

# ARTFORUM

PHILADELPHIA

**Steve Powers**

PENNSYLVANIA ACADEMY OF THE FINE ARTS

118 North Broad Street

October 20–January 27, 2007



*Roaming*, 2007, enamel on aluminum, 48 x 48".

In thirteen years as a downtown New York artist, Steve Powers has defined a graffiti writer's postgraffiti trajectory. The period of intense urban surveillance and listening to voices on many streets has left him with a dappled, authoritative voice of his own, lyric in gesture as much as in content. This exhibition consists of a sculpted environment of tin signs and several discrete enamel paintings on aluminum; *8 Day Week*, 2007, is its clear centerpiece. Describing a typical cycle from MUNDANE to MUNDANE, each of its panels comprise small epigram-pictogram compositions. Day by day, an inevitable emotional arc of collapse and redemption unfolds, described with gusto and from many angles, as the narrative, and life, go on. There's still jive and plenty of punk in these vignettes—I GOT PEOPLE TO DO read the words next to a screwdriver on *Duesday*—but they are cut with mature, lasting pathos. COPING SKILLS DON'T FAIL ME NOW reads *Sadderday's* fierce hangover.

This work is happy to explain the thrumming rhythms underlying life, and Powers's avuncular candor gives him charm and vitality as a painter. The literally slick materials—one-shot sign-painters' enamel on aluminum—grant the images an immediacy such that certain elements even seem unfinished, but these are the foibles of painterly sincerity. Powers's pedigree is far removed from the postmodern class of painters working today who, whether coolly untalkative or hammily expressive, ensure the enduring popularity of Martin Kippenberger and predicted the recent resurgence of the hardy Georg Baselitz. Here is painting with heart, surprisingly refreshing, remarkably effective.

—*William Pym*