



ROBERT GOBER

WORK 1976-2007

12 May to 14 October 2007

MEDIA INFORMATION

With approximately forty sculptures, five large-scale installations, and several groups of drawings it is the largest exhibition of the famous American artist's work to date. For this exhibition we have taken great care to reconstruct installations – some for the first time since they were created – and assemble a large number of works, the earliest of which are scarcely known at all and the most recent of which have never been exhibited before. Childhood, sexuality, memory, loss, religion and discrimination are themes that have always preoccupied Gober and for which he has developed his own unique pictorial language, influenced by Surrealism and by Minimal and Conceptual Art, though all read very much against the grain.

Gober's visual world unfolds from everyday domestic life, personal history and collective common knowledge. His creative career began with drawings of interiors and constructions of miniature houses, which were soon superseded by sculptures depicting everyday objects. These are replicas that are laboriously and meticulously created from scratch. The sculptures that result are deceptively similar to the original but also radiate an uncanny autonomy that tells us that they are not what they pretend to be. They inhabit a space between reality and dream in which the clear meaning of things breaks up and becomes an open flux. Or they are, as Gober once said of his early sculptures, 'formally rigorous but emotionally messy'.

Robert Gober was born in Wallingford, a small town in Connecticut, in 1954. Immediately upon graduating from Middlebury College in Vermont in 1976 he moved to New York and has lived there ever since. He first began to attract more attention as an artist in the mid-1980s with an extensive group of works produced over three years: his *sinks*, which explored the form of an ordinary washbasin in diverse variations. Since that time, his sculptural work has

concentrated on a few selected domestic objects – children’s furniture and other furnishings such as playpens, doors and dog carriers or drainpipes – and also on the human body, turning individual parts like a leg or torso into the object of a sculpture. Since the 1990s he has also produced installations. They take the form of domestic interiors or of exteriors such as unspoilt forest landscapes, in both cases lined with wallpaper and furnished or enlivened with sculptures whose themes are taken from the same realms as those of the individual sculptures. Whether independent sculptures or entire rooms, all of Gober’s works are made up of familiar elements, and in their form and constellations they have a disquieting and frequently distressing effect. That is because Gober builds on familiarity, which he exaggerates by means of an incredibly suggestive idiom in order to unfold his narratives of childhood, sexuality, religion, discrimination and power. These are all old themes that have emerged from time immemorial in social communities, both private and public, and here they are narrated from the perspective of the 1980s and 1990s and the first years of the twenty-first century, against the backdrop of a nation that had once sought to become a centre of Western culture.

The exhibition *Robert Gober: Work, 1976–2007* is special not only because of the breadth of its survey but also because of the selection and presentation of the works it shows. The intertwining of individual sculptures and installations, interrupted occasionally by a group of drawings, makes it possible to experience the formal and thematic density and rigour that Gober has developed over the years into a powerful panorama. The most recent works – like the room that Gober installed in the Menil Collection in Houston in 2005 or the sculpture with a basket full of wonderful apples, over which a gun that has gone soft has been placed – give a sense of the rich variety and confident mastery with which Gober is continuing to extend that panorama.