

HELP

LE

SS

Helpless isn't my word. I'm not sure whose it is, but I know that Glenn Danzig's made some claim to it. He owns an instance. Copyright's assigned to the song "Descent" on the Samhain album *Final Descent*.

I don't think I'd ever considered the word Helpless before hearing "Descent." Likewise, I hadn't considered Samhain before abandoning my search for Brian Kennon's super rare Christopher Wool / Misfits artist book, *Good Boy*, but Samhain was Glenn Danzig's response to quitting Misfits, and as I abandoned my search for one of twenty-five copies of *Good Boy*, Samhain became my response to quitting Brian Kennon.

Samhain's catalog has over 30 songs in it. A modest lot for a band with only four years to its name. Glenn Danzig controls the catalog. The cumulative verbiage of 30+ songs amounts to a good deal of words for an artist to control, and Danzig holds reams more through the copywritten works of his other projects. His prolific assertion of copyright is interesting. Many, if not most, of Danzig's songs borrow heavily from tales of pop horror and the occult. So, the songs he retains rights to—the words he owns—aren't his for *what* they say—they're his for their architecture, their specific poetry of transformation and invention.

When Brian Kennon filtered Danzig's Misfits lyrics through Christopher Wool's lens—cutting and pasting Wool's stenciled letters, hacking out excerpts of anthemic Misfits songs, thinning lyrics from the fat of rock—he freed them from the tyranny of Danzig's catalog. Kennon freed those words from the melodic hell of punk rock. He transformed them into objects—books—which are noble for how they fit into shopping bags when we buy them. And, while buying and owning aren't the same thing (Kennon owns *Good Boy*, while we're merely free to—if we can find it—buy it), we still decorate our shelves with the things we buy, showing them to people as if they were ours. Scarcity adds to the weight of these objects when we find them—the scarcer, the heavier. Rarity materially occupies space in ways that Danzig's ethereally democratic songs can't, and my space is still sadly absent a copy of *Good Boy*.

I've never seen a copy of Kennon's book, but I imagine it's great in the same way I imagine lawyers might argue that the words Chris Wool stenciled onto his canvases should be protected as *his* words. Kennon was savvy to have selected new ones for *Good Boy*. I pondered that as I meditated further on Samhain, and wondered if *Good Boy*, being a book and not a series of individual canvases, had presented a lyrically linear story in its mashed-up pages of Misfits fragments. I wondered if Wool had ever exploited the form of his stencil paintings as a vehicle for story.

Imagining that neither Kennon nor Wool had storified the form, I did it. I worked sixteen fragments of sixteen Samhain songs into sixteen new paintings—sixteen paintings which read as a single, cogent text—sixteen paintings free to act without the permission of the book they inhabit, to break out into narrative diptychs or be slashed back into their fractured root texts. And right there, on the gessoed surface of the first page, is what was once the Helpless of Samhain's "Descent"; the cover of Kennon's *Good Boy*; the Good Boy of the Misfits' "Mommy, Can I Go Out And Kill Tonight?"; Iggy Pop's "I Want To Be Your Dog" (less the *I*)—stenciled by Wool, all-caps in enamel onto canvas, reduced down to "GOOD BOY" by Kennon and fed a little less directly back into "HELP/LE/SS" by me. The concentrated referential capacity of appropriative techniques is, if nothing else, efficient and wonderfully confusing.

Take the stencils I cut for my book, *HELPLESS BRIAN KENNON*. If matched against Wool's, they're wrong. Neither the linespacing, nor the letterspacing, nor the stencil gaps match Wool's, but the paintings feel familiar. If their flavor's Wool, their aftertaste is distortion. They're not Wools. Neither are they Kennons nor Danzigs. They're Visitors.

Reacting to *Good Boy* enhanced my awareness of both iterative authorship and the helplessness of authors in protesting thoughtfully transformed, liberated material. I realized how little reverence all those noble objects in shopping bags deserve. How we as artists 'Help Less' and challenge more by acting on the permission that art grants us to build anything attracting our attention into something else. To make what we can't or won't buy. What doesn't exist.

While it'll likely remain litigated against, the license art gives us to dialogue with and against culture, commerce, scarcity, and mythology is so seductive it's irrevocable. The work presented in this show is evidence of that. While we're all just HELP/LESS artists, the forms we employ to challenge, subvert or abstract authorship are valiant, and they're not going anywhere.