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## Glenn Ligon

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# ARTFORUM



View of "**Glenn Ligon: Encounters and Collisions**," 2015. Photo: Andy Keate.

*Glenn Ligon is a New York-based artist whose work is currently on view in the Venice Biennale. His curatorial project "**Glenn Ligon: Encounters and Collisions**," which he discusses below, features his work alongside that of forty-five more contemporary artists, and runs from April 15 through June 14, 2015, at Nottingham Contemporary, and at the Tate Liverpool from June 30 through October 18, 2015.*

**THIS EXHIBITION IS** as much for a public as it is for me. Often my work has been critically framed around issues of race and identity. There was some opportunity here to reposition my own work, to communicate to an audience that it has never been solely about race or identity, and that I have been simultaneously invested in issues around repetition, abstraction, and narrative.

It never occurred to me to curate an exhibition of this nature—it's just not somewhere that my practice was ever going. But Alex Farquharson, the director at Nottingham, contacted me after he read *Yourself in the World*, a collection of my writings about other artists' work, and said that he thought the book could

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serve as the basis for an interesting project. For me, those texts were deeply personal and by themselves they were enough, but over time I began to think an exhibition would be a great opportunity to work with the stellar collection of the Tate Modern and directly with other artists and collectors, and to juxtapose works that I have been thinking about for a long time.

Because I am deeply invested in Abstract Expressionism, which has been a touchstone for my painting practice, I was particularly excited to hang a Beauford Delaney next to a Franz Kline. Delaney and Kline were of the same generation and share many common interests, but such juxtapositions are rarely made, partially because Delaney's works are not in institutions the way they should be, but also because some people imagine they have nothing to say to each other, which clearly they do.

With my own work, it was an opportunity to imagine where things could go as well as consider the intersections between my practice and the work of my contemporaries. For instance, my multimedia drawing *Study for Condition Report*, 2000, incorporates *Untitled (I Am A Man)*, 1988, a painting based on placards carried by protesters in a 1968 rally. The more recent work reproduces the 1988 piece and pairs it with an overlaid condition report of that painting by an art conservator. It “should be” in the section of the exhibition that also contains Charles Moore's photographs of the Birmingham water protests or other representations of civil rights activism. But instead I decided to put it next to Lorna Simpson, Zoe Leonard, and Lynette Yiadom-Boakye—artists whose work investigates the politics of representation and, in the case of Yiadom-Boakye, evinces a fascination with a fictive masculinity.

Also, a funny thing happened: I decided to include a Robert Morris felt piece—*Untitled*, 1967–68/2008—although I have never written about Morris. He isn't an artist that I've thought about before in relationship to my own practice, but when I saw this specific piece I thought there was a certain synchronicity with my neon sculptures. These are the kinds of formal correspondences and strategies of representing the body—without showing the body—that might strike you as well in this exhibition. The ideas in my work are on a continuum, engaged with the issues of our time but also conceptually and formally evolving out of my earliest encounters with other artists.

— As told to Andrianna Campbell