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Samuel Jablon
Unstung

Reviewed by Emily Burns



SAM JABLON, *Comfort Can Fuck Itself*, 2018, oil and acrylic on canvas, 48 x 48 inches

In his third solo show with the gallery, Sam Jablon presents *Unstung*, a solo exhibition of sixteen paintings at Freight + Volume in Manhattan's Lower East Side.

This group of paintings represents a departure for Jablon, as the artist focuses his efforts via paint as the sole medium, abandoning the materials of glass, mirror, and tile that had previously ornamented the surfaces. The combination of acrylic, oil, and oil-stick give the faces of the works an entirely new visceral embodiment—leaving the viewer with the visual echo of a darker, more harrowing sentiment. The artist's hand is more apparent than ever in the construction of the letterforms, as the intuitive immediacy, and crumbly tactility of the oil-stick strokes resonate more closely with the tools of writing than painting. The painterly negative space in each of the works provide a fitting backdrop for the richness and rawness of the textual foreground.

Composed of fragments of a single poem, tangled letters climb over each other like in *Comfort Can Fuck Itself* or criss-cross like crawling bodies in *Washed by Sun*. In *Abandon Cruelties*, the words variously shriek and murmur as they bounce against the boundaries of the supports, in a desperate attempt to be heard amidst their painted peers, and a suffocating haze of truths and untruths in the world at large.

The colors in many of these new paintings feel starkly different from his previous work—the muddiness of the oils repelling the vivid vibrations of the saturated reds and yellows. In works like *Death is Elsewhere* and *Choices Blur with Rattlesnakes*, they are not pleasant colors, but hues that, when used together, evoke something deeper, murkier. In the latter painting, the effect of the removal of the paint from the surface gives the work an altogether unsettling vibration, like an animation stuck in a glitch, it moves before our eyes within the borders of complete stillness.

In light of the legibility-be-damned proclamations of the first glance, the phrases are ominously clear-cut, and we only need a string of a coherent fragments to grasp the forcefulness and imperative nature of the message. All of the works seem to plead with us, with varying degrees of desperation, to heed their words. In works like *Burnt By Sun* and *Eat Disaster*, the phrases are particularly overt, spoken like edicts from another realm, reminding us of the inevitability of a red-hot, fiery fate. Continuing with this theme, *Honey on my Tongue* grapples with the paradox of contemporary rhetoric, as slate black text is lapped by cadmium fire, while the same tortuous swelter unfolds across the prose in *Unslept Unslept Elsewhere*.

These works as a whole feel staggeringly poignant, as a political climate envelops us in a stranglehold of anxious uncertainty. Jablon has managed to capture the zeitgeist, the scratched and incised memos echoing our own stifled voices, and the troubled, tangled vision of the future.