



SAMUEL JABLON STUDIO VISIT

January 2016

Samuel Jablon mixes poetry and painting fluidly. His work challenges the viewer to step closer and dig deeper. Spending time observing the intricacies of his paintings, one realizes that they are far more than just words. Samuel sat down with us to talk about upcoming projects, his performance pieces and the themes that drive him forward.



1. Can you tell us a bit about your background, how did you get to where you are today?

I grew up in Upstate New York. My mom is an artist, so I more or less grew up in a studio. I went to Naropa University, where I studied poetry but I was continually drawn to art, specifically painting. At the time I was taking classes with people like Anne Waldman, Amiri Baraka and Bob Holman, and it was a really rich experimental time. I remember Richard Tuttle came and gave a lecture that was just a fluid mix of words and art. I can't remember if the lecture was on anything, but it was like being on a train and watching scenes pass by. It was around that time that I decided I wanted to be an artist. After I graduated from Naropa I moved to Brooklyn, and started looking for graduate programs in visual art that had a connection to poetry. I ended up selecting Brooklyn College, which was a great place for me to figure things out. A lot of things happened right when I graduated: I was invited to perform at the MoMA, and offered my first show at Freight + Volume, which was then in Chelsea.



2. What inspired you to first integrate poetry into visual art?

I was always writing poetry and making paintings, and was unsatisfied having two practices. I felt there was always something missing, so I integrated poetry into the paintings, and I started doing performances. All the work has roots in poetry, but it's also very much about painting.

3. Do you find any phrases to be recurring in your work—any favorites?

Two recent recurring phrases are "Everything Living Dies" and "What A Beautiful Time".

4. At the moment is there an underlying theme or mentality behind the phrases you chose or your poetry as a whole?

At the moment I'm investigating ideas of nothingness, lessness, somethingness and moreness in both the text and the painting.



5. The phrases often lack spacing, and words are split across two or more planes, so there is no explicit distinction between words. Is there specific reasoning behind this continuation/blending of letters?

I wanted people to slow down and actually look at the work. The language in the paintings becomes the form and structure for the painting, and is very challenging to read. Everything is theoretically legible, but I arrange compositions so words and phrases take time to decipher. I don't want the work to give itself up too easily.



6. Can you explain the significance behind the use of various materials on your wood panels—the semiprecious stones, mirror, fused glass, metals— and their placement?

My mother owns a glass tile design firm based in Binghamton, New York, which is how I have had access to a lot of materials that I have experimented and worked with. Their placement is a bit more intuitive and in the moment. Most of the time I place the materials where I think they look right, and then I stare at the work for a few days to see if the placement sits well with me.



7. Artists or authors that continuously inspire you?

Authors: Yuko Otomo, Ben Lerner, William Burroughs and Samuel Beckett
Artists: Alfred Jensen, Eva Hesse, William Pope.L and Jessica Jackson Hutchins

8. Tell us about your involvement in poetry happenings like Soap Box Poets, and MoMA's "Transform the World! Poetry Must be Made By All!" How do you see the project evolving/ending?

I performed at and organized the Soap Box Poets during the Howl Festival, and I performed at the MoMA event. Both performances were about confronting people with poetry in untraditional places. There were no stages, introductions, or line-ups. The events were about reading to people as they passed by. Some people would stop and engage, while others seemed annoyed or disengaged. The way I work and create projects has evolved a lot over the last few years. For instance, *O me! O life!* is a project I did with Storefront for Art and Architecture, the concept behind it was poetry as architecture. I invited a sound artist to record in Times Square, a video artist to create an hour long video from found clips of New York City, and five poets to create poetry from advertising. Everything was presented and performed at once as an episode of Storefront TV and streamed live online.



9. Can you tell us about your performance based work and your "sculptural painting poems"?

The paintings and performances are very much related. The Poet Sculpture is an installation and moveable platform comprised of soapboxes of various sizes. Each individual box is designed and painted for an influential poet, and the formation and words of poets are then configured during each performance to define the sculpture. It is continually in flux as poets physically interact in real time with the structure to create and manipulate a three-dimensional visual poem while performing their own language based works. When used as a platform during poetry readings, poets interact with soapboxes named for Julia de Burgos, Jayne Cortez, ee cummings, Allen Ginsberg, Barbara Guest, Langston Hughes, Tuli Kupferberg, Taylor Mead, Frank O'Hara, and Pedro Pietri.

The performances and the paintings create a tension that feed my practice. There are times I want to work with other artists and collaborate to push and challenge ideas—in the course of the Poet Sculpture, we've done a number of installations in different environments, from the Queens Museum of Art to 14th Street, Union Square. Other times I want to be on my own in the studio painting.

The paintings are about a studio practice a commitment to materials, paint and text. The work investigates a tension between materiality and language.



10. You have a show coming up at both Freight + Volume and Arts + Leisure in April. What can we expect?

You're seeing some of work here. The two spaces will be very connected, but very different. One space will be filled with bold large paintings, while the other will be mostly small intimate works. I think the contrast will highlight the effect of varying sizes in my work, which impacts the arrangement and legibility of the letters.

