



Beckett, 2014, acrylic, glass tile, mirror, fused glass, 14k gold tile on wood, 62 x 52 inches

STUDIO VISIT



Portrait by Violet Shuraka

Samuel in his Brooklyn studio

Samuel Jablon

Q AND A WITH HEATHER MORGAN

You live and work in Brooklyn, NY. How long have you been in the city and what brought you to New York?

I've been living and working in Brooklyn for about 5 years. I came here from Colorado partially because this poet Bob Holman convinced me I needed to be here. I don't think it took much convincing though. I wanted to be in a community of creative people, and Brooklyn really seemed like the place to move.

Do you feel a connection to artists such as Jenny Holzer and Lawrence Weiner or any other artists creating language-based works?

I like both Holzer and Weiner a lot. They both

declare things in their work, and I think their work needs to be clear and concise. I am not that interested in making declarations. The poetry tends to get lost, I like things to stay a bit more elusive.

You are both painter and poet, in the traditional sense of sheafs of paper with hand- and typewritten verse. Which medium came first for you? How did you end up incorporating words into your abstract paintings?

Words have always been important to me, they are something I've always believed in, because they are definitive yet remain elusive. Painting came first. I grew up in mom's painting studio, and was always surrounded by paintings. I really didn't find



Get Dirty, 2014 acrylic, glass tile, and fused glass on wood, 40 x 30 inches



All In, 2014, acrylic and glass tile on wood, 24 x 30 inches

poetry until I went to Naropa University for college. I incorporated everything into one practice because I felt divided, like I had a poet life and a painter life, when what I wanted was an artist life. It really came together in grad school at Brooklyn College. I wanted to push myself to really create a flexible practice that was rooted in poetry. Everything for me starts in poetry and evolves from there.

Your work is loaded with contradiction, in visual terms (the gritty versus pretty) and in terms of your statement (“I can’t go on/I must go on.”) The effect is a sort of cheery anxiety. What is your feeling about the power of these juxtapositions? Do they reflect your worldview or speak to a general condition?

I like the tension that these juxtapositions create. I think there is a world view of opposites represented in my work. I don’t think it is always a conscience move, but it’s something I do often. There is a power to the tension between black and white. Everything can exist between. I’m most interested in possibilities and creating work that offers this.

The legibility of the text in your paintings varies, sometimes the writing is backwards or upside down. Is a certain inscrutability part of your message?

I don’t want people to get the work too quickly, a large part of the work is sitting with it, and seeing what’s there. The more difficult they are to read the

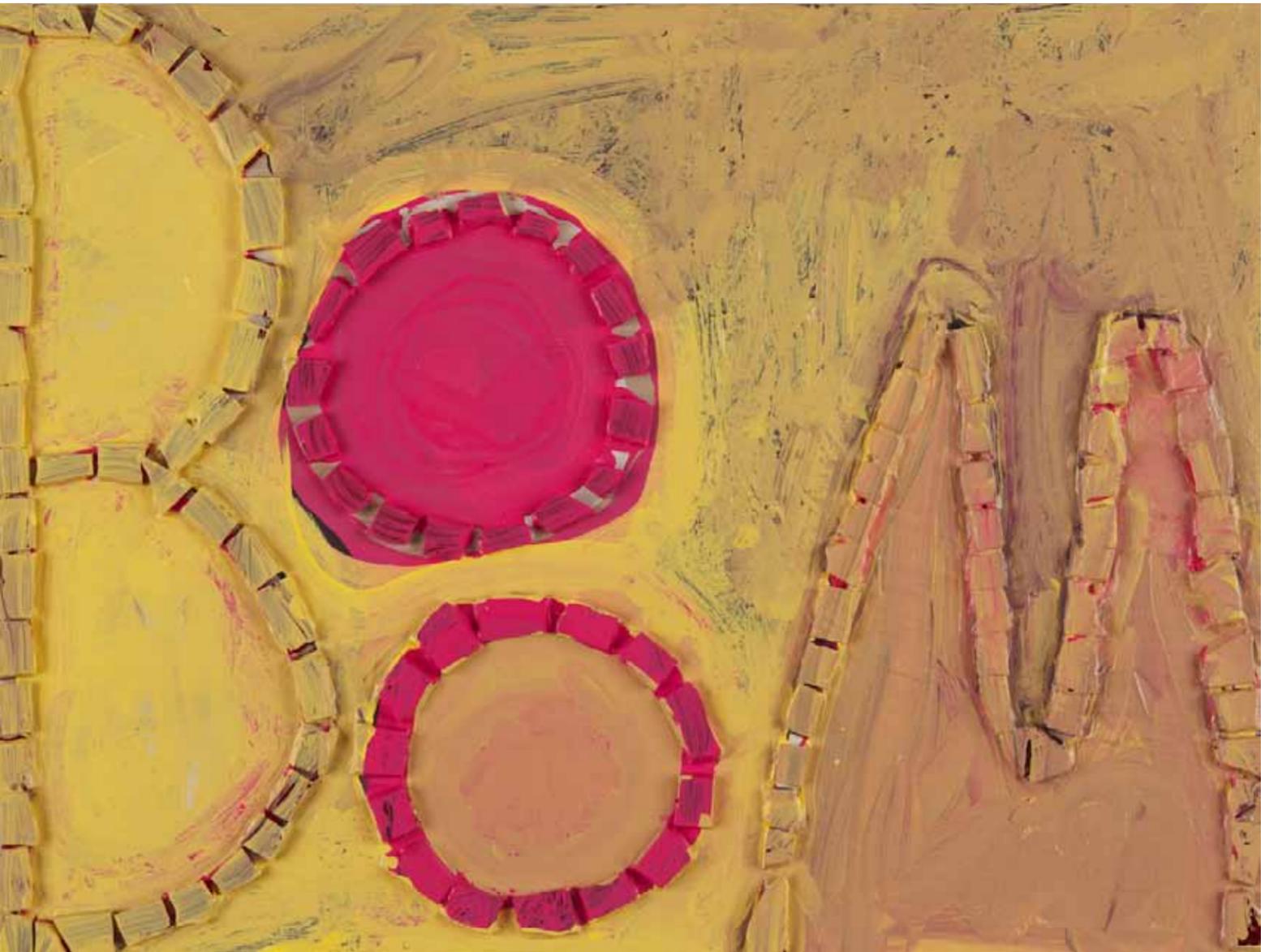
longer people stay with the work. If I can hold someone’s attention through a painting for a minute or two I tend to think it’s successful.

There is a very street feeling to your work. You spell out words with glittering tiles like a subway mosaic; the scrawling shape of the letters and your saturated palette also refers to graffiti. Is this the distillation of your life as a New York City painter or do other influences come into play?

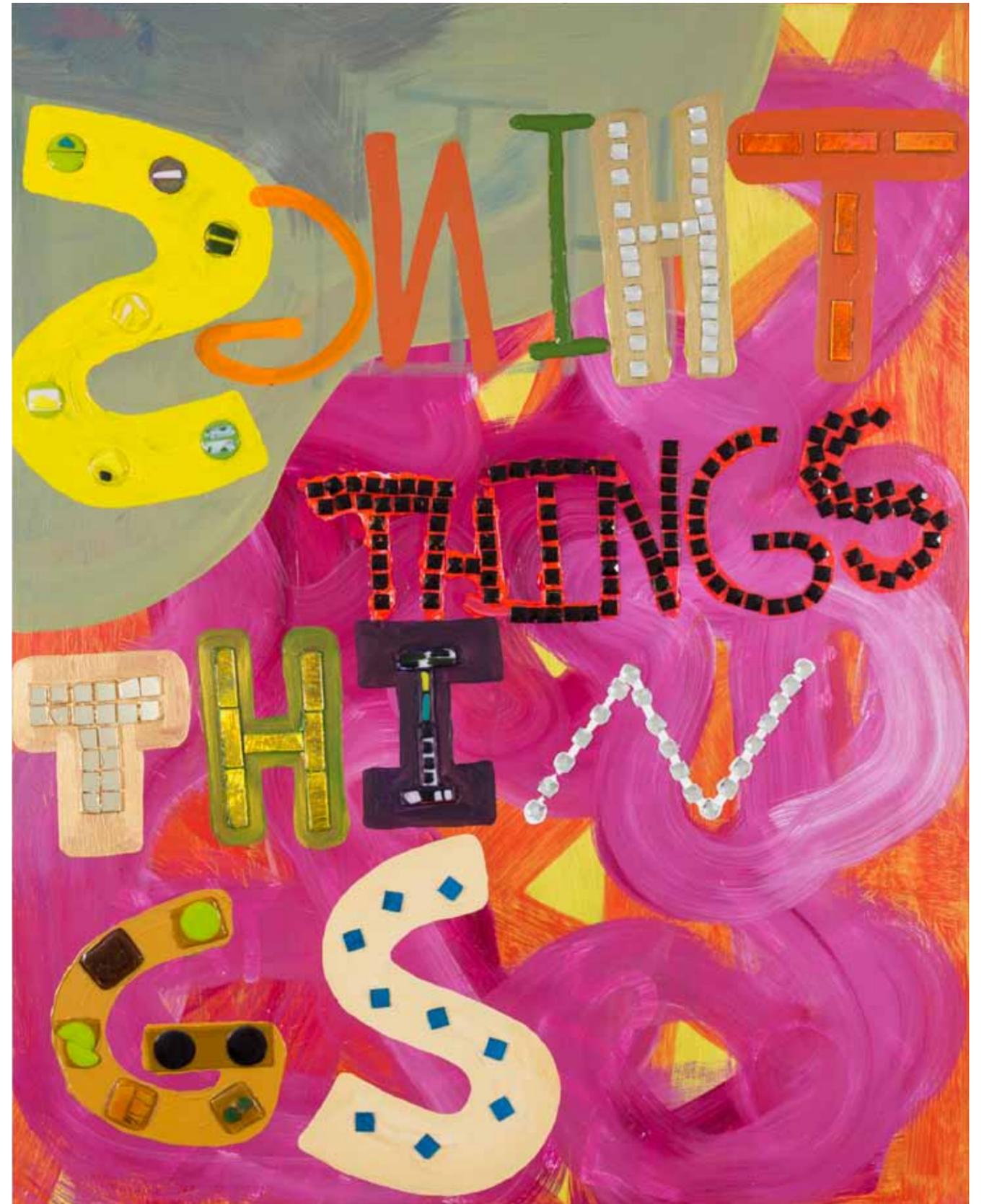
I walk a lot in the city, sometimes I’ll just spend a day walking. I wouldn’t say my work is a distillation of my life in NYC but living and working here has influenced my work. I do love the subway mosaics. I also probably spend too much of my time hanging out with poets, but I find them really refreshing, because poets don’t become poets to have a career, they are just poets. It reminds me that there is a lineage and a world that isn’t about one’s career. Sometimes the artist side of the art world can feel overwhelming careerist, poets kind of balance me out, and remind me why I wanted to be an artist in the 1st place.

Tell us about *The Poet Sculpture*. Does performance add a dimension to the painting as well as to the written word?

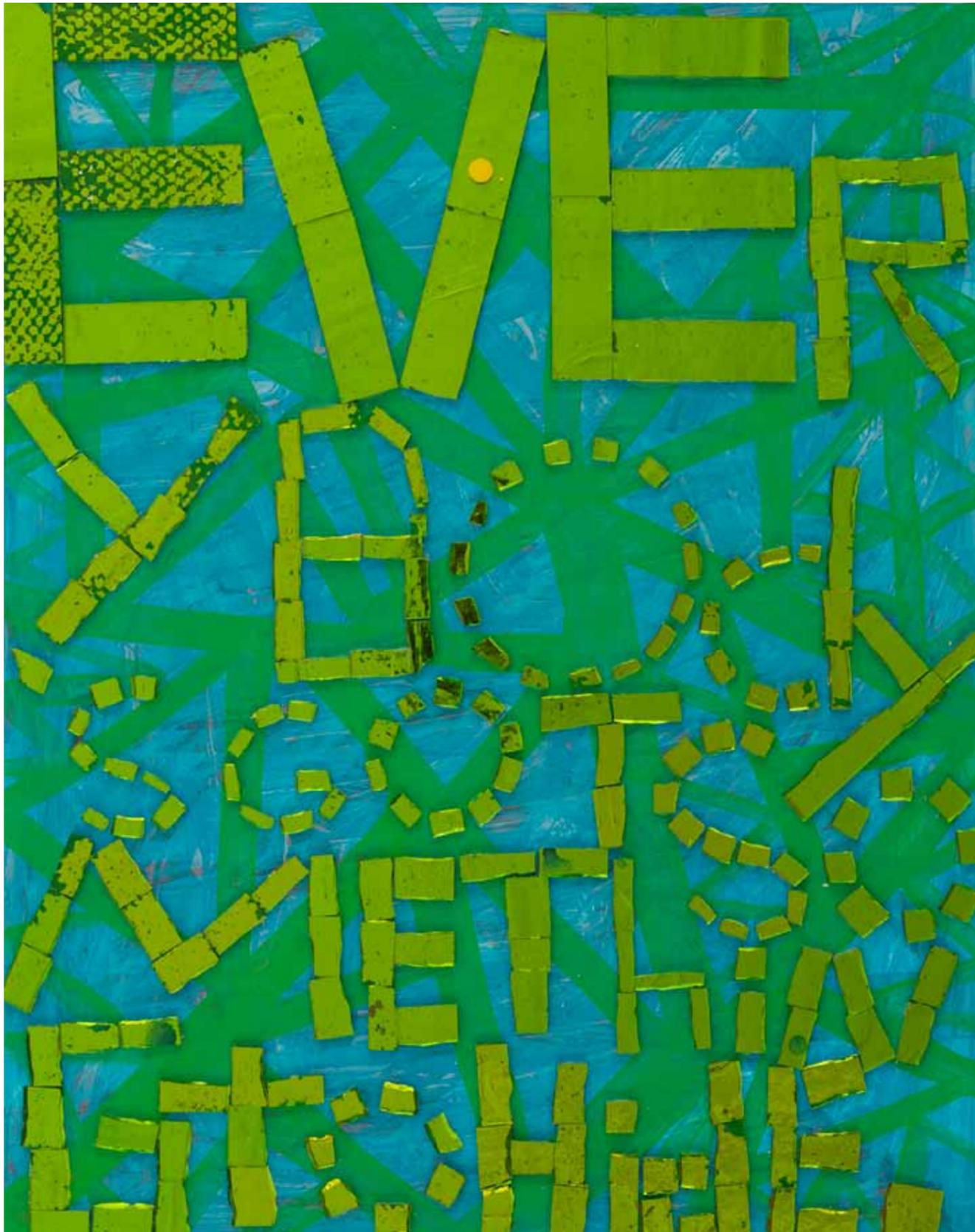
The Poet Sculpture is a performance and a sculpture. It is activated by the poets who interact with it. I invite poets to perform on the sculpture and ask them to move the individual boxes around, and to stand on them.



Boom, 2013 , acrylic and glass tile on wood, 12 x 9"



THINGS, 2014, acrylic, glass tile, dichroic glass, fused glass on wood 60 x 48 inches



What Chu Hiding, 2014, acrylic and glass tile on wood, 20 x 16



Nowhere Bus, 2014, acrylic and glass tile on wood, 48 x 60 inches

Each “soapbox” was designed for an influential writer who has passed away. So there is a thread of lineage that connects the past to the present. In a way the sculpture creates a large visual poem that is very related to the paintings, but at the same time it is the “soapbox” for the poet.

The sumptuousness of paint inlaid with glittering tile—these objects are disco beautiful—which is used very playfully to extol exuberance (“Light up the night”) or to mask our dread (“everybody’s got something to hide”). What do you think about the effect of beauty on the viewer in interpreting these different ideas?

Good question! I think beauty is intoxicating and usually lies, but at the same time we all want to believe the lie. You can’t always trust what’s on the surface. I like playing with that tension. What’s beauty and what’s a lie, what’s too good to be true. I think the viewer instantly loves beauty, but then starts to question why, and that’s where the poetry comes in.

Your piece *Boom* naturally calls Basquiat to mind. Your work often seems to allude to the bright and frenetic, to action. Tell us about some of the other sources for your text.

Basquiat and I both like words. The text comes from all over the place. Sometimes I simply appropriate a text, for example, in *Simple Country Girl* all the text came from Taylor Mead. He passed away a few years ago and I

made a painting for him, I took two of his poems as the text in the painting, the underpainting actually spells out his name, but it’s impossible to read, and the title of the painting is the title of his last book. So if you knew Taylor there are little clues to figure out the painting was made for him. Other times I write a text from scratch, an example would be *America Dreams*.

What projects are you working on now? Will we be able to see your work in person anywhere in the near future?

I have a solo exhibition in October at Freight and Volume, and a performance project coming up this summer at Storefront for Art and Architecture.