



David Herbert, Beautiful Superman, 2007, Mixed media sculpture (wood, styrofoam, fabric, plexiglas, paint), 365 x 76 x 35 cm, Courtesy Saatchi Collection, London

David Herbert

Born 1977 in Seattle/WA, lives and works in New York

www.davidherbert.com

Gallery:

Postmasters, New York

David Herbert, who began his career as a video artist before moving into sculpture, is a hands-on artist with an extraordinary aptitude for materials who can basically make anything out of anything, and do so convincingly. He devises exquisite, yet seemingly rickety and precarious versions of iconic historical objects, architecture, and figures (many of them recognizably American), as well as eccentric sculptural versions of famous movie props. Herbert's towering *Beautiful Superman*, 2007, made of wood, Styrofoam, fabric, Plexiglas, and paint, presents a pop culture superhero in tremendous distress. Here Superman is skeletal, absurd, abject, and entirely drained of power, as he hovers just a few inches off the floor. References abound: to Jesus on the cross, hanged men dangling from lone trees in innumerable Hollywood Westerns, and sad-faced clowns in outlandish garb subject to mishaps and punishment. Herbert's version of a mortal and emaciated Superman, wearing a drooping cape and boyish shorts, and at the cusp between life and death, also perfectly fits with an America facing limits, restrictions, anxiety, and waning confidence.

Throughout Herbert's work, mighty and enduring American symbols, including the Empire State Building and a Mississippi River riverboat, are vulnerable, exposed, and poised for disaster. His version of the Empire State Building, while intricate and meticulous, seems corroded and defiled, like an elegant suit three-quarters devoured by moths or a charred relic of a building after a terrible fire, while his riverboat (called the Mark Twain, which could be either an old-time boat from the nineteenth century or a twentieth-century Disneyland facsimile of such a boat) ominously tilts as if about to slip under a river. Nevertheless, Herbert's comical impending disasters are visually stunning, and mark him as one of the very top artists of a new generation. His *Mickey*, 2009, is a marvelous conflation of fun-loving exuberance and desperate alarm. With spindly arms and legs, chunky and cumbersome feet, and exaggerated hands held up as if futilely trying to ward off big troubles, this Mickey, like Herbert's Superman, is a pop culture icon updated for a turbulent and anxious new era.

Exhibitions | Bibliography

Exhibitions:

2008: *The Shape Of Things To Come*, Saatchi Gallery, London

2007: *I (Heart)* New York, Postmasters Gallery, New York

2006: *New American Talent*, Arthouse Texas, Austin/TX

Bibliography:

Beyond Architecture. Imaginative Buildings and Fictional Cities, ed. by Lukas Feireiss and Robert Klanten, Berlin 2009

Jaring Durst Britt, "David Herbert," in *Freedom: American Sculpture*, exh. cat. The Hague Sculpture 2008, The Hague 2008

Carrie Neiman, "In the Studio," in *Style Weekly*, October 26, 2005