



Meanings multiply in Graham Gillmore's "wordscapes," such as *Strike Out on Your Own*, 2009.

Graham Gillmore understands the power of a well-placed comma. In his show "Drop Dead, Gorgeous" earlier this year at the Mike Weiss Gallery in New York, the addition of the comma to the title turned a gushing compliment into a threat. Such familiar phrases—from "strike out on your own" to "after you"—fluctuate in meaning when held up to scrutiny on canvases that Gillmore calls "wordscapes."

Painting freehand, Gillmore outlines his letters with squares that evoke children's blocks, as well as tombstones. The chunky letters often cast dark shadows and create both a spatial and a psychological landscape. "I'm attempting to invest language with as much substance as possible," says the 46-year-old artist, whose accountant father brought home ledger paper—which has rows of tiny squares—for Gillmore to paint on. "I also want to slow the viewers' reading of the text so they notice the architectonics of the letters themselves, and to suspend meaning until the last minute."

In his show at Mike Weiss, Gillmore focused on the gap between how we view ourselves and how we are viewed by others. For one piece, he co-opted language used in the psychological assessments he has been taking as part of a custody battle—statements he had to rank like "I love to talk even to people I don't know" and "I always make sure that my work is well-planned and organized." At once confessional and mocking, the work is poignant, humorous, and relatable.

The artist, who splits his time between New York and the tiny town of Winlaw in British Columbia, recalls being "hit over the head" by works by Rauschenberg and Ruscha on his first visit to the Vancouver Art Gallery, in high school. He graduated from Vancouver's Emily Carr University of Art and Design in 1985 and started using text after becoming frustrated with the limitations of figurative imagery. "I got into this more psychological domain, where the language was describing something that one couldn't visualize," says Gillmore.

These days he finds source material in everything from *The Sopranos* dialogue to a rejection letter he received, which he parodied in his exhibition this fall at the Monte Clark Gallery in Vancouver. His next show is scheduled for the spring at the OMR Gallery in Mexico City. Gillmore's prices range from \$12,000 for works on paper to \$50,000 for large canvases. "I'm playing a game with my viewers and myself," says the artist. "At the same time, there is some very serious autobiographical information in my work that I hope will help others come to terms with conflict and disappointment." —Hilarie M. Sheets



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