

# NEW YORK

## **What Makes Protest Art Good?**

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Photo: Courtesy of the artist, Corbett vs. Dempsey, Chicago and Kate Werble Gallery, New York

Scott Rothkopf, Whitney curator  
Cauleen Smith, *In the Wake*, 2017.

Right now I can't stop thinking about Cauleen Smith's deceptively seductive protest banners, which I walk under every day on my way to the office. Most banners and placards are designed to be instantly legible, so you can see them fast and faraway. But these draw you in slowly with their strange poetry and phrases like, "No wonder I go under." Some feel like aggressive calls to arms, others laments. Their loving handwork transforms an ordinarily disposable banner into a precious relic or heirloom, something to cherish – and heed – for a long time to come.