

“Extract”

Glenn Ligon

Almost three decades ago, I began a series of paintings utilizing James Baldwin’s seminal 1953 essay “Stranger in the Village,” which documents his stay in a remote Swiss mountain village. Each of the “Stranger” paintings consists of passages of text rendered in oil paint and coal dust on canvas. Materially dense and difficult to read, the paintings reflect the struggle Baldwin must have gone through to make sense of complex issues regarding colonialism and cultural hegemony, the climate of anti-blackness in Europe and the United States, and his perpetual search for a safe harbor in the world.

“Extract” is based on a photograph of the painting “Stranger (Full Text) #1,” 2020–21, which was pinned to the wall of my studio in Brooklyn. I have a habit of taking iPhone photos of works in progress, and this image recorded the beginning of a painting that would end up being forty-five feet long and ten feet high. While it only showed a fragment of the larger text, the excerpt visible in the photo seemed to encapsulate many of the themes of the essay as a whole. I decided to make a print out of this extract, as an homage to Baldwin and synecdoche of my broader engagement with his writings over many years.



Figure 1 "Extract," 2021. Aquatint with photogravure on Hahnemuhle Copperplate Bright White paper 14.5 x 15 inches (36.8 x 38.1 cm). Edition of 75 and 25 APs. © Glenn Ligon; courtesy of the artist, Hauser & Wirth, New York, Regen Projects, Los Angeles, Thomas Dane Gallery, London, and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris.

Author and Artist Biography

Glenn Ligon 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. In 2011, the Whitney Museum of American Art held a mid-career retrospective, *America*, which traveled nationally. Important solo exhibitions include *Glenn Ligon: All Over the Place*, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (2024); *Post-Noir*, Carre d'Art, Nîmes (2022); *Des Parisiens Noirs*, Musée d'Orsay, Paris (2019); *Glenn Ligon: Some Changes*, The Power Plant Center for Contemporary Art, Toronto (2005). Ligon's work has been shown at the Venice Biennale (2015, 1997), Berlin Biennial (2014), Istanbul Biennial (2019, 2011), and Documenta XI (2002).