

## Interview: Samuel Jablon

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Samuel Jablon in conversation with Peter Freeby



Samuel Jablon recently exhibited at Storefront for Art and Architecture with *O me! O life!*, and *WORD:PLAY* with Freight + Volume gallery. He has studied poetry at Naropa University, and holds an MFA in visual art from Brooklyn College. Jablon primarily creates typographic paintings using paint, mirror, glass tile and fused glass. His work involves listening to and observing his environment. He uses overheard phrases, advertisements and appropriation to compose text for both paintings and performances.

Jablon has identified the blur of the human experience. People don't live with neatly cut scenes where they play out events in their life severed from their interaction with every other moment. His work seeks to capture the wider noise of the human experience and create an artistic practice which describes the communication and exchanges between people. For Jablon, unintelligible

conversations of crowds walking by on busy streets are more accurate to real life than introspective considerations. Jablon has an upcoming solo show this spring at both Freight + Volume in the LES, and Arts + Leisure in Harlem.



**Peter Freeby:** What made you choose to keep doing text paintings over other styles of work?

**Samuel Jablon:** For me it was never a word or an image. It was always: if you make the mark, the letters are images. I like pushing it to the point where the letters really become images... My work ranges from a written poem to large text based paintings that are both extremely visual and also really difficult to read. It's legible if you spend your time with it... In grad school I focused on how to create one practice. How do you create something that is both poetry and visual art? How do you make that a single entity?... People were getting mad at me for just making text paintings, and finally I said, "fuck this. I'm going to make a reflective, gold mirror text painting." It was like an early version of the text paintings I'm making now. I liked how people responded. They instantly hated it, or instantly loved it. There was no in between.

**PF:** Why do you work with glass?

**SJ:** I would say my work comes more from my life. It's not necessarily that I want to work solely with glass. I work in glass because that's what's around me.

**PF:** How did you start working with glass?

**SJ:** It is actually a personal...historical... thing... My mom owns a glass tile business, and I've worked with this material my entire life... I've used it forever, so I can use it and manipulate it and work with it... I design a lot of the glass. I literally make it or fuse it, or I help fabricate it.



**PF:** How physically demanding is it to work with glass like that?

**SJ:** I'm pretty engaged with it. Sometimes I'm just smashing mirrors. Other times I'm fusing glass. I'll make clear or iridescent glass. I'll make a red painting and I'll need red glass, so I'll fuse it. I'll go upstate where I have access to kilns and material. Sometimes I'll use material that's more commercially available that you can buy, but it's kind of a mix. Even if it's commercial, I'll rip it apart.

The big paintings take months. I'm getting ready for a spring show, and it's taken me the last year to make five of these works. I work all the time. They're just big, and there's a lot of moving parts, and there's a lot of materials. I need to fire the glass, get the right materials, get it to be the

right color, get it to be the right size, fire enough of it and then there's the text and how it fits together. It just takes a while... my process is very guided by process.

**PF:** What does your thought process look like for conceiving of work like that?

**SJ:** When I'm making work, I'm not so much thinking about who's going to view it. I just want to make it... it's kind of like being in the studio and basically having a gut reaction... I don't really know what it's going to look like in the end. I never really go into it with a plan. I might start off with the text, and what I want it to say. And then I just kind of work with it until it starts kicking back, and then that kind of becomes the work... I like to start off autobiographical, and then take things into a direction which is beyond me, and let them become their own things.

Sometimes I think, "Oh my god, this is a horribly ugly painting I'm making." and that's okay. Someone is just going to hate it. I don't want to make it beautiful, I'd rather it be a little unnerving. I guess I play with that line... I find that tension interesting: that tension between whether something is beautiful or ugly... If I make a painting and it makes me feel nervous, or right off the bat I don't like it, that's usually how I know it's perfect. If it challenges me to the point where I don't want anything to do with it, that usually means it's good. When I really love something, I like it for like 4 days. There are certain works that have challenged me, and those are the things I end up showing



Storefront for Art and Architecture, Storefront TV, Series 2 episode 4, *O me! O life!*, 2015

**PF:** What have you been doing recently? What was that like?

**SJ:** I just did a performance at Storefront for Art and Architecture... I'm interested in exploring things I'm experiencing right now on the street: who I'm with, who I'm talking to, or where I am in the world... for *O me! O life!* I was looking at how words create a space, and create an

environment... I was thinking about the city as an environment, and how you walk by people speaking near you all the time... what happens when you start making stuff with this experience? Poetry as architecture, what does that look like?... I commissioned poets to make poetry out of advertising, and then I presented that as a poem.

**PF:** Who are you watching?

**SJ:** Urs Fischer, Jessica Jackson Hutchins, Diana Al Hadid