

Walter Robinson

CATHARINE CLARK GALLERY

Exhibition titles are often little more than attention grabbers, but the name of Walter Robinson's recent show, "Represent," is actually of some use in pinning down the meaning of the work on view. This word has many definitions (among them "stand for," as in function as a symbol or metaphor; "act as a representative"; or even as an adjective, "representational," as in figurative), and these alternate or overlap within individual works as Robinson critiques popular culture, globalization, and the precarious nature of our current political situation.

The most striking work in the show was a life-size rearing stallion, slick and black, pierced with bright red arrows. Its title, *St. Sebastian*, 2006, alludes to the early Christian martyr customarily portrayed in this way. But why a horse? As it turns out, this particular animal, its mane and tail elaborately articulated, is a dead ringer for the Ferrari symbol. The exclusive Italian sports car manufacturer has morphed into a vast



Walter Robinson,
Red Ink, 2006, rag,
paper, wood, epoxy,
dimensions variable,
as installed:
83 x 83 x 24".

that attempts social comment, Robinson's convoluted inventions demand a certain amount of effort from the viewer. In *Red Ink*, 2006, a little table stands in front of an artful facsimile of an old schoolroom world map—two circles, side by side, showing the continents in shades of pink, green, and blue. The table, its legs embedded in what looks like a cartoony pool of shiny red ink (actually epoxy), holds a large rubber stamp that has been pressed, repeatedly, all over the map. The stamped shape looks familiar—the outline of the United States?—but something seems different. It takes a while to realize that what's wrong is that the "blue" states—the few Democratic strongholds along the country's periphery—are missing. Thus the title of the work suggests the high cost of leaving our imprint everywhere, as well as who is responsible for the mess.

Sometimes, though, these combinations of "symbolic symbols" either cancel each other out or just seem too easy, as in a pyramid of big-busted Minnie Mouses covered in glistening white goo titled *Pyramid (Abu Gbraib Minnies)*, 2007 (though this unfortunate idea probably took a great deal of time and effort to realize). Still, it's that combination of sociopolitical content and exacting, even obsessive craft that makes the works in "Represent" succeed far more often than they fail. At their best, Robinson's slick, candy-coated objects suggest the nervy offspring of a sardonic Geppetto, as odd as they are cute.

—Maria Porges

luxury-goods and clothing empire, and has licensed, for example, a line of shoes and athletic wear made by Puma, whose logo of a lunging feline predator provided the inspiration for *Hunter-Gatherer*, 2006, a second arrow-studded sculpture. The conflation of one of Catholicism's sexiest images (Sebastian is usually depicted all but naked, in a pose that suggests ecstatic surrender) with powerful animals used as embodiments of speed results in a complicated set of metaphors. Throw in international commerce and globalization and you have what the press release describes creatively as a "symbol symbolic of symbolism."

Not that all of this content is immediately apparent. Unlike much work