

THOMAS DANE GALLERY

Glenn Ligon

Prompts

Private view: Monday 12 October, 6–8pm

Exhibition dates: 13 October–19 December 2026

Thomas Dane Gallery

11 Duke Street, St James's, London SW1

“But Realism in Art can only be achieved in one way—through artifice” – André Bazin, *What is Cinema?*
Volume 2

“Take an object. Do something to it. Do something else to it.” – Jasper Johns

In *Prompts*, Glenn Ligon's sixth exhibition with Thomas Dane Gallery, the artist has assembled a group of earlier and new works which conspicuously inform, contextualise, re-contextualise, appropriate and, somehow, 'prompt' one another.

One of the most enduring and original aspects of Ligon's practice is the way he has—through subtle alterations and re-framing—created bodies of work in a continuous, self-referencing process over years, sometimes decades. Nowhere is this more evident than in the numerous variations of his emblematic 'AMERICA' neons, which for over twenty years have served as both an insight into the artist's meticulous approach, and as an ingenious and elliptical parable for the country itself.

The two giant works mirroring each other in the front gallery, *Untitled (America)* and *Untitled (Double America)* (both 2026), were originally templates for fabricators and installers to shape and hang each neon letter of *Rückenfigur* (2009) and *Double America* (2012), works in which Ligon sequentially flipped and combined the letters from earlier neons. From matrix to remnants, the templates now mark out the solarised vestiges and ghostly, quasi-burnt outlines of the neons, adding another layer to the artist's ambivalent relationship to American history.

In 1999, Ligon began a year-long residency at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, where he invited local children to colour in pages from Afrocentric colouring books from the late 1960s and early 1970s, published by Johnson Publishing Company among others. The result was a feast of loud, colourful scribbles and smudges, bringing a childlike innocence to images of Black American heroes such as Malcolm X, George Washington Carver and Frederick Douglass, and later prompting Ligon's own series based on the children's drawings.

Afrocentric colouring book pages also serve as the prompt for Ligon's newest work, *Black Panther Coloring Book #2* (2026). The source material, Akinsanya Kambon's twenty-two drawings, realised in 1968 for the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense as a visual history of racial and social injustice, remains a divisive opus to this day. Here, Ligon has covered the images of Kambon's original suite with black oil-stick rectangles, leaving only the text and a few details visible, in a nod to the redactions of government files and perhaps also to the cinematic technique of *hors-champ*, or what lies beyond the frame, sensed but never shown. Injunctions such as “POWER COMES THROUGH THE BARREL OF A GUN” prompt the viewer to imagine the image beneath.

To emphasise such artifice, Ligon also presents a new painting, *Redacted #15* (2026), featuring the practice of using the “X” on a manual typewriter to remove a mistake. The redacted text is an excerpt from James Baldwin's 1953 essay ‘Stranger in the Village’, which has featured extensively in Ligon's oeuvre since 1996.

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Ligon's semiotic gesture amounts to a form of self-critique and self-cancellation—a meaningful signal in an era where, once again, Black and queer voices such as Baldwin's are being erased from the public discourse.

Glenn Ligon (b. 1960, Bronx, New York) lives and works in New York. Solo exhibitions include: *Glenn Ligon: Break It Down*, Aspen Art Museum, Aspen CO (2025); *Glenn Ligon: All Over the Place*, The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, England (2024); *Post-Noir*, Carre d'Art, Nîmes, France (2022); *Call and Response*, Camden Arts Centre, London, England (2014); and *Some Changes*, The Power Plant Center for Contemporary Art, Toronto, Canada (travelled internationally) (2005). Selected curatorial projects include *Grief and Grievance*, New Museum, New York NY (2021); *Blue Black*, Pulitzer Arts Foundation, St. Louis MO (2017); and *Glenn Ligon: Encounters and Collisions*, Nottingham Contemporary and Tate Liverpool, England (2015). Ligon's work has been shown in major international exhibitions, including the Venice Biennale (2015, 1997), Berlin Biennale (2014), Istanbul Biennial (2019, 2011), and Documenta XI (2002). In 2011, the Whitney Museum of American Art held a mid-career retrospective, *AMERICA*, organised by Scott Rothkopf, that travelled nationally across the United States. In 2024 a book of selected writings and interviews by the artist, *Glenn Ligon: Distinguishing Piss from Rain*, was published by Hauser & Wirth, and this fall MIT Press published *OCTOBER Files: Glenn Ligon*, edited by Huey Copeland.

Ligon's work is held in the permanent collections of museums worldwide including Tate, London, England; Centre Pompidou, Paris, France; Museum of Modern Art, New York NY; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York NY; National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis MN; Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago IL; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco CA; and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles CA. His awards and honours include a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship and the Studio Museum's Joyce Alexander Wein Artist Prize. Ligon is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

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Gallery hours: Tuesday to Friday 11am–6pm, Saturday 12pm–6pm or by appointment.

Admission: Free

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Nearest Tube: Green Park or Piccadilly Circus

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