

James Gobel

Gobel's works are made with hand-cut felt, embroidery thread and paint. Resembling tapestries, the mosaic of both wool and acrylic felt, meticulously positioned, have depicted Gobel's figurative and abstract compositions for over 20 years. The method of construction is a creation of Gobel's own invention. The subject matter over the course of his career has steadfastly centered around the queer male body. Gobel selects from the margins of the LGBT community, choosing the pudgy individual or the lumberjack to be his sitter, redirecting the viewers attention to the communities less typified figures, allowing them access and inclusion to the cannon of representational painting. In his most recent series, "The Charles Laughton Papers", Gobel has created a series of felt paintings inspired by the life and notoriety of 20c British-born actor Charles Laughton. This project has lead Gobel to research his archive of papers in the UCLA Special Collection, interview his biographer, and in 2018 a pilgrimage to the actor's birth site, the Old Vic Hotel, in Scarborough, England. This series also reveals a new level of precision and detail in Gobel's marquetry, replacing yarn lines with embroidery thread, allowing for tighter and more agile arrangements within the picture plane. Presented below is a selection of recent work.



"Window Old Vic" Detail 2019
72x48 in.

Hand-cut felt, flashe, acrylic, embroidery thread, PVA on canvas

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"CL+JG 2099" Detail 2019
72x60 in.

Hand-cut felt, flashe, acrylic, embroidery thread, PVA on canvas

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Charles Laughton film still "**The Private Life of Henry VIII**" 1933

I have used images of early 20th century film icon Charles Laughton (Scarborough UK, 1899-1962) as inspiration since I began painting. Laughton's character portrayals are still seen today as some of early films most dramatic and notable performances. Lead roles in films like "*The Private Life of Henry VIII*", "*Les Miserables*" and "*The Hunchback of Notre Dame*" would also make him memorable for his physical transformations. These characterizations serving for me as a way to see a different gay body, one of considerable physical stature, occupying, in celluloid for the first time, great characters of history, both in imagination and fantasy. A closeted gay man, Laughton would create an entirely hidden identity, little known to the many that surrounded him, including his wife of 33 years, Elsa Lanchester. After his death in 1962, a clearer understanding of his life and work is now better understood. Three biographies are written on his life and work. They reveal an artist of considerable intellectual depth and social complication. He shared his presence with many of the times most forward thinking writers, artists, and filmmakers; Christopher Isherwood, Bertolt Brecht and Peter Ustinov among them. In addition to his films and publications that he both produced and was a subject of, I examined and documented his personal archive papers in the UCLA Special Collections. I continued on a pilgrimage visiting his birthplace and childhood home until 19 years of age, The Old Vic Hotel in Scarborough England. I continued by interviewing his biographer, British actor Simon Callow, to complete my research.

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"Beyond the Wall" Detail 2019
108x180 in.

Hand-cut felt, flashe, acrylic, embroidery thread, PVA on canvas

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I have chosen not to represent his likeness or directly reference his performances, but rather attempt to create opportunities to collaborate or reveal biographical agencies most meaningful to the actor. It is important to note here that my subject's seminal biography was titled "*Charles Laughton: A Difficult Actor*." Known for temper tantrums and creative differences with many of his peers, Charles' story is made of many layers.

The collection of paintings that are part of the series exist under the title "*The Charles Laughton Papers*"

Smallest in the series is, "*Christmas, Fourth of July, Lincoln, Easter, Thanksgiving, Valentines Day*"(Posthumous Collaboration) 2019, it displays in carefully laid thread tracing a doodle by Charles listing important holidays. A notable day of observance is "Lincoln", a favorite of Charles', as for many years he publicly toured the US, reading historic speeches and writings to enthusiastic fanfair. The painting of felt that surrounds his unmistakable handwriting is my contribution, not only to his words but as a reflection upon the culmination of attempting to understand his life. Likewise, each painting individually proposes a new impression of the life of Charles Laughton.

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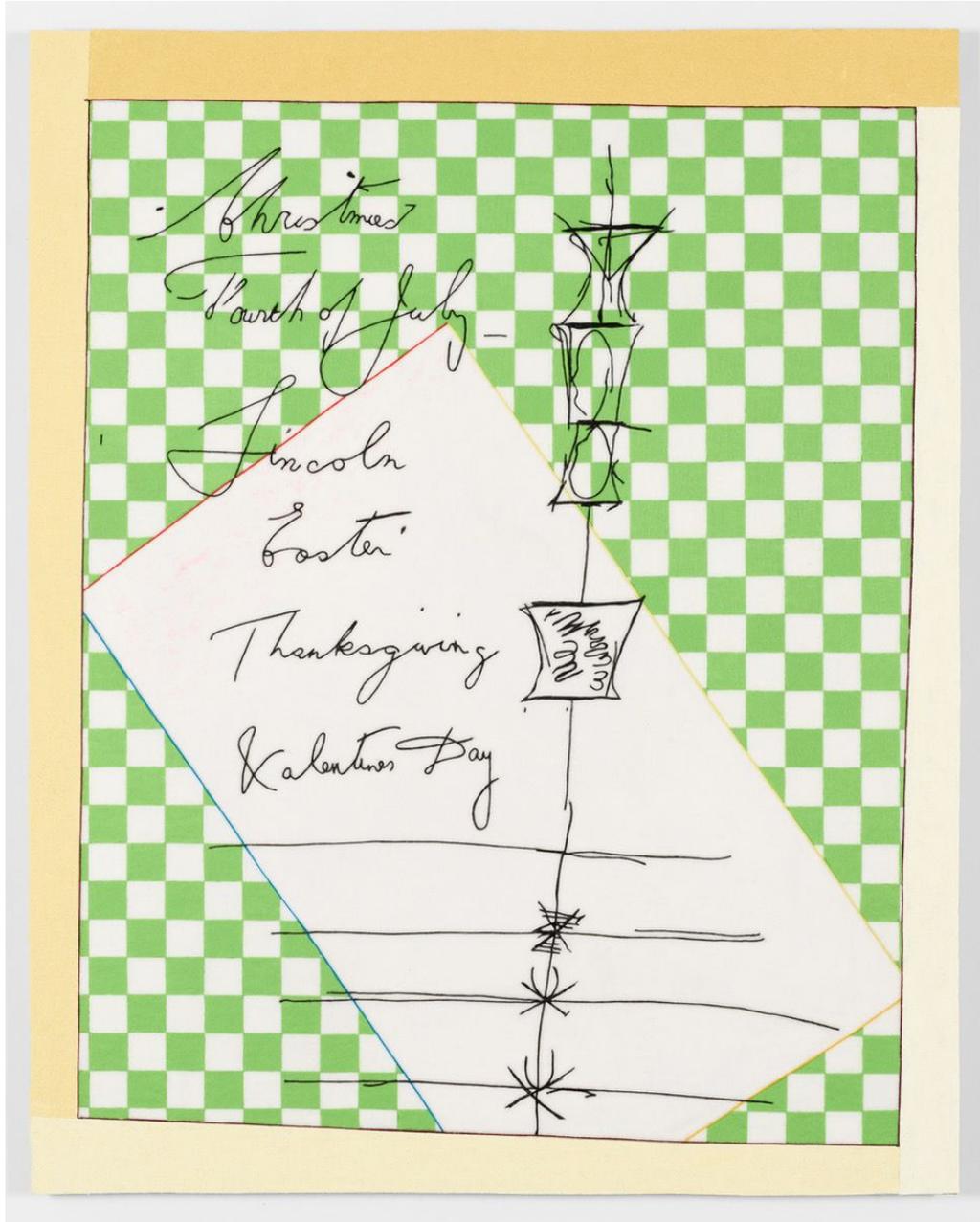
Selections from the developing series "*The Charles Laughton Papers*"



"CL+JG 2099" 2019
72x60 in.

Hand-cut felt, flashe, acrylic, embroidery thread, PVA on canvas

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"Christmas, Fourth of July, Lincoln, Easter, Thanksgiving, Valentines Day" (Posthumous Collaboration) 2019
48x38 in.

Hand-cut felt, flashe, acrylic, embroidery thread, PVA on linen

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"Anonymous Limerick" 2019

64x52 in.

Hand-cut felt, silver leafing, ink, acrylic, embroidery thread, PVA on canvas

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"Beyond theWall" 2019

108x180 in.

Hand-cut felt, flashe, acrylic, embroidery thread, PVA on canvas

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"Window Old Vic" 2019
72x48 in.

Hand-cut felt, flashe, acrylic, embroidery thread, PVA on canvas

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Biography: Born in Portland, Oregon, 1972, James Gobel received his BFA at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (1996) and his MFA at the University of California, Santa Barbara (1999). He has had solo exhibitions at the UCLA Hammer Museum (2000); Kravets/Wehby Gallery, New York (1999, 2001, 2002, 2005); Marx & Zavattero, San Francisco (2008 & 2010) and Steve Turner Contemporary, Los Angeles (2008 & 2012). Gobel's work was included in the traveling museum exhibition curated by Dave Hickey, entitled *Las Vegas Diaspora: The Emergence of Contemporary Art from the Neon Homeland*, Las Vegas Art Museum (2007), *Surface Value*, Des Moines Art Center (2011), Kemper Museum (2012), Leslie Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art (2014), *Second Floor Projects* in San Francisco (2016) and most recently at the McNay Museum, his work was acquired and featured in *Transamerica/n: Gender, Identity, Appearance Today* (2018). His work has been written about in *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *Artforum*, *Art in America*, and *Beautiful Decay*, as well as numerous catalogs.