



In his 1830 novel, *Le Rouge et le Noir*, Stendhal exposes the hypocrisies of French society after the Revolution through the romantic entanglements of protagonist Julien Sorel. One of his loves, the daughter of the Marquis, Mathilde de la Mole, is portrayed as a narcissist; Sorel is warned that, “She looks at herself instead of looking at you, and so doesn’t know you. During the two or three little outbursts of passion she has allowed herself in your favor, she has, by a great effort of imagination, seen in you the hero of her dreams, and not yourself as you really are.” The novel’s primary concern is the illusion of truth and the folly in looking for it; similar terrain as this interview with artist Glen Fogel.

Fogel’s exhibition *My Apocalyptic Moment* holds up a mirror to what he calls “the uncomfortable middle” where, perception and reality meet. The artist’s paintings of old love letters, his videos of relatives’ wedding rings, and other fabricated objects are not about self-obsession, but rather are a satire of the romantic notion that we can see ourselves in someone else’s eyes: the ultimate projection of self. Each piece on view relies on the cool removal of process or material to transform its message from nostalgic pastiche to reflecting pool. In our reading of the work, we’re subject to Fogel’s sleight of hand: we simultaneously sympathize with all characters and sentiments and ultimately find ourselves implicated in a broader narrative about how we make portraits of one another. There is no malice in this manipulation, only great tenderness.

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# GLEN FOGEL

*my apocalyptic moment*

## Glen Fogel

&

## Kristan Kennedy

**KK:** Why do you think you’ve been the subject of so much adoration?

**GF:** Well, I think it’s over now. It was really intense from about third grade through my early 20s. It was as if I was found out before I knew what I was about. It was at once thrilling and really disturbing. I couldn’t figure out what people were seeing.

**KK:** Perhaps there lies a truth, somewhere between the insane, obsessive notes written to you by pre-teen girls and the embittered letters of your later loves?

**GF:** I remember feeling like I was a blank surface that people were projecting themselves onto. Somehow people would look into my eyes and just see what they wanted. I don’t really believe in truth.

**KK:** I don’t think I do either. When did you decide to mine the letters for a series of paintings?

**GF:** Four or so years ago, I received a hand-delivered letter from someone I was seeing, and it opened a floodgate. The letter was the ultimate act of projection and the person was fully aware of it. I realized that I had received so many of those letters over the years and was always carrying them from place to place in a box, but never sure why I was keeping them.

**KK:** Was there some freedom in exposing them, in putting them out where they became material? Did they reflect who you were, a portrait of some kind?

**GF:** It seemed to me that my voice as an artist could in part be the voice of others, like a conduit. I do think of this project as an ongoing self portrait as

told by others, one that will perhaps develop a sense of who am I over time. The act also felt incredibly wrong and that appealed to me.

**KK:** Was the wrongness in the revealing of the personal?

**GF:** Yes, and the apparent narcissism of the act. I think there is a definite cringe factor to the letter paintings. They make people feel uncomfortable.

**KK:** There is a space between the beauty or craft of the work and what it is saying. Is that where the tension lies?

**GF:** That is precisely where I want the tension to be. The paintings play out like a sleight of hand; in the end, I don’t feel very exposed by the project at all, so perhaps, like you say, it’s not really about me or ‘Glen’...

**KK:** There is a specificity in using your name that does not call out uniqueness, but rather its universality.

**GF:** So am I the medium?

**KK:** To quote McLuhan, “The medium is the message/massage.”

**GF:** In the two newest paintings, there are all sorts of odd grammatical errors from the translation of them being painted in China. I used to have them corrected, but have recently decided to leave the errors.

**KK:** I love that quality to them, that something was lost in translation. What was your thinking behind having them fabricated?

**GF:** The idea was to create distance, to put the intensely personal through a

totally removed process. Originally, they were conceived as paired with the With Me...You videos, and the rings featured in that work were treated with a similarly formal process. Both works were about rendering personal artifacts through the lens of advertising and commodification.

**KK:** There is such a perfect imperfection to the rings. In fact, all of the work has a patina, but it remains devoid of nostalgia. The stylistic choices strip the work of any schmaltzy, diaristic qualities. It all feels new, even if it references the past, or an era, or a lifetime commitment.

**GF:** I think it was always present in my work. There has always been a veiled aesthetic.

**KK:** Talk to me about your use of color, light, and sound in With Me...You. I am interested in the video’s pristine trance quality being interrupted by this “noise.”

**GF:** The sound and light disrupting the videos was meant to do exactly that—to create a disturbance. It is also meant for comic effect, as a “You don’t think I’m serious, do you?” or maybe a, “Damn right, I’m serious!”

**KK:** This seriousness/irreverence gets to the heart of things for me. It also destabilizes the viewer. This leads me back to portraiture. I was watching a video of de Kooning where he describes the origin and impulse of making his Women paintings. It all started with a collection of cutout mouths from magazines. A commentator in that video called the mouth, “the eye of the hurricane.” The photo of yours that we selected for the exhibition feels connected to de

Kooning’s Women; both are at once violent and beautifully passive—they feel linked to the history of portraiture, but also subversive.

**GF:** Perhaps there is a similar impulse in the graffiti act represented in my photos as is in de Kooning’s paintings?

**KK:** That is true. It is sort of a cultural portrait, made by many people. They reveal the best of human nature: to scrawl on the wall, to change things, to use their brains, to be clever, to invite accident. With each mark the graffiti reveals how ugly things are. De Kooning thought it was absurd to try to make a portrait—to fashion paint into a nose—but he also thought that it was equally absurd not to make portraits. He believed artists would always be compelled to do it, as a way of defining humanity.

**GF:** I wonder if all art is portraiture of some kind, like the primal impulse to portray ourselves. I know I can’t seem to get away from it no matter how much I might try.

**KK:** I think that is what he meant about the absurdity in trying to avoid making work that reflects who we are. How can we not make visual statements about our lives? It is our language.

**GF:** So true, what else do we have?

**KK:** We have nothing else.

**GF:** Especially when one doesn’t believe in truth.