

MW Capacity

A painter blog for no-coasters

Q & A with Archie Scott Gobber

March 26, 2009 by [Chris](#)



The Audacity, 2009

Please give our readers a little bit of information about yourself (upbringing, education, location, news, etc.):

I was born in Warrensburg, Missouri, a town about an hour east of Kansas City. As a kid it was surreal being surrounded by Minuteman missiles tucked in the ground around the area. We always knew if there was a nuclear conflict that we would be blasted away. It produced a good amount of anxiety.

I received a B.F.A. from the Kansas City Art Institute in 1988 and have resided in Kansas City since.

As far as news, I have a solo show at Review Studios Exhibition Space through April 17th. A billboard above Missouri Bank Crossroads Branch with Art Through Architecture, a program administered by the Charlotte Street Foundation and the American Institute of Architects, Kansas City. Also, I have work in a show at the Kemper Museum and also at Marty Walker Gallery, Dallas. I will have a new outdoor piece at Dolphin on March 27th.

Many of us don't grow up with painting and art as part of our daily life, and our routes into the fine arts are circuitous. Was that your experience? How and when did you say, 'I'm going to do this?'

My first experience with art was watching my mom paint at the kitchen table. She would paint scenes from greeting cards that we had gotten and hang them in the house. That was the extent of the emphasis on fine art, but my parents always encouraged me. As a kid I was drawn to graphics and logos. In high school I had an excellent art teacher, John Willard. He is an accomplished artist himself and we all wanted to be half as good as him. We were exposed to some modern art but really the basics, Picasso, Thomas Hart Benton and Dali. Getting accepted to art school clenched it for me.



Changeable, 2008

Talk about your daily inspirations, 'fine' art & not fine art:

As far as fine art goes, I don't look too much, but it does creep in, mostly from influential friends. David Ford, Mike Erickson, Eric Sall, Dylan Mortimer, these are all artists I respect and look to. I've always had a love-hate with Warhol, I love John Baldessari, Ed Ruscha, Wayne White, but not a lot of text artists. Painter's painters interest me.

Language is a big inspiration. Email, handwriting, cell phones, texting, news, television, politics, writing, reading, and conversations all affect me. Signage is a major influence and not only the "sign", the structure holding it. Context is huge. I see "words" in the sky. My 8-year-old daughter is a great influence, it's like learning again. My wife, Laura McGrew, is an apparel designer and has her own business, [Tomboy](#). We go through the same travails and are "there" for each other.

What are you listening to? Reading?

I'm listening to: Last FM, Dan Reeder, silence. I'm reading The New Yorker mostly, but I like to read historical novels.



Drink..., 2008

Tell us about one useful thing you were taught or told.

My junior year at the Art Institute I was struggling in the Painting Dept. Abstract and figurative art were popular. I tried to work abstractly but never felt confident. I was just making the motions. At that time, I was in studio with a visiting artist, Philomene Bennett. She is a force with an infectious personality and energy. She is the first person that said, "Do what you like and have fun." What an epiphany that was for

me. It was like being cut free after being tied down for so long. It's a lesson that I share with my students at the Art Institute.

Tell us about one useful thing you learned for yourself.

Get along with everyone, whether they like your work or not.

For you what is the hard part?

Being confident is a struggle even though my work looks confident. It's hard keeping up with all the peripheral business of art.

What is the fun part?

Seeing an idea realized as a finished work. I love the making, the absurdity of being alone for hours on end in my own brain. Some of the most exciting moments are prior to the work. The moment an idea hits.



Better Off Now, 2009

One thing that's striking about the exhibit at Review is the way you seem to reinvent or re-imagine your project. I have to admit that I'd expected to see you streamlining a bit, to build a body of the funny typography images. Instead scale, form and color, the relationship of the work to the space it occupies have all become more complex, and actually really surprising. I'm curious about your thoughts on building a consistent body while continuing to grow as an artist.

Thanks. This is my second solo show at Review so I'm comfortable with the space. Also, I'm a resident artist in the Review Studio program, so my studio is just down the hall from the gallery. I knew from the previous one that I could handle the space with 4 pieces of considerable size.

I actually moved in a fifth, a 50" X 56" canvas and thought about using a floating wall, but the piece looked like a 16" X 20" in the space. I knew I had 3 works ready to go and finished them all in the weeks prior to the opening. The fourth piece I had planned in my mind for quite awhile and knew that I just had to make it. This piece, "*Better Off Now*", is 12' X 33' X 10' and was completed the week of the debut. I built the piece in the studio, which could not accommodate the scale so installing it in the gallery was my first chance to see it whole. I love those surprises and deadlines invigorate me. It worked very successfully.

Another piece changed significantly from how I had it in the studio and it was all very accidental. "*Word*" is a floor piece that leans against the wall and has 36" black aluminum letters that read, "NEK'd". In the studio it read "WORD" and hung on the wall, but when it was moved to the gallery the capital "P" I was using to make a capital "D" wouldn't lean against the wall unless it was turned upside down. It became a lowercase "d". It was an epiphany, "there are lowercase letters". You'd think I would be in tune with all letters but I wasn't.

You are right about scale, form and color, they are very important in my work. I don't go into a show wanting to make pieces that look good together. Instead I always start with the text or idea and proceed to materials from there. I never plan my work enough to rule out other ideas coming into play. They always change, conceptually or otherwise, because the only part nailed down, generally, is the text. I've gotten to a point where my pieces work well in context with one another, but can also be strong individually. So the consistency in the body of work just happens.

The one piece in the exhibit that shows the most growth, to me, is *"The Audacity"*. A large canvas, 80" X 114", that is very colorful and stacks two messages on top of one another, seeking to confuse the viewer and the statements. It was really informed by the piece, "WORD". This is the direction I want to go with my work.



Word, 2009

What are you getting better at?

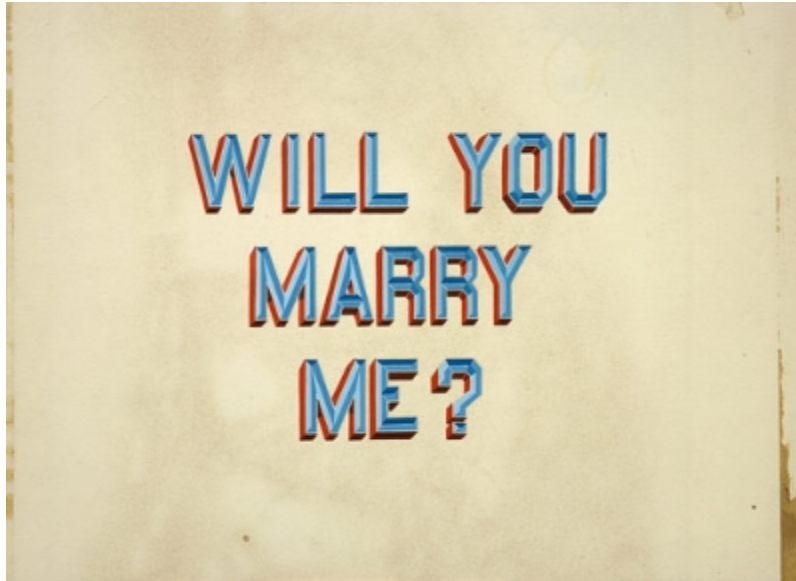
Painting and color.

What is sketching for you? What is the role of drawing in your work?

I guess there is always a sketch at first. It might be a computer-generated ink-jet print, simple black and white, Microsoft Publisher '97 file, just to see what a word looks like or a detailed pencil drawing of a nostalgic font. Often, I project the sketch with an ancient opaque projector, so sketching is integral to the process. Most of these sketches are quick and end up in a pile with others, they are not considered art themselves, just supporting material. If I do a detailed drawing it usually becomes a finished small piece.

Do you love or hate one liners?

Both. I've often felt like a victim of the one-liner. You know, a lot of my work is pretty easy to get as long as you can read and seem to be one-liners. I struggle to overcome this and the piece, *"The Audacity"* in the current show, is an attempt to hold the viewer longer than usual. This is why I choose my text very carefully, making sure that multiple meanings can be arrived at. Language is ambiguous and when I capitalize on that idea the work goes deeper than a one-liner. I am a joke lover, though.



Marry Me, 2008

The word "snarky" made it into the press release for Archie Scott Gobber is Better Off Now. Does that feel like a taboo in any way? Like why would an artist want to be snarky? Aren't we all supposed to want to be not-snarky?

I'm glad you noticed. Here is how it was used: Matthew Bourbon of Artforum writes, "Gobber's art is a cross between the text-based paintings of Ed Ruscha and the sign collages of Jack Pierson. The difference with Gobber is his consistently ironic point of view-his work feels wickedly snarky as he skewers any subject he can get his hands on."

Now, that quote was taken from an article that reviewed a show of mine at Marty Walker Gallery in Dallas and felt specific to that show and critic. "Snarky" is a funny word. Kathy Dowell, a curator and writer, took to calling me Snarky Gobber. I mean we live in an age of complacency, some snarkiness is warranted. "Snarky" to me is like what is called "dark humor", an irony that is cutting and devilishly funny.

In spite of the puns and evident satire, I don't think of your work as being ironically detached, or insincere.

Yes, I base all my work on my life, what's happening right now, what I'm thinking. It's really very current. I like to speak to "Now". I'm not making historical paintings, at least not until they're done. Although, the aspect of humor and being able to laugh at myself is not always apparent, I always try to relate to my own blue-collar upbringing, the individual, a humanist approach.

How much nostalgia plays in to what you do? The idea of palimpsest seems relevant.

Palimpsest, I had to look that up but you're right on. I want the work to be pieces of other things, to be violated by another actor and display that violation. That's why the signage works so perfectly with what I'm doing. There is a history created with the nostalgic fonts and the art is often violated with a paint roller or spray paint, something more current. It's old school sign work, but presented as painting, you get all that great baggage with it.



Broker, 2009

What do you like about working in Kansas City?

Most everyone I love is here or very close. Kansas City is affordable. I'm a mid-westerner and proud of it. The art scene is filled with discriminating artists making important work. I've always said there's no market here and that allows artists to work freely, not beholding to any patron base. If any of my patrons are reading this, please forgive me.

I have a unique perspective since I've been here for many years. The city has really improved with all the foundations and galleries that have pushed and supported important work. The Charlotte Street Foundation and its' leader, David Hughes, has really been on the forefront. Review Studios and the Brad and Linda Nicholson Foundation are great for mid-career artists and the Dolphin, with its' fantastic new space, directed by John O'Brien, has raised the bar for galleries. I think the goal of all of us is to garner more attention to the city to get the important Biennial studio visits. I think we can.

What's coming next for you?

Well, what's coming next for you? I don't really know. A good friend of mine, Isaac Tanner, says, "Just be ready for the next opportunity and always be making work to position yourself for that".

Good advice. Thanks, Scott!
