

On the Edge of Interpretation: Archie Scott Gobber's Amateur Content

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Archie Scott Gobber's art walks a precarious line between humor and politics by addressing the paradoxes that inextricably link them. He mines the topical vernacular of our cultural territory and turns its catchphrases on their head. His "sign" paintings, composed of graphic visual puzzles and font styles, question the relationship between identity and ideology. He asks for new readings of the familiar with a contradictory tension that risks falling off the edge of interpretation – toward the side that seemingly trivializes these issues or on the side of relevancy by addressing them.



This show reminds us to look at both faces of the metaphorical and Gobber sets up this dialectic by titling it "Amateur Content". His artist statement provided only a dictionary definition that emphasized the dichotomy of its meaning, a condition that always underlies his work, that it "may mean two strikingly different things." We know that Gobber isn't an amateur but "one who performs something for love rather than money." However the title piece is also a painting of a three dimensional ribbon banner that appears ready to decorate what's transpiring outside of this show – a time that gives us daily witness to political content done with amateur incompetence.

In 1929 Rene Magritte gave us a cautionary warning about text and image relationships when he wrote “Ceci n’est pas une pipe.” below an image of a pipe he called “The Treachery of Images”.



Gobber’s felicitous comments on our cultural use of language is seen in the unadorned text of “They, Them, Their“. It brings attention to pronouns that are not gender specific. When gender is non-binary they are commonly used and so why not use “they” as a singular pronoun when the subject does not identify as male or female? However, reading a Gobber is always about turning what is first thought into what can also be interpreted and so “They, them and their” may also speak to those thought of as “other” or foreign and unknown – groups to be feared. “They” are represented as not sharing “my” values and so is also about how language is used to marginalize and divide us. Do these two different interpretations

take away from the significance of each other? Or does commenting on the duplicity inherent in our language excuse its lack of specificity?



The political anxiety of the last year permeates this show and the past prominence of text in Gobber's work is matched, and even superseded by, the objects themselves. On "Nobody of the Year" the words appear and disappear, as your viewing angle changes, fading in and out of memory. Shrouded in a black frame echoing a "mourning" object of the turn of the century, is being a "nobody" a death sentence in our culture that celebrates the fame and fortune of celebrity? Again, there is an ambiguity here that is both poignantly sad and ironic as we are also reminded of those thought of as "nobody" senselessly lost to violence.



A
CONFEDERATE
MONUMENT
ONCE STOOD
HERE

A Monument for a Removed Monument questions the role of the object as separate from the sentimental need to memorialize the past. Does simply removing a Confederate monument erase the memory of those who fought to defend and maintain slavery? This piece was actually placed on the very site of a removed Daughters of the Confederacy monument and photographed by Mike Sinclair to be displayed next to it in the gallery. Should Gobber's monument next be replaced by a yet another titled "An Artist's Object for *A Monument for a Removed Monument*" ?

Gobber has taken the politically motivated symbolic gesture that removed the original monument to a surreal place. This surrogate opens up a dialogue about how its original racist history might contradict or at worst even exploit its intentions. Gobber responded to a recent exchange on [Instagram](#) that questioned these concerns, "To me it is celebrating the removal of the monument. It's a gravestone, an attempt to lay to rest."



Kneeling Flag completely drops the use of text in favor of another sign system, the ultimate patriotic symbol of our constitutionally protected democracy – the American flag. Gobber humorously anthropomorphizes it to “take a knee” as an expression of solidarity with our nation’s history of public protests and demonstrations. It elicits delight and satisfaction by aligning the flag with NFL players’ racial profiling protest against their critics but also risks the contradictory effect of feeling too cartoonish a characterization for such a serious issue.

Humor has a long history of being a strategy in social justice movements but can art really speak empathetically for our politics? These Gobber works fall under the title of the show, “Amateur Content”, that admits to being no expert on the concerns raised about cultural territory and identity. However, in a political climate where language is often used to blur the meaning of truth, they are asking important questions.

Amateur Content, A solo exhibition by Archie Scott Gobber ran from 5/11/2018 – 6/16/2018 at Haw Contemporary in the Crossroads