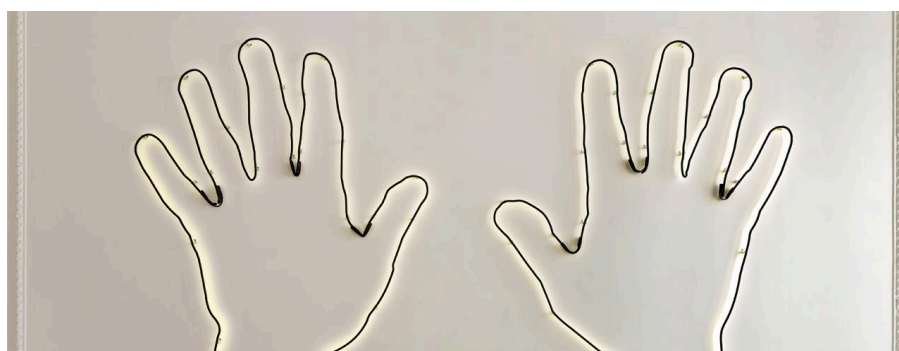


## THOMAS DANE GALLERY

Casavecchia, Barbara. 'Postcard from Naples: Shows Exploring the City's Layered History'.  
*Frieze Online*. 24 May 2018

# frieze

**Postcard from Naples: Shows Exploring the City's Layered History**  
From Glenn Ligon's first solo exhibition in Italy, at Thomas Dane Gallery, to a unique project in  
an ancient Roman aqueduct



Enclosed by a golden frame, the small 'window with a view' created for the exhibition 'Carta Bianca. Capodimonte Imaginaire' (Carte Blanche. Imaginary Capodimonte) at the Capodimonte Museum, could be mistaken for a painting from a different century. Seen from a woody hilltop, the vista across to Mount Vesuvius and the blue horizon of the Gulf of Naples evokes the charms of the Grand Tour: a picture-perfect image that superimposes itself upon more dystopic versions of the city seen, for example, in the popular TV series *Gomorra* (2014). Around the window, to enhance the trompe l'oeil effect, are 18th- and 19th-century paintings of idyllic forests selected by the contemporary landscape architect Paolo Pejrone, who is one of the ten 'ideal visitors' invited by the Capodimonte's director, Sylvain Bellenger, and Andrea Viliani, the director of the local contemporary art museum, MADRE, to freely interpret the Capodimonte's extraordinary historical collection of painting, sculpture and decorative art. A personal favourite is the room curated by the neurologist and science historian Laura Bossi Régnier. She framed her choices around the question 'What makes us human?' and included works such as Agostino Carracci's mocking portrait *Hairy Harry, Mad Peter and Tiny Amon* (1598) displayed next to a porcelain statue by Filippo Tagliolini, *Allegory of Painting* (c.1880), in which mimesis is embodied by a pensive monkey in front of a canvas.



Glenn Ligon, *Untitled (Siete Ospiti) (You Are Guests)*, 2018, installation view, Thomas Dane Gallery, Naples.  
Courtesy: Thomas Dane Gallery, Naples

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## THOMAS DANE GALLERY

With last year's Documenta in Athens and this year's Manifesta in Palermo, it would seem that Grand Tourism – and mining historical legacies – in the European South is on the rise. At Thomas Dane's Neapolitan outpost in the elegant area of Chiaia, Glenn Ligon's first solo exhibition in Italy, 'Tutto poteva, nella poesia, avere una soluzione – In poetry, a solution to everything' (a quote from a poem by Pier Paolo Pasolini), looks at heritage as something embodied by language. The show includes a selection of Ligon's paintings made from oil stick and coal dust, some neons, as well as a new series of monumental silkscreen and ink marker paintings, 'Debris Field' (2018). All of these works are in the artist's signature black and white, with a notable exception: a blue neon, the colour of which echoes the view of the sparkling sea. The words it spells out, though, are less inviting: Untitled (Siete Ospiti) (You Are Guests, 2018) is a local, subtly threatening, football chant. Contemporary politics are in the air: Italy has transitioned from a nation whose history has been shaped by emigration, to a country where migrants and refugees are perceived as a threat and where racism is on the rise. Ligon is a master at investigating racial stereotypes and the ambiguity of written and spoken languages. Notes for a Poem on the Third World (Chapter One) (2018), is a black, painted neon in the shape of two hands raised in a gesture of surrender or protest. Its title is a reference to Pasolini's eponymous project for a non-narrative film divided in five 'Notes' on India, the Middle East, Latin America, 'black ghettos' in the US and sub-Saharan Africa, that for him symbolized 'the coloured culture, i.e. an archaic, popular, preindustrial and pre-bourgeois culture'. In a famous scene from the film Notes for an African Oresteia (1970), Pasolini screens some of the footage he had filmed in Uganda and Tanzania to a group of African students at Rome University. A young Ethiopian man stands up and explains to the director that Africa is not a nation, but a continent, hence laying bare Pasolini's colonialist perspective.



Site of 'Underneath the Arches' contemporary art programme, Borgo Vergini-Sanità area, Naples, 2018. Courtesy: Underneath the Arches; photograph: Antonio Picascia

Ligon's series of five of oil stick and coal dust on paper 'Sole Nero' (Black Sun, 2018) is part of the series 'Negro Sunshine' (2005–ongoing), which is titled after an expression the artist came across in Gertrude Stein's story 'Melanctha' from Three Lives (1909). It alludes to another problematic Pasolinian reference: La negra luce (The Black Light), which is the chapter of a script for the unrealized movie Padre Selvaggio (Savage Father,) that Pasolini wanted to shoot in an African country in the immediate aftermath of independence; its main characters were to represent the fight between 'enlightenment' and 'savagery'. Italy's distorted perception of blackness is still shaped by the Fascist era, when the creation of the fictional myth of Italian 'whiteness' severed links with the pan-Mediterranean identity the country had experienced for centuries.

Another response to the city's layered history is provided by 'Underneath the Arches', a project in an archaeological site. Curators Chiara Pirozzi and Alessandra Troncone invite artists to engage with an underground section of the ancient Augusteo del Serino aqueduct that was discovered in 2011 in the heart of the vibrant Rione Sanità area. Blind Horizon (2018) by the Mexican artist Arturo Hernández Alcázar is an installation that includes recordings he made across Naples and its peripheries. Immersed in the cold, dark, subterranean space, the flux of sounds emerge from a set of old megaphones, held in place by makeshift aggregates of stones, tubes and wires. To see the city, you need to close your eyes, listen and imagine.

<https://frieze.com/article/postcard-naples-shows-exploring-citys-layered-history>

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