

Nottingham Contemporary and Tate Liverpool present a major exhibition curated by one of America's most distinguished contemporary artists, Glenn Ligon. Ranging from Willem de Kooning, Andy Warhol, Bruce Nauman and David Hammons to Steve McQueen, Lorna Simpson, Felix Gonzalez-Torres and Chris Ofili, *Encounters and Collisions* presents an extraordinary cast of artists who have influenced Ligon or with whom he feels affinity. Ligon refers to many of the artists featured in his own art and writings. The exhibition is a kind of ideal museum as seen by Ligon - one that in particular reconnects Postwar American art history with its wider political and cultural contexts.

Since the late 1980s each of Glenn Ligon's art works has cited works by other artists, works of literature or other aspects of culture. His work often deals in subtle and probing ways with the shifting experience of American identity, borrowing directly from sources as varied as slave narratives, the essays of James Baldwin and Zora Neale Hurston, the comedy routines of Richard Pryor, or news coverage of Louis Farrakhan's Million Man March of 1995. Ligon is a painter who also makes work in many other media: print, video, neon and installation. Similarly, around half the works in *Encounters and Collisions* are paintings and half are in other media.

Exploring the aesthetics in politics, and the politics in aesthetics, *Glenn Ligon: Encounters and Collisions* opens up the Postwar American art canon to the politics and poetics of difference. The big names of Abstract Expressionism, such as Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning, appear, as do key representatives of tendencies in American art that followed in its wake, from Pop art and Minimalism to Conceptual art and performance. This work is brought into close dialogue with the evolving politics of its day, in particular the Civil Rights struggle and the Black Liberation movement – specifically, photographs from 3 May 1963 when the authorities turned police dogs and fire hoses on black protestors in Birmingham, Alabama, and powerful imagery relating to The Black Panther Party, in particular its charismatic leader, Huey P. Newton.

Ligon's own New York generation is well represented, including David Wojnarowicz, Lorna Simpson, Felix Gonzalez-Torres and Zoe Leonard. Like Ligon, these and other artists explored loaded questions around representations of race, gender and sexuality during the reactionary aftermath of the „Culture Wars“ and the AIDS crisis at the close of the Reagan era.

Several of Glenn Ligon's own works will anchor this wide-ranging exhibition. They include *Stranger #23*, a large black on black painting featuring a stenciled passage from James Baldwin's *Stranger in the Village*, the letters picked out in sparkling coal dust. It also features one of Ligon's paintings of Malcolm X in gaudy make-up - one of a number of paintings he based on an African-

American colouring book from the 1970s that he invited young children to colour in a few decades later. The word AMERICA faintly glows in a work made from black painted neon. The exhibition also features an example of Ligon's work in video: an abstracted version of a film adaptation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, directed by Thomas Edison in 1903.

Glenn Ligon has said: "The exhibition is an attempt to create a space that positions my work as a series of dialogues with other artists and histories, encouraging the viewer to consider how these dialogues profoundly shaped the artworks I have made over the course of my career."

Alex Farquharson, Director of Nottingham Contemporary said: "Glenn Ligon's work has long been concerned with encounters and collisions with the work of other artists and writers, and with culture and history more generally. His is a practice built from hypothetical dialogues with others. Encounters and Collisions will be a unique opportunity to see Ligon's own personal art history brought to life in a single exhibition and will reveal the larger, submerged part of the proverbial iceberg of his celebrated practice."

Francesco Manacorda, Artistic Director, Tate Liverpool said: "Tate Liverpool is honoured to be able to host such an important and iconic alternative art historical narrative from one of the most significant artists of his generation. Presenting such a fresh and topical perspective alongside the late work of Jackson Pollock and our collection displays will provide our audience with a rich view on the relationship between visual art, the black experience and the American canon."

*Glenn Ligon: Encounters and Collisions* is a collaboration between Nottingham Contemporary and Tate Liverpool curated by Glenn Ligon, in dialogue with Alex Farquharson, Director, Nottingham Contemporary, and Francesco Manacorda, Artistic Director, Tate Liverpool. After Nottingham Contemporary the exhibition opens in Liverpool on 30 June, where it coincides with *Jackson Pollock: Blind Spots*.

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