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# Robert Gober: The Heart Is Not A Metaphor



## Synopsis

Robert Gober rose to prominence in the mid-1980s and was quickly acknowledged as one of the most significant artists of his generation. Early in his career, he made deceptively simple sculptures of everyday objects--beginning with sinks and moving on to domestic furniture such as playpens, beds and doors. In the 1990s, his practice evolved from single works to theatrical room-sized environments. In all of his work, Gober's formal intelligence is never separate from a penetrating reading of the socio-political context of his time. His objects and installations are among the most psychologically charged artworks of the late twentieth century, reflecting the artist's sustained concerns with issues of social justice, freedom and tolerance. Published in conjunction with the first large-scale survey of the artist's career to take place in the United States, this publication presents his works in all media, including individual sculptures and immersive sculptural environments, as well as a distinctive selection of drawings, prints and photographs. Prepared in close collaboration with the artist, it traces the development of a remarkable body of work, highlighting themes and motifs that emerged in the early 1980s and continue to inform Gober's work today. An essay by Hilton Als is complemented by an in-depth chronology featuring a rich selection of images from the artist's archives, including never-before-published photographs of works in progress. Robert Gober was born in 1954 in Wallingford, Connecticut. He has had numerous one-person exhibitions, most notably at the Dia Center for the Arts, New York; The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; and Schaulager, Basel. In 2001, he represented the United States at the 49th Venice Biennale. Gober's curatorial projects have been shown at The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston; The Menil Collection, Houston; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. He lives and works in New York.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

27th Annual Lambda Literary Award Finalists for LGBT Nonfiction. (The Editors Lambda Literary) What claims our attention is not so much Goyer's quotidian subjects as the intentness with which he reconstitutes ordinary objects; this is his way of possessing them. Goyer's laconic perfectionism lends humdrum stuff an eeriness. I feel that eeriness in the subtle shadow play he reveals in his plainly carpentered closets, in the delicacy of human hairs inserted into the wax surface of a sculpted leg, and in the trompe l'oeil finesse with which he paints the label on the battered Benjamin Moore can. Goyer keeps his virtuosity tamped down and under wraps. His weird world is constructed with the meticulousness of a jeweler putting together a Fabergé egg. (Jed Perl *The New York Review of Books*) In the mid-1980's Robert Goyer began to receive significant art-world attention for his sculptures of everyday domestic objects embedded with references to social justice, freedom and tolerance. The oblique works offers a socio-political and psychological end-of-the-twentieth-century context to their mundane formal structures. (The Editors *THE Magazine*) The heart is an excitable physical organ that registers sensations of fight or flight and of love or aversion: the first and last unimpeachable witness to what can't help but matter, for good and for ill, in every life. (Peter Schjeldahl *The New Yorker*)

Ann Temkin is an American art curator, and currently the Marie-Josée and Henry Kravis Chief Curator of Painting and Sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Hilton Als is an American writer and theater critic who writes for *The New Yorker*. Claudia Carson is archivist and registrar to Robert Goyer. Paulina Pabochá is Assistant Curator in the Department of Painting and Sculpture at The Museum of Modern Art. Christian Scheidemann is the Senior Conservator and President of Contemporary Conservation Ltd.

Revealing, intimate, and highly engaging. This sits beautifully with the exhibit at MoMA and serves as a lead in to what is most personal about Goyer's work.

Absolutely gorgeous book that is accessible and engaging. I bought it because I had to read and research about Robert Goyer but was pleased to find that I genuinely enjoyed reading the book

from cover to cover. Hilton Als has written a sort of first person discussion of Gober's work that feels intimate and personal. The second half of the book is an interview with Giber that is interesting and accessible as well.

This assembly of reproductions of Gober's art is invaluable. Unfortunately, it is not matched by Hilton Als's catalog essay, which is shallow and self-satisfied. A gay man, Gober is lauded by Als for not angling for a slice of "the victim pie" — ok, so he is one of those "good" marginalized people who does not speak of inequity or make his sexuality too explicit in his work? Yet there is quite a lot of focus on "the hole" of a gay man's body/psyche — so his sexuality essentializes his art? Oh, and right, Als is gay too, so it all makes sense, even when he assumes a tone of superiority about the way "others" misunderstand male homosexuality — then going on to present crass opinions himself. There are real issues to be discussed in subtle ways, but Als has not done that. It's a shame for such nuanced, thoughtful art to be introduced with crude, posturing blather. Why no citations from Als's essay to the reproductions of Gober's art ("fig. 1," or "p. 226") as catalogues customarily provide? Speaking of holes, given that so many pieces are untitled, this is an odd omission. And why no footnotes/citations from Als's many pretentious quotations? At least some of them are worth pursuing. Buy the book, but just look at the pictures.

I was very surprised at the lack of quality in print, scale, reproductions (!), typesetting, and design of this book in comparison to Schaulager, Basel's Gober retrospective exhibition book. Indicative of European care for culture? Maybe. I suppose that's why Steidl/Schaulager's 2007 book is already going for \$225 in like-new condition. Notwithstanding the budgeting needs of massive distribution (MoMA's probably much greater than Schaulager's,) this book could have been stunning, and for the same price. This book serves merely as a cheaply produced reference to Gober's work/history without doing the works justice as other books have.

If your going to have a book titled The Heart is Not a Metaphor then write a book about the heart and explain how your art fits into that. Terribly cryptic and misleading.

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