

THOMAS DANE GALLERY

Fenicia, D. 'Glenn Ligon: "In Poetry, A Solution to Everything" at Thomas Dane Through July 28th, 2018'. *Art Observed Online*. 25 June 2018



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Glenn Ligon, *In Poetry, A Solution to Everything* (Installation View), via Thomas Dane

Glenn Ligon's first solo show in Italy, on view now at Thomas Dane, translates the poetical image into pictorial figuration, taking form around a poem by Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Ma Era L'Italia, L'Italia Nuda e Formicolante*, in which the poet recalls Italy in the years after the war, the cries of his generation and of ancient children, obliged to face history, a mission not based on power but on civilization. At this time, the artist cannot only be who tries to revolt the repressive system of forces. The poet lives, more than others, the agony of modernity and art. His poetry is not born from a crisis; it is the crisis itself.

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The exhibition challenges the avant-garde in its same ground, in an explicit attempt to oppose the cage of ideology. Divided into segments, the voluntary discrepancies and unresolved ideological contradictions the artist presents reflect on the relationship between a subject and an alien body. Ligon presents abstract letters, two neon pieces and two works from his iconic series *Stranger*, with extracts from Baldwin's essay "Stranger in the Village" (1953). In repurposing textual fragments from seminal works on racial identity and socialization, Ligon charts a conversation of the particularities of racial experience into the generalities of fiction from which he selectively gleans to represent his own experience as a black male body. Ligon's art appears as a series of self-reflexive statements organized along the axes of racial and gender identification.



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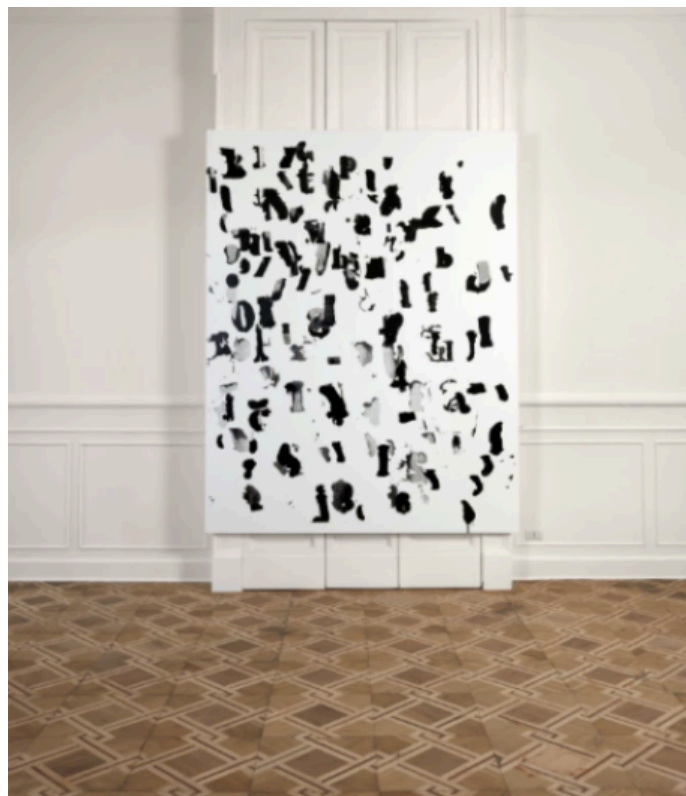
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The letters in his works are alive in their primary element. The artist looks for a form of expression that is pure and abstract, going beyond words. Language is a vehicle and a knife. Forms, ideas, sensations, intertwine as if they were a single, dizzying proliferating entity. The genesis of writing is an excellent allegory of movement. The rhythm and the evolution of the lines bring to mind a kind of curious musical notation; we are confronted with vortexes, gashes, the interweaving of being. Rhythms in nature, of sunrise and sunset, of morning and evening, of waxing and waning moons, the ebb and flow of tidal waves, become an art that awakes reflexive questioning. In the new life according to nature, all individuals are social norms and find a pattern in the rhythms of cosmic behavior. Here, we see a relationship between the experience of poetry and the body.

The two works of the Stranger series are positioned in conversation with the artist's nearby serigraphy. The text, taken from Baldwin's essay, talks about the author's experience living in a small village in Switzerland where most people had never seen an African American before. The black subject is not defined via the gaze of the white other, but somewhat fragmented, dislocated. The black subject then enacts a schizophrenic self-negation against the crushing objecthood imposed by the perception of the white. We see a performance of his psychosocial centrum as his oeuvre presents a self that is rendered coherent entirely through others.



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The form Ligon's paintings assume is unvarying and simple: each repeats its given phrase over and over, stuttering across the surface and gradually bleeding into a chaotic inky mass. Language is the thread that sutures together these disparate histories, allowing for a host of multiple meanings that permit points of contact and overlap between the seemingly irreconcilable lives represented therein. Pasolini's text, similarly, equally addresses the idea of form. He does not intend to subtract himself from the market or its exchanges. He challenges it in its very same ground, he wants to capture the public and he proposes texts that create a conversation around them. Most of what we call literature is fair game for deconstruction. Ligon's work not only points at the lapses of memory that have been required for the public to imagine itself but also suggests how the selective occlusions of the past continue to falsify our imagining of the present. Addressing his falsification of an imagined present couldn't be more timely or appropriate.

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The neon sign 'siete ospiti' in Ligon's work is a reference to racist insults. The black subject is doubled through institutionalized racism, existing both for himself and for the dominant white being, providing an invaluable framework for investigating the dynamics of association, disassociation, and the splitting of the subject. The notes for *A Poem on the Third World* traces the contours of the hands of the artists, inspired by the project of a film that was never realized by Pasolini that would have been filmed between India, Africa, Latin America, Arabia, and the black ghettos of the United States. Exploring what was other brought him to identify himself with the wars of the populations of the East. The works of Glenn Ligon talk about migration and the phenomena that have shaped Italy politically and geographically, confounding nations of the border and the centre, rising a discrepancy between those who truly belong and those who are 'guests'.



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Ligon's conversation is both poetic and unpoetic, expressionist and ideological, pluralistic and logic-demonstrative. The explicit attempt of this show is that of opposing the cage of ideology, the liberty of art that fragments and empties the sense of the ideological discourse, transforming its arguments in simple, expressive strategy. The words in the show are directed only towards the measure with which the artist demonstrates the paradoxical or apocalyptic, the truth is abolished. Ligon offers appropriated declarative statements on race in lieu of the black body, capturing the sensation of being continually transformed into an object while cannily slipping the bonds of surveillance and fetishism by which these scopic regimes operate.

The fundamental iniquities of slavery and colonialism render the reciprocal dynamic between the self and other unavailable to the colonized subject. For under colonialism, the absolute reciprocity is the degree to which one goes beyond my immediate beings that apprehend the existence of the other as a natural and more than physical reality. It directly addresses the way the visual image has been used to secure the authenticity of the racialized body.

The show closes July 28th.

<http://artobserved.com/2018/06/naples-thomas-dane-glenn-ligon-in-poetry-a-solution-to-everything-at-thomas-dane-through-july-28th-2018/>

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