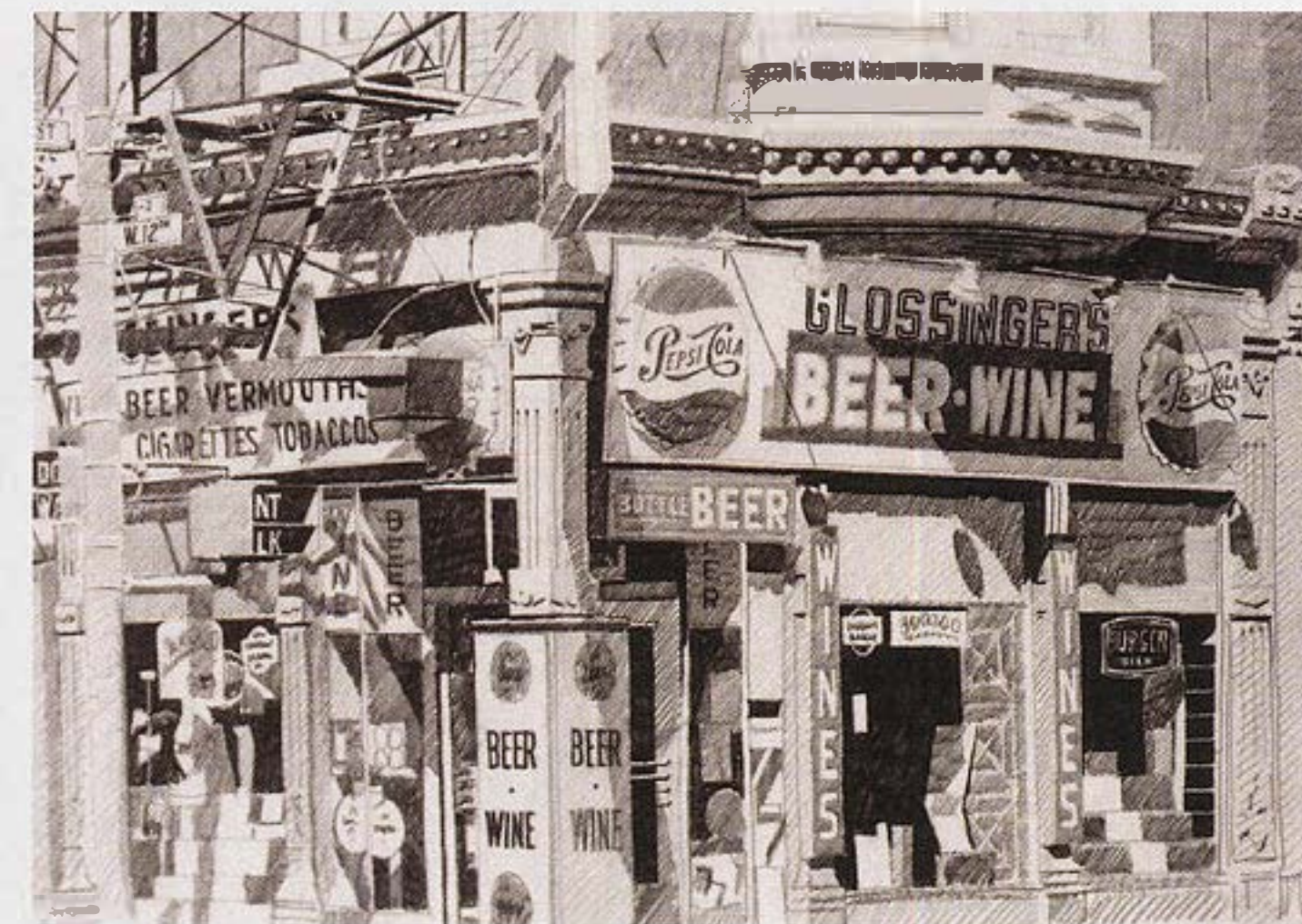
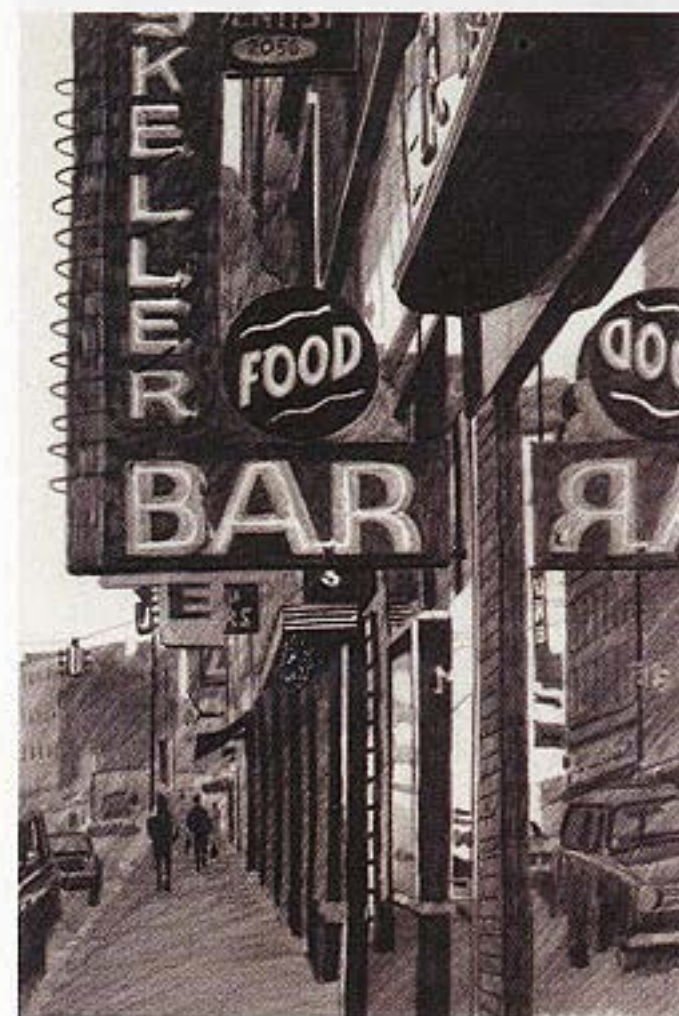




Robert Cottingham is known for using letterforms in his paintings. In fact, the phrases, words, or parts of words in his paintings of outdoor signs have constituted the bulk of his subject matter over the years. Cottingham may be concerned more with the American spirit that he says he senses in old signs than the typefaces on the signs themselves but, either way, the depiction of the letterforms is crucial to his work. He works from photographs and adjusts what he has composed through his camera's viewfinder, becoming intimately knowledgeable about the typefaces used by sign makers, especially those who worked in the 1940s and 1950s. "I think of these signs as the jewelry of our downtown neighborhoods," says Cottingham. "The signs I choose to paint have to have some history and a particular

attitude—it's hard to define exactly what it is, but there has to be something compelling about the subject for me. As I work on my painting, which is my own form of communication, I am also commenting on the sign maker's work. I'm building on it.

"The lettering style of signs, and lettering in general, has always interested me," Cottingham continues. "There is a broad range of personality in typefaces—I find it to be a very rich subject matter. It has held my interest for 25 years." His enthusiasm for letterforms actually began much earlier. The artist says his father regularly took him to Times Square in New York City when he was a boy, and the neighborhood's famous signage is imprinted in his memory. "It was always impressive—the scale alone was overwhelming," says



Cottingham. "You came up from the subway, and—boom!" He didn't feel the same connection to signs he saw in Mexico, or even in England, where the language was the same. "I found the letter spacing in English signs to be a little loose, and the product names unfamiliar," says the artist. "This is my turf. I relate to signs in America in a way that I don't to signs in other countries." Cottingham's informed stance suggests that something in the lettering of the signs he depicts is distinctly American.

The letterforms in painter Alan Peckolick's work are wholly created by him, which perhaps makes them distinctly American too. Peckolick's celebrated graphic-design work—which includes familiar logo designs for Revlon and *Family Circle* magazine—was driven by typography.

OPPOSITE PAGE

Ral's

by Robert Cottingham, 1983, graphite on vellum, 23½ x 34.

TOP

Golden Gopher

by Robert Cottingham, 1983, charcoal on vellum, 19½ x 43.

ABOVE LEFT

Rathskeller Bar

by Robert Cottingham, ca. 1975, graphite, 18½ x 12½.

ABOVE RIGHT

Glossinger's

by Robert Cottingham, 1983, graphite, 13½ x 33½.