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Glenn Ligon: Narratives

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Glenn Ligon: Narratives

Description

The exhibition on display at Schmucker Art Gallery, a suite of nine prints entitled *Narratives* by prominent contemporary artist Glenn Ligon, has been made possible by a generous gift to Gettysburg College by Dr. Kimberly Rae Connor '79. Ligon's works have been exhibited widely at major museums, and Gettysburg College is fortunate to have the opportunity to engage with work that examines issues of race, sexuality, history and representation. The artist is well known for his use of quotations and texts from a variety of literary writers and cultural critics such as James Baldwin, Frantz Fanon, bell hooks and Ralph Ellison, in his continuously successful examination of the critical place of slavery, oppression and freedom in African-American history and identity.

In *Narratives*, Ligon's emphasis on the text takes the place of a traditional image. He includes quotations from Hilton Als, Josephine Baker and Derek Walcott, but the story is his own. The format and font of these prints mimic the title pages of mid-nineteenth-century slave narratives. Not only does Ligon borrow the typographic style of these historic title pages, he also adopts a particular nineteenth-century vernacular. In the act of reading and seeing Ligon's late twentieth-century prints, the viewer must also consider the context and history of the original, personal, heart-wrenching, realistic and persuasive accounts of slavery. Slave narratives bolstered the abolitionists' movement, often reached wide audiences and gained considerable popularity among northern readers, such as Frederick Douglass's narrative, which sold 30,000 copies between 1845 and 1860. While Douglass was the author of his own book, many of the slaves were illiterate. Their horrific stories of abuse, familial separation, severity of the workload and dreadful living conditions were recorded by white abolitionists. Regardless of who transcribed the stories, the books often emphasized the veracity and authenticity of the author's accounts. Correspondingly, Ligon tells of his own life and stresses the truth of this kind of honest and suggestive autobiography. [excerpt]

Keywords

Glenn Ligon, Schmucker Art Gallery, Gettysburg College, African American, slavery, oppression, freedom, race, slave narrative

Disciplines

African American Studies | Art and Design | Cultural History | History | Public History | Social History | United States History

Publisher

Schmucker Art Gallery, Gettysburg College

Comments

Glenn Ligon: Narratives was on exhibition at the Schmucker Art Gallery at Gettysburg College, January 23 - March 8, 2014.

BLACK RAGE;
or,
HOW I GOT OVER;

or,
Sketches
of the
Life and Labors

of
GLENN LIGON

CONTAINING A FULL AND FAITHFUL ACCOUNT OF
HIS COMMODIFICATION OF THE HORRORS OF BLACK LIFE
INTO ART OBJECTS FOR THE PUBLIC'S ENJOYMENT

WITH A PORTRAIT

"When we talk about the commodification of blackness, we aren't just talking about how white people consume these images, but how black people and other people of color consume them, and how these become ways of knowing ourselves."

-bell hooks

NEW YORK:
PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR AND MAX PROTETCH GALLERY
BY BURNET EDITIONS

1993

GLENN LIGON: NARRATIVES

GLENN LIGON: NARRATIVES

INTRODUCTION

Shannon Egan, Ph.D.
Director, Schmucker Art Gallery

The exhibition on display at Schmucker Art Gallery, a suite of nine prints entitled *Narratives* by prominent contemporary artist Glenn Ligon, has been made possible by a generous gift to Gettysburg College by Dr. Kimberly Rae Connor '79. Ligon's works have been exhibited widely at major museums, and Gettysburg College is fortunate to have the opportunity to engage with work that examines issues of race, sexuality, history and representation. The artist is well known for his use of quotations and texts from a variety of literary writers and cultural critics such as James Baldwin, Frantz Fanon, bell hooks and Ralph Ellison, in his continuously successful examination of the critical place of slavery, oppression and freedom in African-American history and identity.

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The slave narratives of the 1840s influenced Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* of 1852, which garnered more attention than other anti-slavery documents in the nineteenth century. Stowe, a white woman, delivered a strong anti-slavery message, yet she was not an active abolitionist. Ligon's work alludes not simply to the impact of *Uncle Tom*, but rather to other true stories, white readers' expectations for drama and sensationalism, and the legacy of such works in the present day. The artist echoes the dramatic, ascension stories of his predecessors' narratives, writing in his words, "for the benefit of the fugitive," of the "many hardships and sufferings he endures on his journey toward freedom." Ligon relies on his reader/viewer to supply additional

details of the stories, as the title pages stand in for longer, imagined texts. Ligon creates nine different title pages; some are almost identical to actual titles of slave narratives, and others are evocative of adventure, suffering and sex.

The prints initially were exhibited in 1993 as part of a larger exhibition of Ligon's work at the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, DC. The exhibition, titled *To Disembark*, a direct reference to Gwendolyn Brook's 1981 book of poems of the same name, was comprised of two suites of prints, including an edition of the one on display here, nine sculptures with audio components, and three large-scale wall drawings. The sculptures were intended to invoke the story of Henry "Box" Brown, a slave who shipped himself from Richmond to Philadelphia to find freedom. Brown authored his own narrative of this phenomenal story of escape: *Narrative of Henry Box Brown, Who Escaped from Slavery, Enclosed in a Box 3 Feet Long and 2 Wide. Written from a Statement of Facts Made by Himself*. Ligon seeks identification with Brown and evokes Brown's heroic story in the artist's own conceptual and critical retelling of the history of slavery and segregation in America.

In the wake of Ligon's first major exhibition at the Hirshhorn Museum and after recent large-scale retrospectives of his work at the Whitney Museum of American Art, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, the exhibition at Schmucker Art Gallery introduces a new audience and a unique, historical lens for understanding the significance of Ligon's work. To see *Narratives* in Gettysburg—the site of the turning point of the American Civil War and the promise of, in Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, "a new birth of freedom"—is to reflect again on the legacy of slavery, the power of an African-American voice, and continued inequalities related to race, gender, sexuality and class. Ligon asks the viewer of his artwork to read between the lines, to understand how an appalling period in this nation's history intersects with contemporary details, past sufferings and centuries of oppression.

THE
LIFE AND ADVENTURES

of

GLENN LIGON

A NEGRO;

WHO WAS SENT TO BE EDUCATED AMONGST
WHITE PEOPLE IN THE YEAR 1966 WHEN
ONLY ABOUT SIX YEARS OF AGE AND HAS
CONTINUED TO FRATERNIZE WITH THEM
TO THE PRESENT TIME.

NEW YORK
PRINTED BY BURNET EDITIONS
corner of Greenwich and Desbrosses Streets

1993

A RESPONSIBILITY TO THE PAST

Kimberly Rae Connor '79, Ph.D.
Half Moon Bay, California

The artist Glenn Ligon credits many writers for his inspiration, but among them all American writer James Baldwin looms especially large. Baldwin's cultivated outsider stance, his dual exclusion as a gay and a black man, and especially his appreciation of the role history plays in identity development are all traits that also characterize Ligon. Citing Baldwin as an influence in a 1997 interview with fellow contemporary artist Byron Kim, Ligon quotes from Baldwin's *A Rap on Race* with cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead: "You and I are history. We carry our history. We act our history." Taking Baldwin's assertion to heart, Ligon admits, "I really do believe that we have a responsibility to the past." The slave narrative etchings on exhibit in Schmucker Art Gallery illustrate the artist's sense of responsibility to history. Given my own identity, the rap on race between a black man and a white woman parallels my engagement with the artist and extends through to the responsibility to the past that I claim as a financial aid heir of Gettysburg College.

I graduated from Gettysburg College in 1979 as an English major, but during my education I was never required to read James Baldwin or any other writer of color. I didn't give that absence in the curriculum much thought and earnestly followed my philosophy professor's advice to study abroad after graduation where I extended my literary studies and added religious studies while still reading only dead white men. After arriving at the University of Virginia to continue my education in religion and literature, I was immediately aware of how the very site exuded a sense of racial mystery and thus the inexorable happened: a gifted teacher introduced me to neglected books that started to unpack that mystery. Before I knew it I changed the topic of my dissertation from a twentieth-century European white male poet of spare verse and a slightly conservative tilt to seven reforming nineteenth- and twentieth-century African-American women writers of extended narratives. This shift, however, would not have been possible without the education I received at Gettysburg College.

While I am delighted that the current curriculum at Gettysburg College reflects the progress academia has made in recognizing the talent and skill of writers of color, I don't hold Gettysburg accountable for not originally providing me with a sufficient perspective on the diversity of American literature. With access to information growing infinitely exhaustive, we cannot expect an education to encompass everything we should know. Rather, we expect it to develop our curiosity and to provide us the analytical and creative tools to go out and explore our worlds. Gettysburg College didn't teach me specifically about African-American art and literature, but it prepared me to care about it, to want to learn more about it, and to spend my career telling others what I knew. Eventually, my explorations into African-American narratives led me inevitably to the study of slavery and the College's role in the abolitionist movement, so poignantly related to the slave narratives Glenn Ligon examines in exercising his responsibility to history.

In 2002, while writing an essay on *Cloudsplitter*, Russell Banks's magnificent novel about abolitionist John Brown, I came across a reference to Daniel Alexander Payne's 1888 memoir, *Recollections of Seventy Years*. Payne, an African-American bishop and college president, makes a case for educating African Americans and points out how limited opportunities were at this time. But, he does mention a few "educational institutions accessible to us," one of which was in Gettysburg. I wrote to Karen Drickamer, then the Director of Special Collections and College Archives at Gettysburg College, and asked where I could find more information on the role the College played in admitting African-American students. She and archivist Christine Amaduri gently corrected me; Bishop Payne had attended Gettysburg Theological Seminary, not what was then Pennsylvania College. Still, Amaduri and Drickamer admitted that the school did not have "a lot of the kind of information that you are seeking," but nonetheless sent along some documents related to my query that she thought I might find interesting.

What the Gettysburg archivists sent was a small but fascinating sample of the kind of patchwork archival work that slowly and carefully begins to build a narrative, in the same way Ligon's slave narrative title pages slowly build an identity. The documents included a history of the seminary that mentioned in 1935 a "colored student, Daniel A. Payne, from Charleston, South Carolina, entered the Seminary and there was no discrimination against him."

The documents also included an article published thirty years after Payne's admittance to the seminary, a clipping from a May 1964 edition of the *Gettysburgian*. The newspaper reported students' efforts to raise money to sponsor "Negro transfer students," an event which was preceded by an editorial several days earlier, also in the college newspaper, arguing "the case for integration." The article is wise and prescient and makes a good faith effort to identify the reasons behind Gettysburg College's lack of diversity and to recommend ways to redress the problem, including a pitch to support the fundraiser that would bring African-American students from the South to Gettysburg College. The student author, Donna Gillespie writes, "This student body needs to be revitalized, and a step in the right direction is a joint effort (administration, faculty, and student body) to bring to Gettysburg a student body whose ethnic and sociological background will contribute to the expansion of the scope of our liberal arts community."

A 1976 memo from the Faculty Executive Committee at the College to all faculty and administration, however, does not report much improvement on the "recruitment and retention of black students, faculty members, and administrators." The report documents the College's efforts to be intentional and active in minority recruitment, yet it only presents information; it is more tentative than the student editorial from a decade earlier and does not draw conclusions about the small presence of people of color at the College (and curiously only mentions "black" students, not any other ethnic population).

By 1991 the College articulated its relationship to African-American history in a series of events commemorating the dedication of an historical marker dedicated to Alexander Payne. The *Historical Portrait Collection*, a project of the Intercultural Resource Center curated for the dedication, described the history of African-American students at Gettysburg and recognized that history as beginning with Alexander Payne. The exhibition also featured Samuel Schmucker,

Folks and Places Abroad

Being an account of the life, travels and opinions of Glenn Ligon,
and his estrangement from his place of birth
for the crime of wearing a colored skin.

"I had no nation now but the imagination."
-Derek Walcott

"The very idea of America makes me shake,
it makes me tremble, it gives me nightmares."
-Josephine Baker

PUBLISHED FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE FUGITIVE

1993

BLACK LIKE ME
OR.
THE AUTHENTIC NARRATIVE
OF
GLENN LIGON

A BLACK MAN,

To which is added testimonials from individuals and
institutions on the veracity of his account

PREPARED FROM A STATEMENT OF FACTS
TAKEN FROM HIS OWN LIPS

TO THE PUBLIC,

A coloured gentleman, Mr. Glenn Ligon, purposed to visit your city for the purpose of exhibiting his splendid PANORAMA, or MIRROR OF OPPRESSION. I have had the pleasure of seeing it, and am prepared to say, from what I have myself seen, and known in times past, of oppression, in my opinion, it is almost, if not quite, a perfect fac simile of the workings of that horrible and fiendish system. The real *life-like* scenes presented in this PANORAMA, are admirably calculated to make an unfading impression upon the heart and memory, such as no lectures, books, or colloquial correspondence can produce, especially on the minds of children and young people. If you can spare the time to witness the exhibition, I am quite certain you will feel yourselves amply rewarded. I know very well there are a great many impostors and cheats going about through the country deceiving and picking up the people's money, but *this* is of another class altogether.

Yours, very truly,
A WHITE PERSON

New York:

PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR BY BURNET EDITIONS

1993

for whom Schmucker Hall is named, as playing an important role in that black history as an abolitionist, just like John Brown, the man whose life story brought me back to Gettysburg in symbolic and actual ways.

Before he was executed, John Brown spent days in a jail cell in Charles Town, West Virginia. In a cosmic bit of symmetry, my father, Don Bowers, the unwitting benefactor of the art on display, also spent a night in the Charles Town courthouse jail, protesting what he believed was an illegal speed trap that caught him on his way to Shenandoah Downs to bet on the races. The small sum left over from his gambling habit that he left to me and my siblings is what I used to acquire the Ligon lithographs; a gambler's love of risk carried on in my willingness to take a risk on a then-not-well-known artist whose work I loved.

The fact that the racetrack winnings of my father, a Korean War, *Stars and Stripes* trained journalist who retired as executive producer of a network news program, helped promote the career of an artist who reveres the written word as much as he did is an irony my father would appreciate (if not this run-on sentence). That Glenn Ligon's work would eventually hang in the Obama White House, however, my dad would see not as the result of a fortunate bet, but as the foreseeable outcome for an artist who, like the Fourth Estate at its best, uses the power of language to inform and inspire. In that spirit, I'd like to take Booker T. Washington's advice to prepare viewers for the exhibition by telling a story. This story highlights the ironies attendant to any study of race in America and illustrates the remarkable strategies and techniques African-American artists have developed to interpret and live in this irony.

At the University of Virginia I defended my dissertation in an eighteenth-century rotunda designed by Thomas Jefferson, a man whose influence is evident everywhere and often on campus. One can hardly spit tobacco without hitting a statute of Jefferson on the Grounds, and nearly every speech an administrator gives on a significant occasion includes a Jeffersonian quote. The first students who enrolled at the university in 1819 were white and male; many brought their slaves with them. I enrolled in 1982, only 25 years after women and African Americans were admitted as students. I was also there when one of the African American students who had been denied entry to the law school was inaugurated the nation's first elected African-American governor since Reconstruction.

One of Douglas Wilder's first acts as governor actually functions as a clever interplay of word and image, not unlike Glenn Ligon's approach in the narrative pages. That act was to hang in his Governor's office a portrait of Virginian George Mason, who refused to sign the Constitution he helped write because it did not abolish slavery. A man is remembered in image for the words he wrote and wouldn't write.

My time in Virginia also overlapped with the controversy of Sally Hemmings' intimate connection to Jefferson. Mounting DNA evidence led the Jefferson descendants divided over whether or not to allow Hemmings descendants to be buried in the family plot on the grounds of Monticello. And it was at Monticello where I witnessed my self-proclaimed literary "briar patch uncle" slay a dragon, African-American style.

I met Tuskegee Airman, bassist, novelist, jazz and social critic Albert Murray when I was managing editor for *Callaloo*, a UVA sponsored journal of African-American arts and letters. When distinguished visitors like Murray came to town, one of my jobs was to be their escort. Murray had just had some minor back surgery and was walking with a cane at the time, and although in his 70s he was far from infirm; there was nothing feeble about his body or his mind.

It was Murray's idea to go to Monticello. He admired Jefferson, and after receiving a gift from the university of a Jefferson cup, a small pewter drinking vessel Jefferson conceived that is so functional and elegant it has become iconic (and also the commencement gift of choice for graduating students), Murray was curious about the home of the man who put so much thought and consideration into designing a small item for domestic use, among other achievements. What's important here is detail and beauty: Murray paid attention to both when he admired the cup and its maker.

In the 1980s, when one toured Jefferson's home, one seldom, if ever, heard the guides say "slave." Archeologists had just begun excavating Mulberry Row, the site of the slave cabins, and tours were only recently beginning to include commentary about slave life on the plantation. Yet when guided through the house, docents would describe those who labored for Jefferson as "servants." As we moved through the house, I noticed that Mr. Murray's reaction to each iteration of "servant," grew increasingly vocal and visible, from a low throat clear to a deep cough and arm swing to a palm cupped over his ear, giving the impression that he was an old man hard of hearing, eventually to the image of him leaning on his cane and exclaiming "excuse me?"

It took the docent a while to notice that his disruptions were cued to her use of "servant" to describe Jefferson's slaves. Finally, after yet another use of "servant," Mr. Murray summoned all the respect due to him for infirmity and age, loudly repeated the line back to the docent and followed "servant," with, "and how much did they get paid?"

And so the power shifted, and the story had a new protagonist narrating events. We went from sitting in the balcony to sitting on the porch. The docent demurred and agreed that "slave" was a more accurate description, but defended the use of "servant" as "Mr. Jefferson's preferred term," a specious claim that only further indicted the real sinner in the room, the man of honor and slaveholder, Mr. Jefferson himself.

Rather than launching into a pedantic lecture or coming unglued in a rant, Mr. Murray, as he might say, stomped the blues; that's the way a brother slays a dragon. He brushed it off, like Obama, who has Jay-Z on his iPod; he used a little style and sass that signified the absurdity of the docent's pointless use of "servant" to sanitize a role we all knew could never be cleaned. While remaining utterly dignified, he got his point across and had fun, too. While driving home I asked Mr. Murray about his actions and he smiled and said, "Honey, you can't slay a dragon with a formula."

The next time I returned to Monticello, the docents were no longer saying "servant;" they were saying "slave." Whether or not Monticello changed its script because of Mr. Murray's performance, I'll never know; just as we cannot attribute with any certainty or accuracy the abolition of slavery to the publication of slave narratives. But I do know *now* how to appreciate a mythic challenge when I see one, and it looks a lot like Mr. Murray at Monticello. That experience led me to recognize the same dragon-slaying genius at work in Glenn Ligon's art. Just as Murray turned his tour of Monticello into an improvised riff on the head tune of race, Ligon's series of autobiographical works attempt to slay, or at least tame, the dragon of race by claiming agency over his identity. Just as Murray quietly insisted on the naming, and the right to name the role servants played at Monticello, so Ligon builds to cumulative effect the journey of a man claiming authority over his own voice.

Ligon achieves his goal by breaking down the careless use of language that unnecessarily and unnaturally orders identity by unsustainable categories like race, gender, orientation, and so forth. Instead, he ignores the distractions of the present and turns to the past for clarity. The artist points us toward the writers whose words provide a source for ongoing moral reflection on the human condition and for aesthetic analysis of how we image humanity and construct identities. A word for all this—for Murray's blues and Ligon's prints—is *textimony*: the stylized performance of testimony.

Textimony aptly describes the approach of a visual artist who uses text and a literary tradition; Ligon gets us to *read* by first asking us to *see*, sparking our imagination so that the viewer wants more than the sound bite: one wants the epic. Ligon is but one of the most recent in a long line of artists referring to the slave narrative tradition, such as Anthony Davis's opera *Amistad*, choreographer Alvin Ailey's *Revelations* and Julie Dash's film *Daughters of the Dust*, among many others. Creators in diverse genres have drawn on imaginative, symbolic, and creative language, expressed in a variety of modes, to relate their own concrete conditions to the cause of liberation by referencing slavery and sought inspiration and ideas from the historical example.

A COLORED MAN ROUND THE WORLD

OR

A STRANGER

IN THE

VILLAGE

BY

Glenn Ligon

BEING AN ACCOUNT OF THE SUNSHINE AND SHADOWS OF THE
AUTHOR'S JOURNEYS AMONG THE OTHER PEOPLES OF THE WORLD.

Where is my rest place, Jesus? Where is my harbour?
Where is the pillow I will not have to pay for,
and the window I can look from that frames my life?
-Derek Walcott

PUBLISHED FOR THE AUTHOR

1993

In turn, the work they create reveals the transformative potential of the artistic process. These experiential testimonies, when shaped by imagination, become *textimonies*. *Textimony* is the script of liberation performed; it is language that swings, even as it hangs on a gallery wall.

Always motivating the performance, however, no matter the stylistic technique, is the need to witness, to testify to a reality still characterized by elements that remain unchanged since slavery. One can situate Ligon's art—in form and function—in the context of two principles, one by Frederick Douglass, the other from novelist Toni Morrison, that have guided my scholarship on the slave narrative tradition. Both index slavery as a moral touchstone and a practical guide. In describing his fugitive state, Douglass insisted to his reader “to understand it one must experience it or imagine himself in similar circumstances.” He then proceeded to write the narrative that would invite readers to imagine his experience in the hopes that it would evoke an empathetic response to support the cause of abolition.

Over a hundred years later, Morrison offered an observation in an interview she gave not long after publishing *Beloved*, her prize-winning novel set in slavery. Morrison supported Douglass's principle by applying it to an interpretation of the process that led her to imagine life in slavery. Morrison writes: “The past is, it's a living thing, it's this relationship between ourselves and our personal history and our racial history, and our national history that sometimes gets made sort of distant. But if you make it into a person, then it's an inescapable confrontation.”

This kind of identification by way of confrontation is what Ligon urges on his viewer, not with didactic fury but with elegant persuasion; he references the great minds of the past to comment on where we are now. He adds another chapter to our collection of *textimony* as the record of the many ways we perform the telescopic storytelling that is history.

From works that identify Ligon by how others describe him, to works that reveal increasing degrees of self-definition without anonymity or the endorsement of a prevailing authority, Ligon creates a series of overlapping narratives of self, illuminating the complicated and shifting nature of human identity. In the process Ligon raises new explorative questions while paying homage to African and several African-American aesthetic traditions. While his technical proficiency and recognition of the formal possibilities of manipulating text as image demonstrate his position in a post-modern aesthetic, his very use of text as image and the inseparability of genres of expression derive from traditional African worldviews.

In addition to citing literary influences, Ligon's work alludes to other aesthetic traditions in black culture, such as protest movements and folk art. Creating art out of what they found and often responding to the movement of the spirit within, these “ordinary” artists carried on a tradition in which aesthetic sensibility was informed more by an African perspective of unity than a Western consciousness of duality. These artists made beauty out of everyday objects—in pottery, textiles, wood carvings, iron work, architecture, and funeral monuments—and further demonstrated that the creative spirit can indeed manipulate context to serve a creative and moral purpose. Glenn Ligon's work shares in this same spirit of the everyday, but uses advertisements and scraps of text as his source material.

By imitating slave narrative title pages, Ligon has found an alternative strategy for storytelling that goes back to a traditional American literary genre and recasts this form as a sacralized representation. He fills in the gaps of memory that would separate us from these forgotten and partially concealed narratives. And the prints he creates depend on narratives, both in an actual sense of derivation of form and a thematic sense of content. By moving slave narratives from the library to the gallery, Ligon creates a special hermeneutic that enables us to understand the narratives buried in ostensibly non-narrative images. From Ligon's work we see that not only do actions say things, words do things, a foundational tenet of speech act theory and a guiding principle of contemporary civic rhetoric.

Outside of the found or folk art tradition, the academic tradition of African-American art was largely ambivalent about slavery and its representation. But around 1960 a gathering of artists led by Romare Bearden and inspired by the Civil Rights Movement began articulating the role the artist plays in addressing social conditions that emerged from the experience of slavery. They named their group “Spiral,” to denote progress, and created this forum to force “recognition of aesthetic aspirations and problems related to African-American artists’ search for identity.” As a group they never quite succeeded in accomplishing their goal of generating a specific definition or articulation of a black aesthetic because they could not overcome the diverse viewpoints that reflected a twin dynamic characteristic of African-American public experience and private needs. Should art uplift and ennoble the race and treat topics specific to the African-American community, or should it be broad and inclusive enough to accommodate European and other influences and the idiosyncrasies of creative genius?

In their search for an identifying style, these artists agreed that art should not be limited to black subject matter, but beyond this they came no closer to resolving the African-American identity crisis than W. E. B. Du Bois did when he formulated the notion of a “double-consciousness.” Between these poles of African and American, between essential and socio-cultural constructs of self, is where African-American artists like Glenn Ligon continue to find themselves.

Squarely positioned in the African-American discourse on representation and identity, Ligon’s art calls for a response from the viewing public. Between thing and concept, between reality and imagination, and between icon and word, Ligon reaches toward and personalizes the unknown or unfamiliar. He reveals others to be just like him or just like us, because of the essential narrative way we image humanity and in spite of the complicated contexts from which our identities emerge. In the process he achieves something akin to what Frederick Douglass and other slave narrators accomplished: he gives us a point of entry into the experience of history that makes it real and relevant and, most of all, our responsibility.

ARPS GRIMMAGE

TO MY

MOTHER'S LAND

AN INTERESTING ACCOUNT OF A JOURNEY
AMONG THE PEOPLE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
IN THE YEAR 1976

WRITTEN BY HIMSELF.

Embracing remembrances of four days spent in a motel
in Darlington, South Carolina with sixty of the Author's relatives
and the various adventures that befell them.

NEW YORK

1993

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Shannon Egan, Ph.D.
Director, Schmucker Art Gallery

It has been a great pleasure to welcome Glenn Ligon's remarkable work into the Gettysburg College collection, and I am especially grateful for Kimberly Rae Connor's benevolence in offering students and faculty at Gettysburg College an extraordinary opportunity to engage with this important contribution to contemporary art and African-American history. Not only has Dr. Connor donated the prints to the College, she also has provided the insightful essay in this catalogue and is sharing her scholarship and insights on Ligon's work in a symposium organized to accompany the exhibition. Other lecturers include Scott Hancock, Associate Professor of History and Africana Studies, Gettysburg College, and Crystal Feimster, Assistant Professor of African American Studies and American Studies and History, Yale University, and I am indebted to them for responding without hesitation to our invitation to join this panel.

This exhibition, publication and symposium represent a collaborative effort by a number of people, and I extend my sincere appreciation to Dr. Connor as well as many other faculty, administrators and staff at Gettysburg College. I thank Carolyn Sautter, Director of Special Collections and College Archives, Musselman Library and Veronica Haskins, Major Giving Officer, for their initial enthusiasm and support in welcoming this gift. Glenn Ligon's *Narratives* are particularly relevant to the recent conversations and momentous events taking place to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the American Civil War, the Emancipation Proclamation, the Battle of Gettysburg, and the Gettysburg Address. For their acknowledgment of the significance of this gift to Gettysburg College at this time, I thank the three co-Chairs of the 150th Committee, Peter Carmichael, Director of the Civil War Institute and Robert C. Fluhrer Professor of Civil War Studies; Michael Birkner, Franklin Professor of the Liberal Arts and Professor of History; and Jane North, Executive Vice President, as well as Katie Barako, Special Projects Coordinator, President's Office, and all the members of this committee. The exhibition and symposium are supported in part by the Civil War Institute at Gettysburg College, and I am always so appreciative of the tremendous collaborative interest from Prof. Carmichael and Jill Oglive Titus, Associate Director of Civil War Institute, as well as the thorough administrative support of Diane Brennan. I am also grateful to Jennifer Bloomquist, Associate Professor and Program Director of Africana Studies, for her encouragement of this exhibition and the support of the Africana Studies Program. At Schmucker Art Gallery, I am appreciative for the encouragement of the Gallery Advisory Committee and the tireless work of Karen Eskildsen and Selwyn Ramp, Gallery Preparator. Many thanks are due to Caroline Burghardt, Director of Publications and Archives at Luhring Augustine, New York, for granting permission from the artist and Anita Duquette, Manager, Rights & Reproductions at the Whitney Museum of American Art, for providing images for this catalogue. The beautiful graphic design for this catalogue and related promotional materials are provided by Ayumi Yasuda.

GLENN LIGON

Born in the Bronx, New York in 1960, Glenn Ligon received a BA from Wesleyan University (1982) and attended the Whitney Museum Independent Study Program (1985). He has received numerous awards, including the United States Artists Fellowship (2010); Joyce Alexander Wein Artist Prize from the Studio Museum in Harlem (2009); Skowhegan Medal for Painting (2006); John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship (2003); Joan Mitchell Foundation Grant (1998); and Visual Artist Fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts (1989, 1991). His works are in the public collections of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Philadelphia Museum of Art; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum; Tate Modern; Walker Art Center; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, among others. Monographs of Ligon's work include *Glenn Ligon: AMERICA* published by the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; *Yourself in the World: Selected Writings and Interviews* published by Yale University Press, New Haven, CT; *Glenn Ligon – Some Changes* published by the Power Plant, Toronto; *Glenn Ligon: Unbecoming* published by the ICA Philadelphia; and *Coloring: New Work* by Glenn Ligon published by the Walker Art Center. Glenn Ligon lives and works in New York City.

KIMBERLY RAE CONNOR '79

Kimberly Rae Connor received her B.A. from Gettysburg College in English in 1979, graduating Magna Cum Laude, an M.A. in Literature and Theology from the University of Bristol, England, and an M.A. and Ph.D. in Religious Studies from the University of Virginia. She is currently Associate Professor in the Department of Public and Nonprofit Administration and Director of Interdisciplinary Studies, is a greatly admired author and teacher of social and leadership ethics, religion, and literature, with academic focus on African American religious life and cultural production. Professor Connor published two well-received books, *Conversions and Visions in the Writings of African American Women* and *Imagining Grace: Liberating Theologies in the Slave Narrative Tradition*, and the later was selected by Choice Magazine as an outstanding academic title. Dr. Connor integrates her own research into her coursework, urging students to see from various cultural, religious and philosophical perspectives, helping them develop into more mindful, tolerant leaders and advocates of social justice. She has also worked as an instructor for the Online Refugee Education Project of the Jesuit Commons in Dzaleka, Malawi and Kakuma, Kenya.

IMAGES: Glenn Ligon, *Narratives*, 1993, suite of 9 photo-etchings with chine collé, 28 x 21 in. Gift of Kimberly Rae Connor '79, Special Collections/Musselman Library, Gettysburg College. Courtesy of the artist, Luhring Augustine, New York, and Regen Projects, Los Angeles. Courtesy of the Whitney Museum of American Art, N.Y. Digital Images © Whitney Museum of American Art.

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GLENN LIGON: NARRATIVES

JANUARY 23 – MARCH 8, 2014

SYMPOSIUM:

FEBRUARY 21, 2014, 3:30-5 PM, MARA AUDITORIUM

Presentations by

Kimberly Rae Connor '79, Associate Professor and Director of
Interdisciplinary Studies, School of Management, University of San Francisco

Crystal Feimster, Assistant Professor of American Studies & African
American Studies, Yale University

Scott Hancock, Associate Professor of History and Africana Studies,
Gettysburg College

RECEPTION:

FEBRUARY 21, 5-7 PM, SCHMUCKER ART GALLERY

Gettysburg
COLLEGE

300 North Washington Street
Schmucker Hall
Gettysburg, Pennsylvania 17325

Schmucker Art Gallery
