

reviews: new york



Glenn Ligon, *Double America*, 2012, neon and paint, 36" x 120". Luhring Augustine.

Glenn Ligon

Luhring Augustine

This was Glenn Ligon's first show at Luhring Augustine, and it was an extraordinarily elegant, minimalist Pop, all-neon permutation of his well-known text-based paintings. Using evocative phrases extrapolated from many sources, the writings on the wall were a kind of politicized, technologized haiku in shades of black and white on neon. The glowing, double-edged phrases, sometimes painted black in front—"negro sunshine" for instance—were all the more oracular haloed in light. They continue to take on, as we would expect from Ligon, race, identity, and the pursuit of happiness (or the lack of it).

The large *Double America* (2012), part of Ligon's "America" series, bears the word "America" slightly disrupted: it is not quite a mirror image, but the word appears twice, once right-side up (lit white) and again upside down (painted black), a metaphor for a two-tiered, racially divided society. The installation abounds with such implications: dangling black and white cords, text in black and white, the frequent appearance of the words "shadow," "black," "sunshine," and so on.

The spirit of Bruce Nauman hovered over the show. *One Live and Die* (2006) refers to Nauman's *100 Live and Die* (1984), and Ligon's *Impediment* (2006) was inspired by another Nauman work. Painted black, the word "slur" is stretched out, with each letter repeated four times as if the speaker was stuttering or drunk, the artist pointing to speech and ethical defects. The only

work not lighted was Nov. 6, 2012 (2012), with the numbers in black, the date of the last presidential election—as if it were too soon to tell what it means, an attitude more somber (and realistic) than jubilant. On the other hand, the jauntiest piece in the show, scripted in lower case, proclaiming that "only poetry

isn't shit," was intensely bright, the medium very much part of the message in this terse but powerful redaction of ongoing, ambient racism in the United States.

—Lilly Wei