

ARTFORUM

Archie Scott Gobber

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Cleverness seems to be the guiding principle in Archie Scott Gobber's current exhibition. Employing a cynical and puckish wit, 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. In works like *Talentless*, 2008, the artist offers the text TALENTLESS IS THE NEW TALENTED—a one-line joke that reads like a fashion catchphrase perhaps found in *Vogue* or *Elle*. Gobber's fastidious rendering of the typeface simultaneously mocks Hollywood's famous-for-nothing starlets and jabs at his own facile sound bites and studiously crafted production. At its worst, Gobber's art brings only a snicker of recognition at the humor he deploys. *Mad in China*, 2007, for instance—in which the artist eliminates the pertinent e to change MADE into MAD—feels thin. While the work potentially taps into a reservoir of public sentiment against China's disregard for safety standards in children's products, it is ultimately a dead end leading back only to the easy joke. At its best, however, Gobber's art engenders more than the mere twisting of a phrase and instead uses a bon mot to imply a larger world of critique and satire. In the grandly scaled *In Loving Memory of You*, 2007, he boldly paints a phrase that is usually affectionately carved in the headstones of the dead—but in Gobber's portrayal, the hyperbolic size of the painting and the neon shock of artificial colors are meant to mock and poison these simple words of affect, waging a dark attack on an unidentified person—maybe even the viewer. It is a bitter sarcasm that, in its passive-aggressive anger, is sinisterly funny. Sometimes, the artist hits the mark by default. In *I Am the Shit*, 2007, a beautifully pristine sculpture made as a model for an oversize work, the art feels more nuanced as a diminutive maquette. There is a slightly pathetic bravado to proclaiming greatness in such tiny form. As the shortest piece in the show, this work has a Napoleon complex and ultimately conquers the others with its blatant self-promotion and crass advertising mien.