

A MAGAZINE  
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DIALOGUES

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# Danny &



# Garth



Daniel Gordon and Garth Weiser are very different kinds of artists. But they share a few things in common—their studio building in DUMBO, Brooklyn, and a house in Far Rockaway, where they both surf regularly. And while their studio practices may not appear to overlap—Weiser is a painter, Gordon a photographer—there is commonality there too. Both artists, who have been quite successful, are interested in the breakdown and ultimately flawed reconstruction of visual information. Carmen Winant spoke to Gordon and Weiser about how they met, what they think about (and don't think about) when they surf, and their mutual dislike of the word *discipline*.



With  
Carmen Winant  
Photography  
by Mark Mahaney



Carmen Winant: Since we are in your mutual studio in DUMBO, Brooklyn, let's begin by talking about this space, which is quite large. How long have you guys been working here?

Garth Weiser: Along with a few other friends from Columbia [University], my wife and I got this place in 2005. We gutted the whole thing—it was an old sound studio. Before that it was a cork factory.

CW: What was the neighborhood like then?

GW: The same. Well, there were fewer people.

Daniel Gordon:  
And a lot fewer  
condos.

CW: How did you two connect?

GW: We had several studios for rent, and Danny and his girlfriend Ruby had just graduated from the MFA program at Yale and needed studios in Brooklyn, so they took them over. That was the summer of 2006, and how we first met.

DG: I'm a photographer, so I wanted a studio with natural light. There is a strange place on the fifth floor of this building—in order to get there, I have to walk through the owner's space and up a spiral staircase with no railing and go through a plank in the floor.





CW: Sounds like a good place to hide in case of a nuclear attack.

DG: I am not sure if it would be the first place to go or that last, actually.

CW: You guys also share a house in the Rockaways, right?

GW: There are eight of us who share the house. Danny and I are the only fine artists among them. There are also two fashion photographers and one crime reporter. We generally don't stay over too often in the house. We use it mostly to shower and to store our boards, which is hugely convenient.

CW: Do you have to have a car to surf in New York?

GW: It helps to have a car, but you don't need one. We both do now, but before that I used to take a long-board from Penn Station to Long Beach.

CW: Once you're out there, does your mind go blank? Or the opposite—when you're surfing, do you find that your brain becomes more active?

DG: Yes; the former. That kind of emptiness, or quietness, happens for me while exercising in general, be it running, yoga or surfing. If this makes sense, I find that the space of not thinking is actually where I come up with things. Or maybe a better way to

Garth Weiser in his studio.



Studio view with a work in progress.





say that is that it's a time and a place to reboot. It helps me be present when it's time to be active.

CW: How do you think about surfing practice in relation to art disciplines? There is a quality of physical, repetitive work in both of your paintings and photographs. Do surfing and art feed off of each other for you? Or perhaps, by balancing each other out, they do the opposite?

GW: I wouldn't call my surfing a discipline. That seems a little serious.

CW: What about a practice? I find that is a very heavily used word at the moment. I counted the other day in my yoga class—the instructor used the word *practice* 22 times in 90 minutes. I think about athletic practice a lot in relation to the way artists use the word. Does it qualify anything you are putting your concentrated energy into, I wonder?

GW: For me both *practice* and *discipline* connote a certain professionalism. I love surfing, but for me it's more of a hobby.

CW: That's funny. I get really offended when people refer to me as "jogging" instead of "running." It feels condescending, like they aren't taking my pursuit seriously.

DG: Well, surfing is fun. And art making...

GW: Can be harder. I'm a professional artist, not a professional surfer. No one pays me to surf!

DG: Sometimes I think that

overusing the word *practice* has the potential to drain the enjoyment out of the creative process. When you become "professional" at something—at anything—this can happen. Maybe that's why we're happy to think of surfing as a hobby.

CW: I grew up not knowing a lot of artists who were also athletes. Is there something unique about surfing that you guys think is attractive to artists?

GW: I was always forced to play sports. Where I grew up in Montana, it helped to be athletic. It was more socially acceptable.

CW: That's funny, Garth, as you wear kneepads when you paint, due to all the getting up and down. That strikes me as a real mechanism of athletics. And you, Danny?

DG: Well, I was always very physical. I was on a rowing team in high school, and played tennis, soccer, baseball. I think it's a total stereotype that artists aren't interested in sports, isn't it? And there are a lot of artists who are from the generation right before us who surf... Sean Landers and Xavier Cha, for instance. Whether you are an artist

or not, [you have] to have mind and body balance to live a productive, generative life.

CW: Speaking of that, I would like to talk a little more about the nature of your studio practices—if I can use that word—and how you regard them. In some abstract ways, your work is similar: both of you use applied, additive, time-intensive processes. But otherwise, they are quite different. When I first saw images of your paintings, Garth, I thought they were mural photographs of moiré patterns. And it was the opposite when I saw your work, Danny, I thought they were sculptures, or documents of immersive environments. In some ways, one of you is doing, and the other is undoing, our daily visual expectations. Do you guys see your work that way?

GW: At one point my work was more closely aligned with Danny's. When I first starting making work at [the MFA program at] Columbia—before we knew each other, actually—I made a lot of small sculptures. I would photograph the sculptures and then paint the photographs. Then everything got flatter and flatter.

DG: I never knew that!

GW: I haven't done that in a long time.

CW: Danny, paper scraps and printouts litter your studio floor. Where do you find your imagery? Is it all appropriated, or do you take some images yourself? You also recycle much of the paper, and may use the same piece in several different



photographs. How do you find it in the sea of paper on your floor?

DG: It's mostly appropriated. Sometimes—occasionally—I'll make a picture if I'm not able to find what I'm looking for. I can't say exactly how many times a scrap could be recycled; I might use it once and then never again. Or if it's a piece I am particularly fond of, I'll use it over and over until it just kind of disappears.

CW: What do you guys have coming up?

DG: I'm doing a solo booth at Liste in Basel this June with Wallspace [Gallery], and have a group show at Patricia Low in Gstaad, Switzerland, in August. Also, I have some shows up now and opening soon, including a show at Saatchi in London called "Out of Focus."

GW: [I did] a solo presentation at Frieze New York with Casey Kaplan Gallery in May and then some work of mine will be in the show at Albright-Knox [Gallery] in August. The museum owns two large paintings that they bought at my last New York show.

CW: Do you two speak often to each other about your work, or your relationship to the art world?

GW: Of course, Danny and I do have highfalutin' conversations sometimes. But since finishing graduate school, my artist friends and I don't talk too much about art in our free time. Surfing, if anything, can be a necessary break from that world.

