

HAUSER & WIRTH

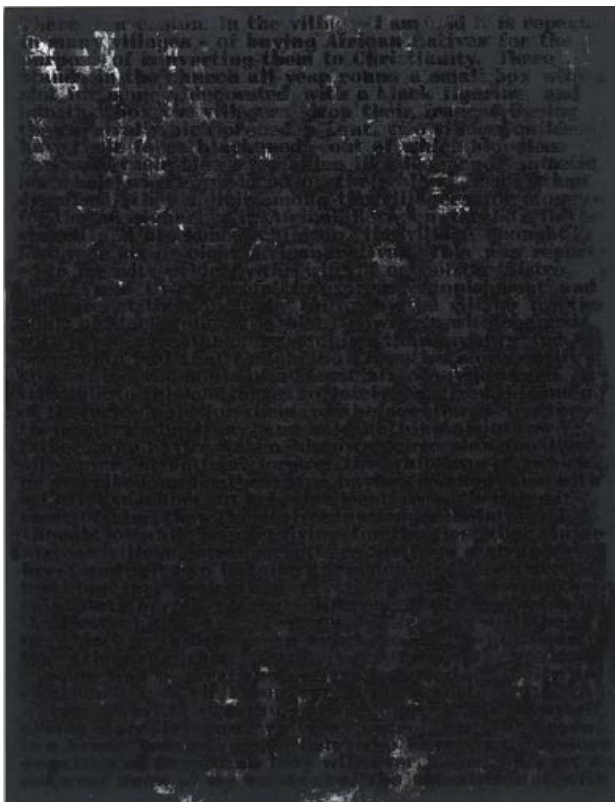
Press Release

Glenn Ligon

25 March – 11 May 2024

Opening: Monday 25 March 5 – 7 PM

Hauser & Wirth Hong Kong
G/F, 8 Queen's Road Central, Central, Hong Kong



Best known for his text-based paintings, celebrated American conceptual artist Glenn Ligon has created new works for his first solo exhibition in Greater China. The display includes a continuation of his Stranger paintings, a new abstract painting series titled Static, and a series of untitled drawings on Kozo paper. These works all use excerpts from James Baldwin's landmark essay 'Stranger in the Village' (1953) and exemplify the artist's radical use of text to explore the politics of culture and identity.

A new publication 'Glenn Ligon: Distinguishing Piss from Rain; Writings and Interviews', edited by James Hoff, will be released by Hauser & Wirth Publishers on 25 June 2024.

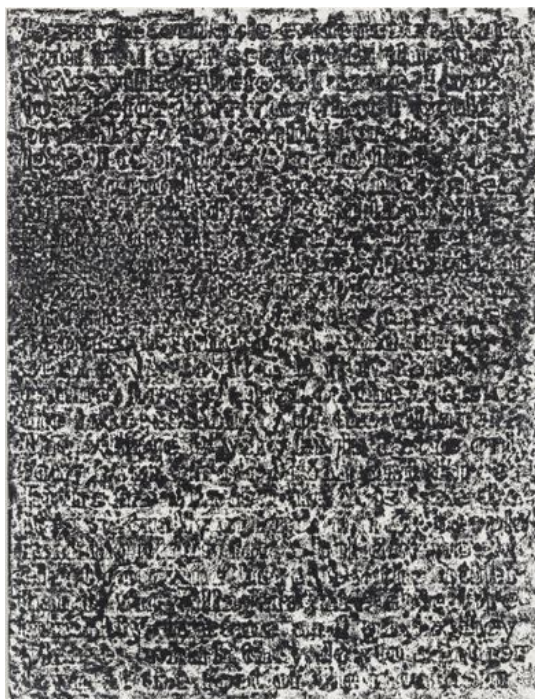
Ligon's solo exhibition 'Glenn Ligon: All Over The Place' will be held at Fitzwilliam Museum (the University of Cambridge's principal museum) from 20 September 2024 – 2 March 2025. Alongside his paintings, sculptures and prints, the artist will curate a series of site-specific interventions throughout the museum aimed at peeling back layers of its exhibition history.

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About the exhibition

'Stranger #98' (2023) is from Ligon's Stranger paintings, his longest running series, which first began in 1997 and renders excerpts from James Baldwin's 1953 essay, 'Stranger in the Village.' In the text, Baldwin recounts his experience of visiting the small mountain village of Leukerbad, Switzerland, where he encountered villagers who had never met a Black man before him. He connects the experiences to global structures of racism, colonialism and white supremacy and analyses how they manifest in both the United States and Europe.

In the Stranger series, Ligon stencils text onto the canvas with oil stick, creating a relief made of sentences. As the stencil is moved across the canvas, oil stick residue and smudges from previous words mark the canvas, obscuring some of the text. The text is further abstracted by the addition of coal dust—a black, gravel like waste product of coal mining—to the surface of the painting. Through the work's varying degrees of legibility, Ligon evokes both hypervisibility and invisibility in the Black experience and explores language's inability to fully articulate issues surrounding race, citizenship and subjecthood. As Ligon remarks, 'The essay is not only about race relations but about what it means to be a stranger anywhere.'^[1]



The new Static series sees Ligon building on this technique but to more abstract ends. Like his Stranger paintings, Ligon stencils excerpts from Baldwin's text; however, here he uses white oil stick on a white gesso ground, subsequently rubbing black oil stick on the raised forms. In applying pigment to the overlapping layers of letters, the artist creates different degrees of abstraction and emphasizes their illegibility. The resulting compositions come to form a visual representation of static: the absence of a coherent transmission signal on a radio or television and the resulting noise. This series questions whether language--in our 'post-truth' world—can function as a way to describe the cultural moment we find ourselves in.

Similarly in his untitled works on paper, Ligon pushes the limits of abstraction by employing the traditional rubbing technique of frottage. Using a single Stranger paintings as a textured surface on which Kozo paper is placed, the artist rubs carbon and graphite to translate the blurred text from canvas to paper. The spontaneous forms that emerge build upon the idea of 'improvisational abstraction,' which is central to the artist's practice, exploring the tension between accident and intention, conscious and subconscious. All three series offer a reflection on, in Ligon's words, 'the things that can be said and the things that cannot be said, or the things that are difficult to say, or that remain opaque despite this will to be clear and explain...'^[2]

[1] Glenn Ligon quoted in Jason Moran, 'Glenn Ligon', Interview Magazine, June 8, 2009, unpaginated.

[2] Glenn Ligon: In the Studio, Brooklyn, New York, 2021 © Glenn Ligon / Hauser & Wirth.

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About the artist

Glenn Ligon (b. 1960) is an artist living and working in New York. Throughout his career, Ligon has pursued an incisive exploration of American history, literature, and society across bodies of work that build critically on the legacies of modern painting and conceptual art. He earned his BA from Wesleyan University (1982) and attended the Whitney Museum Independent Study Program (1985). In 2011, the Whitney Museum of American Art held a mid-career retrospective, Glenn Ligon: America, organized by Scott Rothkopf, that traveled nationally. Important solo exhibitions include Post-Noir, Carre d'Art, Nîmes (2022); Glenn Ligon: Call and Response, Camden Arts Centre, London (2014); and Glenn Ligon – Some Changes, The Power Plant Center for Contemporary Art, Toronto (traveled internationally) (2005). Select curatorial projects include Grief and Grievance, New Museum, New York (2021); Blue Black, Pulitzer Arts Foundation, St. Louis (2017); and Glenn Ligon: Encounters and Collisions, Nottingham Contemporary and Tate Liverpool (2015). Ligon's work has been shown in major international exhibitions, including the Venice Biennale (2015, 1997), Berlin Biennial (2014), Istanbul Biennial (2019, 2011), and Documenta XI (2002).

Press contact

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Caption and courtesy information:

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Glenn Ligon
Stranger #98
2023
Oil stick, etching ink, coal dust, acrylic and pencil on canvas
289.6 x 223.5 cm / 114 x 88 in
Photo: Ronald Amstutz

Glenn Ligon
Static #8
2023
Oil stick, coal dust and gesso on canvas
170.2 x 129.5 cm / 67 x 51 in
Photo: Ronald Amstutz

Glenn Ligon
Untitled #41
2024
Carbon and graphite on Kozo paper
45.7 x 30.5 cm / 18 x 12 inches
20 3/4 X 14 3/4 x 1 1/2 inches (framed)
Photo: Thomas Barratt

Portrait of Glenn Ligon. Photo: Paul Mpagi Sepuya