

Glenn Ligon: *All Over The Place* 20 September 2024 – 2 March 2025



Left to right: Glenn Ligon photographed at Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, December 2023.
Photographer: Rob Hill; *Waiting for the Barbarians*, (installation view) 2021, in Portals, Hellenic Parliament + NEON at the former Public Tobacco Factory, Athens © Glenn Ligon; Courtesy of Thomas Dane Gallery, London.
Photographer: Natalia Tsoukala, Courtesy NEON

This autumn, the Fitzwilliam Museum will present *Glenn Ligon: All Over The Place*, a major exhibition by one of the leading contemporary artists working today. Alongside two dedicated galleries of Ligon's own artwork from the past 35 years, including paintings, sculptures and prints, *All Over The Place* will comprise a series of site-specific interventions curated by the artist throughout the museum aimed at revealing new perspectives on its collection and Ligon's own artistic career.

Since the late 1980s, New York-based artist Glenn Ligon (b.1960) 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 is best known for his landmark neon installations and text-based paintings which draw on the influential writings and speech of 20th-century historical and cultural figures including James Baldwin, Zora Neale Hurston, Jean Genet, and Richard Pryor.

Visitors to the Fitzwilliam will be greeted with Ligon's major 9-part neon sculpture *Waiting for the Barbarians* (2021) installed in the museum's Neoclassical Grade I listed portico entrance, marking the work's UK debut. Inside, a significant presentation of Ligon's text-based paintings including *Mirror #9* (2006) and *Stranger #90* (2018), as well as an important early work, *Untitled (I Feel Most Colored When I Am Thrown Against a Sharp White Background)*, (1990), will transform the museum's Octagon gallery.

Artworks and objects selected by Ligon from Cambridge collections will be interspersed throughout the Fitzwilliam's permanent displays, bringing hidden aesthetic qualities and stories to the fore. The works, which range from experimental dry-points by Frank Auerbach to 18th-century Chinese imitation Wedgwood vases, connect through themes of cultural hybridity, annotation and legibility.

Highlights will include a display in the museum's Charrington Print Room, in which the artist will pair rarely-seen impressions by Edgar Degas from cancelled mid-19th-century plates, with his own *Untitled (Cancellation Prints)* series. A 12th-century book of poetry by Roman author Horace, which features extensive, intricate annotations by an unknown reader, will be exhibited alongside Ligon's iconic work *Condition Report* (2000). The diptych, on loan from Tate, reveals a conservator's hand-written notes on the work's perceived flaws – these 'cracks' and 'marks' – that become metaphors for changing perceptions in society.

In the Upper Marlay galleries, a wall of paintings will be deinstalled to uncover the ghostly traces of previous gallery hangs. In this space, Ligon has chosen to exhibit *Adoration of the Magi* (c.1520) from the Fitzwilliam Museum which features Balthazar as a Black African king alongside one of his own *Untitled (Study for Negro Sunshine)* drawings. A recurring motif throughout Ligon's work, 'negro sunshine' is a phrase borrowed from an experimental modernist novella by Gertrude Stein used to describe the character of Rose Johnson, a Black woman. Pairing one of the *Negro Sunshine* works alongside the representation of Balthazar highlights an invisibility that exists in relation to race – a theme that runs through the show. These gestures will invite visitors to question absences in museum spaces and consider how such omissions continue to shape the present moment and contemporary cultural imagination. Further interventions of *Negro Sunshine* drawings will be made in the Spanish and Italian galleries, as well as a spectacular salon-style hang in the Flowers gallery, reflecting on issues relating to material abundance and resource extraction.

Continuing this theme of historical contingency, and developing an idea of cultural exchange to stimulate reading and counter-reading, Ligon's sculptures based on Korean Moon Jars will be displayed through the centre of the Lower Marlay spaces. Presented as contemporary sculpture on tables rather than in display cabinets, Ligon's pieces speak to the display of Chinese, Korean, Japanese and European porcelain, and the many forms of cultural exchange which contributed to their development.

Glenn Ligon said: "My exhibition is a thread that winds its way through the Fitzwilliam, loose in some places, taut in others, which the visitor can choose to follow or encounter serendipitously. In some cases, I juxtapose my works with pieces from its expansive collection while in other moments I have chosen to amplify themes of empire, resource extraction and cultural hybridity by adding text commentary to existing museum displays."

Habda Rashid, Senior Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Fitzwilliam Museum, said: "Looking in from the margins to see more clearly, thus shifting perspectives and acknowledging what is not seen, sits as part of Ligon's artistic and curatorial practice, which is at the heart of *All Over The Place*. This framing methodology enhances our aesthetic, poetic and conceptual understanding of all the works in the exhibition as well as collections more widely, and the role of museums in making sense of the world."

Glenn Ligon: All Over The Place is curated by Habda Rashid, Senior Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. The exhibition will be accompanied by a fully-illustrated catalogue featuring conversations between Ligon and specialist curators from the Fitzwilliam Museum.

Glenn Ligon: All Over The Place is funded by De Ying Foundation with additional support from The Ampersand Foundation.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

EXHIBITION ENTRY

The Fitzwilliam Museum is open Tuesday-Saturday: 10:00-17:00 | Sundays and Bank Holidays: 12:00-17:00. The Fitzwilliam and its exhibitions are free, but visitors can choose to make a donation.

ABOUT GLENN LIGON

Born in the Bronx, New York, in 1960, Glenn Ligon received a BA from Wesleyan University in 1982. In 2011, the Whitney Museum of American Art held a mid-career retrospective, *Glenn Ligon: America*, organised by Scott Rothkopf, that travelled nationally. Important solo exhibitions include *Post-Noir*, Carre d'Art, Nîmes (2022); *Glenn Ligon: Call and Response*, Camden Art Centre, London (2014); and *Glenn Ligon – Some Changes*, The Power Plant Center for Contemporary Art, Toronto (travelled 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). His work is held in the permanent collections of international institutions such as Tate, UK; Centre Pompidou, Paris; MoMA and the Whitney Museum in New York; the Art Institute of Chicago; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

ABOUT THE FITZWILLIAM MUSEUM

Founded in 1816, the Fitzwilliam Museum is the largest and oldest museum of the University of Cambridge. It houses over half a million objects: ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman artefacts, medieval illuminated manuscripts, paintings from the European Renaissance to the 21st-century, prints and drawings, coins and medals, ceramics and other applied arts from East and West Asia and Western Europe. The Fitzwilliam Museum is an internationally recognised institute of research and conservation.

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ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

The University of Cambridge is one of the world's leading universities, with a rich history of radical thinking dating back to 1209. Its mission is to contribute to society through the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence. Cambridge was second in the influential 2024 QS World University Rankings, the highest rated institution in the UK. The University comprises 31 autonomous Colleges and over 100 departments, faculties and institutions. Its 24,000 students include around 9,000 international students from 147 countries. In 2023, 73% of its new undergraduate students were from state schools and more than 25% from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Cambridge research spans almost every discipline, from science, technology, engineering and medicine through to the arts, humanities and social sciences, with multi-disciplinary teams working to address major global challenges. In the Times Higher Education's rankings based on the UK Research Excellence Framework, the University was rated as the highest scoring institution covering all the major disciplines.

A [2023 report](#) found that the University contributes nearly £30 billion to the UK economy annually and supports more than 86,000 jobs across the UK, including 52,000 in the East of England. For every £1 the University spends, it creates £11.70 of economic impact, and for every £1 million of publicly-funded research income it receives, it generates £12.65 million in economic impact across the UK.

The University sits at the heart of the 'Cambridge cluster', in which more than 5,000 knowledge-intensive firms employ more than 71,000 people and generate £21 billion in turnover. Cambridge has the highest number of patent applications per 100,000 residents in the UK.

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