

ART PAPERS

—Heather Lustfeld, Sept/Oct 2006



ARCHIE SCOTT GOBBER
KANSAS CITY

The new Review Exhibition Space was recently inaugurated with the solo exhibition Archie Scott Gobber: Ready or Not [April 14—May 19, 2006], featuring four large, word-based installations—*I am the Shit*, 2006; *Art is Workmanship*, 2006; *Jesus*, 2006; and *Perfecto*, 2006—which cleverly tackled a number of societal issues.

Known for his meticulous printmaking and photo-realist painting, Gobber often weds politics and advertising through the juxtaposition of text and image, yielding a narrative style rooted in ironic, critical investigations of pop culture. His recent work thus marks a significant shift to sculptural installation, wherein he parlays symbolic use of word, material, and color into stories. This work taps into cultural and social questions through critical references to egotism, art practice, religious/political propaganda, and the myth of perfection.

Each work held a distinct tone. Yet, Gobber delivers an over-arching indictment of western consumerism in a few well-chosen words and phrases strung throughout the open, industrial exhibition space. Depicting their namesakes, the four works were laden with multiple, oppositional messages, attempting to corral huge ideas into inexplicably succinct packages.

A bombastic floor piece sported the phrase, *I am the Shit*, in white-hot, red-framed letters atop a glossy background of enamel paint on stretched plastic sheeting. Supported by an underlying wooden structure, the piece spanned twenty-five feet of concrete floor like an accordion placard, each letter peaking at seven feet. The slick, blocky varsity-style letters and sophomoric, over-the-top slogan tucked away the bare light bulbs and loose cords illuminating the showy veneer from behind. If Gobber hides neither this apparatus nor the intentional imperfections of seemingly perfect surfaces, they are not initially obvious. From various vantage points, effacing phrases such as "Ate Shit" and "I Shit" emerge, replacing pompous self-congratulations with farcical pathos and self-loathing.

Craft and advertising spar in *Art is Workmanship*, 2006, a large wall montage of enamel on canvas and chipboard. Subliminal advertising coopts strategic visual breaks of the phrase, teasing various suggestive readings out of the slogan—such as "Art is Manship." A painted beige brick section—the show's single concession to imagery—skirts half of the lower edge, underscoring the connection to a billboard. Gobber plays meticulous lettering off sketchy, unfinished scrawl, bringing his hand more overtly into the piece. Whereas *I am the Shit* pays homage to the cult of inflation, *Art is Workmanship* declares, if not advertises,

the nostalgic nobility of the hand and traditional craft in the face of mechanized media and prefabricated, gargantuan objects.

Likewise, the glossy, mixed-media painting *Jesus*, 2006, critiques the commercialization —or worse yet, branding—of religion, ostensibly for political or societal control. Sections of paper painted in bold, neon-like gouache tones of pink, blue, and orange, compose the name *Jesus*, which shimmers atop a gorgeous sheen of black enamel on glass. A hybrid between stained glass, neon signs, and the childhood coloring game called "black magic," the piece's general appearance and abruptly cropped letters evoke diverse contexts and iconographies. With only their lower parts left—as if beheaded—the severed letters remain recognizable, and the truncated name symbolizes damage and loss in a society moved by mass communication and agitprop idioms designed to dictate, or prefabricate, faith.

The myth of perfectionism is summoned in *Perfecto*, an expectedly imperfect work. A towering thirteen-and-a-half feet high cedar structure built of surfaces of graduating sizes holds individually painted letters in multiple styles. While visually enticing, and conceptually relevant as a final word espousing the allure of perfection's unattainability, *Perfecto* is the most neutral, and hence the least resolved, work on display. Nonetheless, the installation as a whole marked an impressive passage for Gobber into a new realm.