *Pauline and the Biz* emphasizes Tannatt's project as being one in

which viewers are indeed guided, but in ways that encourage their eventual breaking away, be it from the structure of theater or exhibition viewing. Tannatt's methodology of improvisation is quite similar to the *Theater Game* techniques advanced by Paul Sills's mother Viola Spolin. Given the set-up of *Support Group*, viewers may indeed link Ladere's artistic practice, in which his mother plays a central role, to the improvisational practices of Sills and Spolin, and perhaps even carry this association to an imagining of the Pauline Film Production Company's eventual movie. In this sense, the narrative construction here is different from the traditional one Daniel Buren worked to obliterate within his practice. *Support Group* instead asks that viewers recognize how they direct the course of viewing, much in the same way that improvisational theater is not so much about creating narrative as it is about *doing*.

Another *Monster Model* video, Kenneth Tam's *I no longer worry about shoes being worn inside the house* (2010), demonstrates improvisation, as two players enter a room and are soon ardently discussing attempted headstands, synchronizing their actions in back-to-back poses, and giving each other instructions for movement when unexpectedly blindfolded. An association can be made between Tam's video and a framed drawing by Tannatt on the wall to the right of *Monster Model*. The poster-sized work, *Drawing for Monster Model: Blue Screen Version After Paul Sills* (2010), depicts Tannatt's exhibition mechanism as a diagrammatic rendering of Sills's pedagogical text. An architectural

and anthropomorphic flowchart, the drawing contains phrases like "sensual promise," "chickens hatching," and "windows" that call to mind Sills's famed Second City Theater, in which actors respond to prompts shouted by the audience.

Innumerable links between the artworks and their situation ricochet around the space of *Support Group*. The show risks hermeticism in the way in which it indicates to itself in circles for tautological ends. These layers of repetitious and cacophonous relations nearly cancel each other, but they leave viewers instead to confront their ability to navigate the show in a mix of pre- and self-determined ways. This affective-ness and improvisation, of a kind advocated by Sills, are directly related to each other.

Philosopher Brian Massumi says he uses the concept of affect "as a way of talking about that margin of maneuverability, the 'where we might be able to go and what we might be able to do' in every present situation." He continues: "I guess 'affect' is the word I use for 'hope.' ...[I]t explains why focusing on the next experimental step rather than the big utopian picture isn't really settling for less. It's not exactly going for more, either. It's more like being right where you are—more *intensely*."⁷ Many exhibitions promise discursive juxtaposition. Within the situation of *Support Group*, the viewer becomes an improv actor of sorts, following the multiple threads made available, determining where the exhibition goes.

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7. "Navigating Moments: Interview with Brian Massumi," in Mary Zournazi, *Hope: New Philosophies for Change* (Annandale, Australia: Pluto Press, 2002), 210–42.