



Sam Jablon: Devil Town
March 4 - April 8, 2023
The Pit Los Angeles, CA

The Pit is delighted to present a solo exhibition of paintings by Sam Jablon, his first with the gallery. Mentored by figures such as Anne Waldman, Amiri Baraka, Vito Acconci, and Bob Holman, Jablon's background lives in poetry as much as in painting. Intertwining them with mindful balance, he employs language as structure and paint as its multi-colored mortar. Varying the speed of our apprehension in each painting, he toys with how it is affected by composition, color, and textual obfuscation. The text collapses into the painting, vacillating between legibility and illegibility as the colors, gestures, and marks take precedence — the structural compositions speaking to a history of abstraction rooted in process and mark making. And with each recurring theme, he incites surprising rhythms and subtleties of meaning.

Jablon loosely based his new suite of paintings on tarot cards, deriving from them words such as "Lover," "Devil," and "Joker," which frequently repeat and intersect in various combinations. A few other paintings contribute other wordings such as "Time," "Innocent Culprit," and "Good 'ol Days." The works are in part an exploration of language itself and our collective experiences, fears, and desires reduced to simple words and phrases written, erased and repeated in a gesture of oscillating cynicism and optimism. For Jablon each exhibition or body of work hung together act as a nonlinear poem, composed subconsciously by the viewer as they create their own route through the space. Each painting can be read individually or in combination with others, adding a complexity to the meaning of the words and creation of phrases. But they can also not be read at all - acting instead purely as structure for paintings—with a process-driven focus. In so doing, Jablon dissolves language into images while its basic scaffolding remains. This results from the rigorous layering and erasures that underlie his paintings, making them akin to palimpsests whose outer appearance belie relentless searching. This separates Jablon from his conceptual forebears by virtue of the intimacy and vulnerability in his fallible hand.

His approach reveals itself in numerous ways: in *Innocent Culprit*, 2023, the cadmium red text overlaps and compacts itself to the edge of legibility. The resulting elastic tension in the letterforms is augmented (or released) by the ghostly wisps of red that ebb into the cyan background; dark and sharp shapes encroach around the cyan, mimicking shattered stained glass. In *Time*, 2023, Jablon takes a different tact by reversing the red letterforms as if they were in a mirror (therefore, slowing time); and this is further complicated by "Time" being stacked and repeated three times, like an incantation, appearing as "Emit" when read left to right. The predominantly yellow background, scrawled and calibrated over a light blue, amounts to a visual fizz that completes this nuanced image.

These descriptions point to the duality of Jablon's paintings, which on one hand, invite reading but on the other, demand zen-like visual absorption. Therein lies the mental balance at stake in the viewer, and in Jablon, who, in order to complete his paintings, must hold both processes simultaneously. Since language and color are inherently fugitive phenomena, and are subject to change based on context and subjectivity, Jablon's paintings are more naturalistic than we might expect. They depict language as an agile and adaptive entity.