

KANSAS CITY

Archie Scott Gobber at Dolphin

Language has long played an important role in Archie Scott Gobber's work. In his recent show, words took center stage in a series of signs, placards and posters inspired by the phraseology and themes of last November's presidential election. The exhibition's title, "I'm Archie Scott Gobber and I Approve this Mess," aptly telegraphed the humorous and, at times, desperately ironic

spirit of its contents, and the artist's focus on the linguistic perfdy that has become a hallmark of American politics and government.

A diptych, executed in white gouache on blackboard, paired the phrases "shove it" and "flip-flop" that figured so prominently and damagingly in the 2004 campaign. A salon-style array of more than a dozen various-sized pieces included small hand-painted signs emblazoned with the president's oft-repeated reminder, "It's hard work," and the words "Mission Accomplish'd"

rendered in paint on a vintage canvas banner.

Other pieces invoked issues of civil liberties and global corporate power. In *Gay marriage for all*, the words "gay marriage" in gothic script are emblazoned over a capitalized "for all" in white letters on a turquoise background. In *Wart*, a close-up of a fluttering American flag appears above the logo for Wal-Mart, with the three middle letters grayed out by the artist. In a nod to Marcel Duchamp's *Apolinère Enameled*, Gobber transformed a vintage "holiday sale" sign into a request for "holiday safety" and subtitled the work *Orange Alert*.

Throughout, the preeminence of words and the artist's virtual abandonment of the representational imagery that was central to his previous work conveyed a heightened sense of gravity and pushed the work into the terrain of conceptual art.

One of the exhibition's most provocative pieces was a 20-by-14-inch gouache carrying the slogan "It's a free country" and a handful of butterfly decals. The work was also reproduced as a huge laser print on vinyl for the outdoor Project Wall at the Kansas City Art Institute's H&R Block Artspace. There, Gobber printed the text in plain red capital letters on a white backdrop, evoking nothing so much as a grocery window sign advertising the price of produce. Emissaries, presumably, of the sentimentality that government and the mass media apply to their presentations of so many controversial events, the stuck-on butterflies contributed a fluttering of irony to what was once considered an indisputable fact.

—Alice Thorson

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Archie Scott Gobber "It's a Free Country" @ Kansas City Art Institute's H&R Block Artspace