



Glenn Ligon

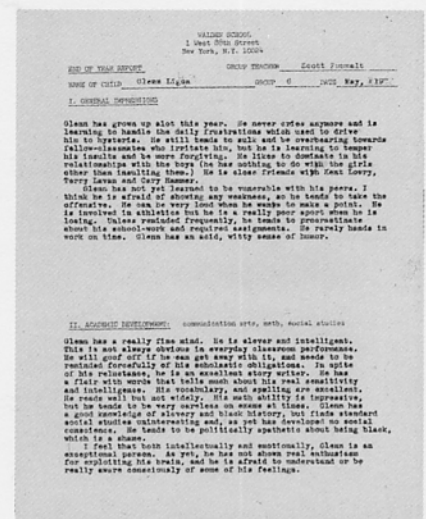
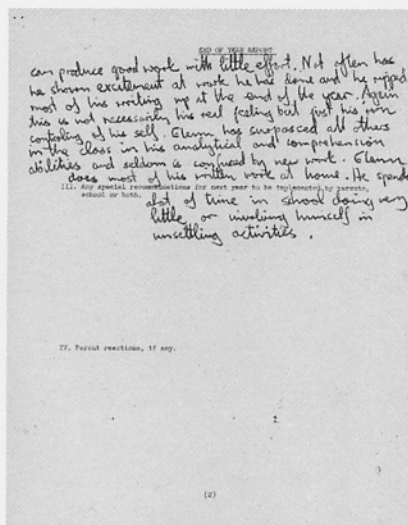
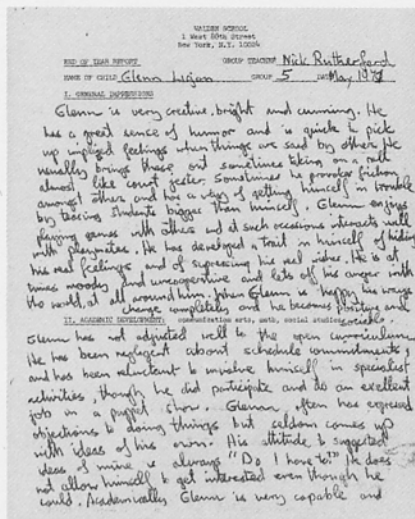
Circa 1971, '72, or '73



Dieu Donne Lab Grant Program: Glenn Ligon  
Circa 1971, '72 or '73  
October 28 - December 23, 2004

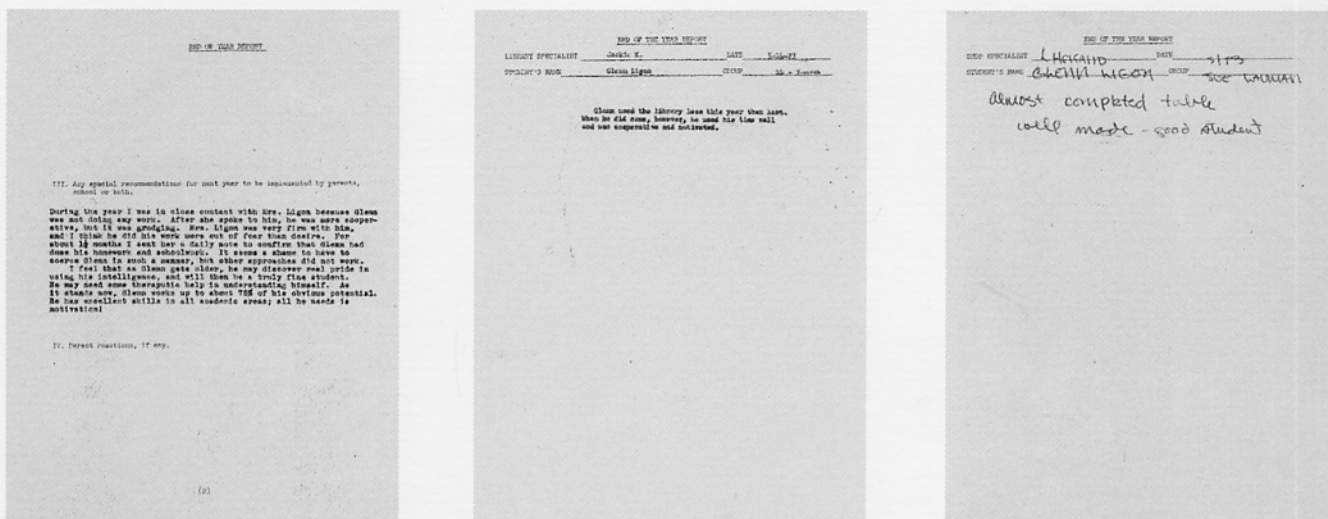
Glenn Ligon (GL) is a 2003 recipient of Dieu Donne Papermill's Lab Grant Residency for mid-career artists. Over the course of his residency, Ligon collaborated with Dieu Donne Studio Director, Megan Moorhouse, to create two editions: End of Year Reports, 2003 and Self Portrait at Eleven Years Old, 2004. The first is a suite of eight prints on handmade paper that recreate the artist's grade school report cards. The second is a pulp painted image of Stevie Wonder, titled as a self portrait to reference the artist's identification with his childhood musical hero.

For this publication, Dieu Donne asked Brett Littman (BL), Deputy Director of P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, a Museum of Modern Art affiliate, and the Managing Director of [wps1.org](http://wps1.org), P.S.1's internet radio station, to conduct an email interview with the artist. As an art critic and as the former Co-Director of Dieu Donne from 2001 - 2003, Littman has a keen perspective on both Ligon's work and the unique collaborative situation presented to him at Dieu Donne.



- BL I remember that when we first met at Dieu Donn  we talked about literature (Winfried Georg Sebald's Austerlitz?). What are you reading now?
- GL I recently read Jos  Saramago's *The Cave*, Italo Calvino's *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, *A Short History of the Shadow* by Victor Stoichita, Oliver Sacks' *An Anthropologist on Mars* and the novel *Solaris* by Stanislaw Lem. All of this is research for a video and a painting project based on a short story by Hans Christian Andersen called *The Shadow*, which is about a writer whose shadow disappears, only to come back years later and take over his life. The main character in the Andersen tale does not recognize his shadow. That moment when the self is unrecognized, the notion of being a stranger to oneself, is what I want to explore in the two projects.
- BL Shadows are very contradictory. It seems that in popular culture we envision the shadow as signaling something ominous – like the killer in *Halloween* coming through the woods or Freddy Krueger sneaking up behind someone. On the other hand Balinese shadow puppets and hand shadows are comforting to children and seeing one's shadow can often be reassuring. Do you feel that shadows implicitly represent a disjunction between the self and the other? Are they the representation of form without substance?
- GL It is precisely that ambiguous line between self and other that I am interested in. The shadow has been represented as a projection of a malevolent inner self (as in the movie *Nosferatu*) and as a container of the soul, the loss of which is a loss of self. The shadow not only represents a disjunction between the self and the other, it represents an estrangement of the self from the self.
- BL Do you feel that we all have this malevolent shadow inside of us? Does this shadow act as a stand-in for bellicosity, anger, misunderstanding, self-abnegation, and racism? Also, I was just rereading your article "Black Light: David Hammons and Poetics of Emptiness" in the last *Artforum*. I am trying to understand the concept of "reconciling the desire to be from nowhere, to have no identity and





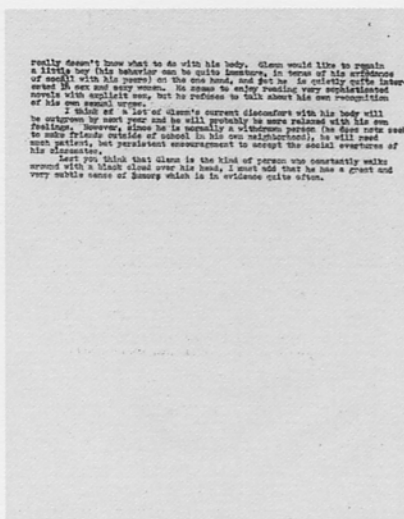
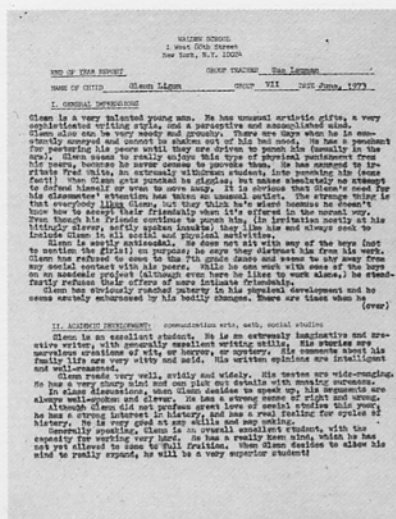
no personality, with the desire to make light ‘very black,’ when black is suggestive of a particular history, culture, and practices?” Could you explain this a little more?

GL No, I am not suggesting that the shadow is always a figure of malevolence. I want to pose a more nuanced reading of it. One of the things that interests me in David Hammons’ work is that he is fascinated by light—both by its absence and its presence—and has made several pieces that deal with this theme. What Hammons is trying to do is reconcile the desire to make dematerialized art objects and minimal environments with the desire to locate those objects and environments within specific cultural practices. In other words, what makes an empty, dark room that Hammons entitles *Concerto in Black and Blue* a space that is “very black” as opposed to merely “dark”? What I suggest in the article is that one of the ways he does that is through language. What we bring to the space in relation to the words “black” and “blue” is what makes the space “very black.”

BL Thanks for the clarification. I think that I understand your point, and maybe the contrast between James Turrell and Hammons that you pose in the essay is the way to understand how Hammons’ work deals with “very black” light by taking Turrell’s concern with the viewer’s activation of the space and the viewer’s perceptions of the space and adding into the mix questions of race and culture.

To shift gears a little, your new editions produced by Dieu Donné, *Self Portrait at Eleven Years Old*, 2004 and *End of Year Reports*, 2003 seem to mine not only your personal history but also your identification with pop culture icons (i.e. Stevie Wonder). I think that Megan Moorhouse, Dieu Donné’s Studio Director, mentioned to me that you are going to continue the idea of “self portraits” of other pop icons. What do you hope to explore in this series?

GL Remember when you were a kid and one album or a song seemed to speak directly to your soul? The singer seemed to have made the record just for you. And you lived intensely in that album or song



for a while, playing it everyday, buying posters of the singer, dressing like him or her, imitating his or her singing style in the bathroom mirror. That singer's image was your image and that is what the series of drawings and the print at Dieu Donn   is about. I am trying to remember what singers I was into when I was younger and I am doing drawings of a singer to correspond to every year of my life. The list varies widely, from Stevie Wonder and Michael Jackson to David Bowie and Jessye Norman. It is about how you can become so intensely identified with pop culture figures that they become part of how you see yourself in the world.

BL I remember wanting to dress and act like Sting (from the early Police albums) when I was 13. A little later it was Bowie from the Station to Station album. Are you interested in the uneasy relationship between what is classified as high and low art?

GL I think that all those distinctions between high and low have lost their potency. The high is the low, and vice versa.

BL Are you interested in process in your work? I imagine that working with handmade paper is very different than painting or working with photography. Was there anything specific that you learned or experienced at Dieu Donn  ?

GL The difference between my studio practice and working with Dieu Donn   is that in the studio it's just me. Working with Dieu Donn   was much more collaborative because the technical aspects of the medium were new to me and I relied on the staff to figure out how to make things work. While I am used to endless revisions in the studio, I was much more conscious of getting my ideas to a certain level of polish before I presented them to Dieu Donn  . Overall, it was incredibly easy, which is not the usual process for me. I have fifty more ideas for projects I want to do with them.

BL When I was at Dieu Donn   I was always happy to see artists learning to work collaboratively with the

studio staff. In my mind, hand papermaking is taking discrete materials (pulp, water, pressure) and making them into something that is cohesive and whole through the interaction of the artist and the papermaker.

One last question, I want to ask you how you would define collaboration? Have you ever collaborated with another artist or writer? I have been doing a lot of research into collaborative art and design groups and have really had a hard time getting a handle on what true collaboration is. Often I feel that what is presented as collaborative is the layering of ideas or a record of a client/fabricator relationship of compromise rather than a true synthesis of styles.

GL Well, there seem to be two kinds of collaborations: one of an artist collaborating with another artist and one of an artist collaborating with a technician or workshop. The distinction I would make between the two is that collaborations between artists, if they work, are about inhabiting each others' concerns, about creating something that is a hybrid, not quite one artist or the other. With a workshop it is more about translating ideas an artist has into a new media, with the workshop not only supplying the technical knowledge to execute a vision but also suggesting avenues that the artist might not ever have gone down. I have done both kinds of collaboration but I think the collaborations I have done with workshops or technicians have been most successful because the egos involved are more under control.

*This email interview was conducted from September 14 through October 5, 2004.*

#### LIST OF WORKS PRODUCED

*End of Year Reports, 2003*

suite of eight prints

published by the artist in an edition of 10 with 4 proofs

photocopy and silkscreen on pigmented cotton and abaca paper, 11 x 8 1/2 inches

paper handmade by Megan Moorhouse at Dieu Donné Papermill

printed by Luther Davis at Axelle Editions, Brooklyn, NY

*Self Portrait at Eleven Years Old, 2004*

published by Dieu Donné Papermill in an edition of 20 with 13 proofs

cotton base sheet with stenciled linen pulp painting, 36 x 30 inches

collaborator: Megan Moorhouse assisted by Rachel Gladfelter

Glenn Ligon [b. 1960, Bronx, New York] is a painter who lives and works in New York. Ligon received his BA in 1982 from Wesleyan University and completed the Whitney Museum Independent Study Program in 1985. He has since had solo exhibitions at institutions including Dia Center for the Arts, New York, NY; The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY; Regen Projects, Los Angeles, CA; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN; St. Louis Art Museum, St. Louis, MO; ArtPace, San Antonio, TX; and the Brooklyn Museum of Art, Brooklyn, NY. Ligon received a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship in 2003, a Joan Mitchell Foundation Grant in 1997, a National Endowment for the Arts award in painting in 1991, and an N.E.A. award in drawing in 1989. This Lab Grant Residency marks his first work in handmade paper.



Founded in 1976, Dieu Donne Papermill, Inc. is a non-profit artist workspace dedicated to the creation, promotion, and preservation of contemporary art using the hand papermaking process. In support of this mission, Dieu Donne collaborates with artists and other partners, presents exhibitions, conducts educational programs, and maintains an archive of paper art.

The Dieu Donne Lab Grant Program, initiated in 2000, provides mid-career artists with a twelve-day residency to collaborate in hand papermaking at Dieu Donne Papermill. Through this program, Dieu Donne intends to produce exciting new work with artists who have a mature vision and long-standing commitment to artistic practice, thereby raising the profile of hand papermaking as an artmaking process and breaking new ground in the field. Past participants in the program include Melvin Edwards, Jane Hammond, Jim Hodges, Dorothea Rockburne, and Robert Cottingham.

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This is issue number 6 of the Dieu Donne Lab Grant Program publication series documenting Dieu Donne's residency program for mid-career artists.

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