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ART IN REVIEW

Ryan McGinness **'Vocabularytest'**

*Joseph Silvestro Gallery
122 North 11th Street
Williamsburg
Through June 17*

Ryan McGinness works in the well-populated gap between art and design. But unlike many of his fellow travelers, he is less involved with useful objects than with legible signs. His specialty is graphic design, which he combines with a good sense of abstract form and a wry, Conceptual-Art-flavored way with words. If you don't know his name, you may already know his work. For example, he was responsible for the "Flatnessisgod" bookmarks that the old Art Market in SoHo gave away.

Mr. McGinness's solo debut is in a new gallery that may be the first Chelsea-scaled space in Williamsburg. It shows an artist moving in several directions at once. Judging from the catalog, what's on view seems to account for only a fraction of his activities. His videotapes are cute but unmemorable, while a field of toy soldiers titled "Saving Ryan's Privates" is just silly.

But redemption comes in the form of an extensive vocabulary of signs that evoke the work of Matt Mullican as well as Ashley Bickerton in his Neo-Geo phase. These motifs appear one at a time on four-

foot-square paintings made of porcelain baked enamel on steel. Further variations on these signs are grouped somewhat according to subject in lacy patterns on the bottoms of skateboards; they also appear in a large wall painting that rambles amiably through references to art, pop culture and the future of the planet.

The works have no depth, but they are beautifully made and suggest many possible meanings. Never far from reach, these meanings give one a new awareness of the mind's fluency — and the artist's options — in the ever denser forest of signs that make up the present.

ROBERTA SMITH