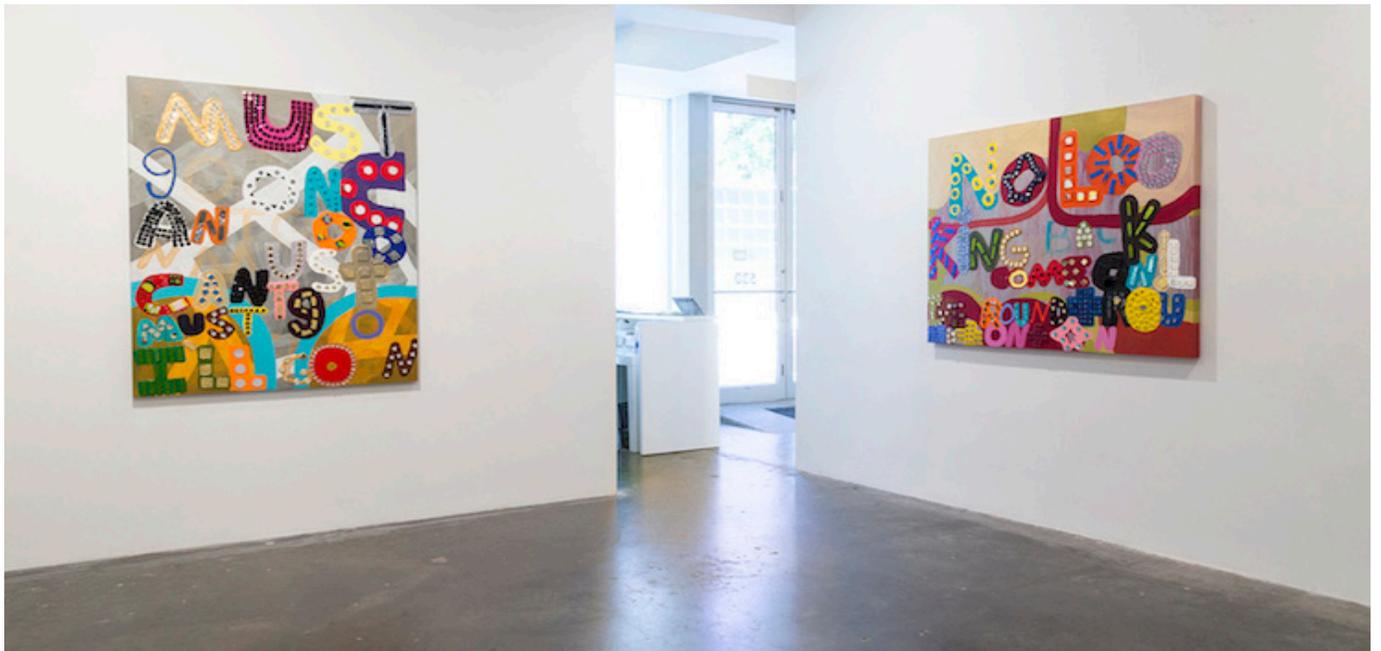


# Staring At The Wall

## Samuel Jablon's Word:Play at Freight+Volume

By Meena Hasan and Cal Siegel  
Published: September 9th, 2014.

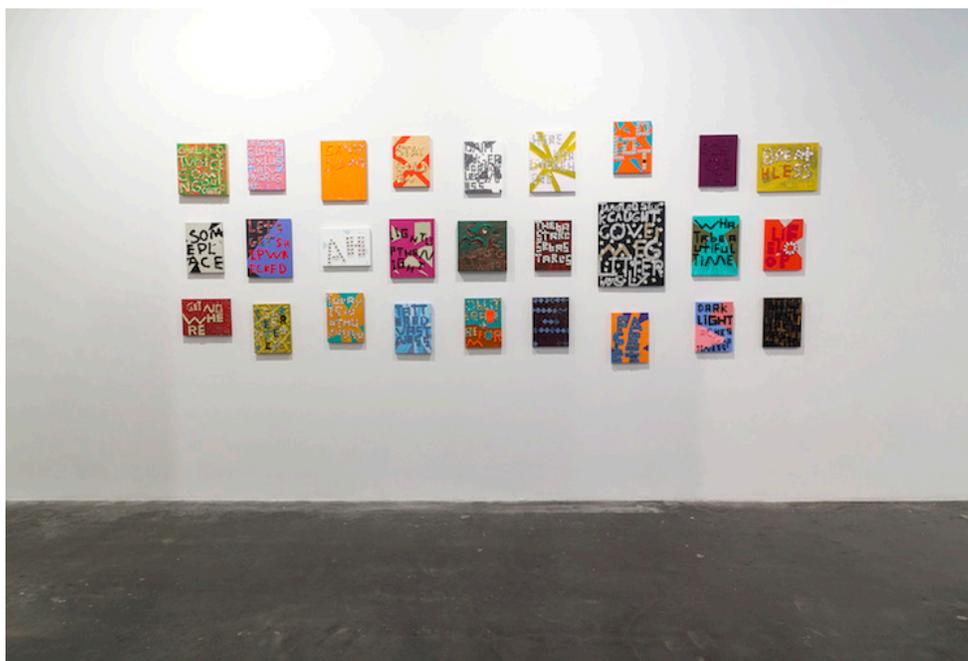


Text based art practice is not an easy endeavor, albeit a noble pursuit within our hyper-visual, daily lives. Artists attempting these methods find out quickly how vast the shadow cast by Holzer, Ruscha, Nauman, Kruger et al can be. With such a strong tradition, creativity of presentation as well as impeccable text selection are paramount. This is where Samuel Jablon excels. The title of his first solo exhibition at Chelsea's Freight + Volume Gallery, *Word:Play* sums up nicely the tone of these paintings as both a visually playful and structurally complicated group.

*Word:Play* is literalized as the eye bounces between the concrete word and the playful painterly quality of the works. The title expands to Word = Play, Word...Play, Word;Play, (Word)Play, Word(Play) etc. The paintings are perceptually complex, interchanging layers of ready-made tiles with colorful acrylic paints. As a result, many of the works have a slow-read, featuring words within words and multiple dimensions of meaning. Most notably, in Jablon's piece, 'Forget' my first read, due I'm sure to my own silly character as well as the differing tiles used was, "NEED WEED". This read induced an immediate chuckle, followed by embarrassment when I realized that more words are featured in the painting. Once I read the painting's entire statement: "ALL WE NEED IS To FORGET", my shame transformed to understanding and appreciation. Weed can have powerful effects on the memory and, perhaps, my initial read was in fact intended. This experience of looking at 'Forget' felt similar to a child-like inside-joke related to the often controversial act of "reading" a painting and, ultimately, I felt welcomed into Jablon's painted world of language.

Jablon's mark making tool of tiles emphatically embraces, but also transcends the tiles' innate decorative qualities as they shimmer and obscure the act of looking. The tiles serve as ambiguous punctuations, and their solidity playfully contrasts with the concrete, signifying nature of the language itself. The use of tiles also allows for a performative quality in the works, tying into Jablon's own poetry and performance practices where language is transformed through action. For example, in the beautiful monochromatic work 'America Dreams', Jablon uses the tiles to stamp out areas, where the absence of paint becomes confused with the presence of solid tile objects. The entire painting has the shallow depth and glisten of a tiled surface. The work also emphasizes a dream-like quality where language and meaning moves in and out of vision, disappearing into a blue void while also rising clearly to the surface.

Samuel Jablon's first solo show, *Word:Play* opened August 21st and is on view until September 20th at Freight + Volume, 530 West 24th Street.



All photographs courtesy of the artist.