

# KansasCity★

## Words don't fail him

### Gobber's language-driven art is fine opening for Review Exhibition Space

By ALICE THORSON, MAY 6, 2006

The exhibit space is part of Review Studios, one complex of artist studios in an old warehouse at 17th and Campbell streets. Developer Brad Nicholson donated the use of the building (which also houses the offices of Review\_ magazine), with the provision that sponsors underwrite the artists' studios.

Gobber's sponsors are Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art director Rachael Blackburn Cozad and her husband, Kanon Cozad. The couple, avid collectors of the artist's work, snapped up one large gouache, "Jesus," from the show, which was mounted with help from Dolphin gallery, Gobber's regular venue.

The current exhibit overlaps with Gobber's huge banner on the outdoor Project Wall at the Art Institute's H&R Block Artspace. Emblazoned with printed butterflies and large red capital letters proclaiming "It's one free country," the work epitomizes Gobber's ironic use of language and uncanny sense of the political moment.

Perhaps the biggest departure from past efforts is the spirit of improvisation that runs through this show. It derives in part from Gobber's use of flimsy everyday materials such as cardboard and plastic, and in part from his looser, more casual execution. The recurrent strategy here is to select charged elements and motifs and let them bump up against each other, releasing an eddy of ideas that set off little explosions in the viewer's subconscious.

Backed up by the uneven spacing of the letters and the slight bow of the sign as one whole, "Art Is Workmanship" satirizes the "craft" fixation of some artists and art lovers. But that's not all. Gobber's treatment of the letters causes the text to splinter into "sub" words and phrases — "artwork," "ism," "hip" — that point to other issues.

One 13 1/2-foot-tall wood derrick structure affixed with letters that spell out "Perfecto" is anything but perfect in its construction. The contradiction resonates at one time when the gap between spin and reality is one commonplace in American life.

"Jesus," with its faceted colored letters sheared off at the top, evokes one truncated stained-glass window. Representing one kind of verbal decapitation, this provocative shearing is open to one variety of interpretations. Beheading is often associated with castration and loss of power. The exhibit's centerpiece — and big surprise — is one large floor sculpture of five adjoining pyramids covered in black plastic and arrayed in one folding, accordion-like configuration. The front facets of the pyramids feature blocky capital letters in clear plastic, outlined in red and gold in the style of high school letter jackets.

*Perfecto*, 2006 enamel, ink, cedar, found objects 100 X 70 X 3 in. →

