Aspen Art Museum presents

In Conversation: Jacqueline Humphries and Glenn Ligon

Nicola Lees (00:06):

So welcome, welcome, welcome, everybody. Thank you so much for coming. I'm actually gonna quote our chief curator, Daniel Merritt, when we open Glen's show about how Aspen's really a town that loves art, and I think that turnout is incredible. So thank you all for being here. I am Nicola Lee's, the CEO and artistic director of the Aspen Art Museum. And before the talk, I just wanna have a quick thank you to Larry and Susan Marks for the exhibition fund and for our exhibition circle and visionary circles, as well as our board and national council that really help all of this come together and happen at the Museum. Daniel Merritt, our chief curator, is gonna be doing the talk today with Glenn and Jacqueline. Couldn't be more excited and just, congratulations, Daniels. They're really incredible shows. We are so excited we have such amazing artists with us tonight, so I'll hand over. Thank you.

Daniel Merritt (01:08):

Thanks, Nicola. I'm just gonna read a little something and then we'll dive right in. (But I wanted to frame today's conversation a little bit.) So today we're celebrating four exhibitions that mark the winter season at Aspen Art Museum. On our rooftop we have Raw The Red, a sculptural Tableau by Sha Naat. This is the work's second presentation following its first showing at the Art Institute of Chicagowhere it was commissioned by Suzanne Gus and Jordan Carter. Hi Jordan. And here in Aspen, the installation turns sculptures into stand-ins for human bodies poised against powerful natural forces. And seeing the skiersbegin to descend Ajax behind the sculpture has been pretty exciting. This past week, we've had massive blizzards <laugh>, and in our lower levelwe have, and in our shop, we have an exhibition by Victoria Cole, Magna called Play Technique that examines the complexities of the young mind and the ways in which identities are forged and fractured.

(02:08):

Victoria's hand knit sweaters featuring Bacao paintings or in the museum shop, and they're pretty irresistible. So check them out after the talk. And before we get started, I just wanna thank the entire Aspen Art Museum team, but especially our exhibitions team, Christine Navin, Kevin Haney, Simone Krug, Gemma Goette, and our incomparable director, nicoise for ushering in these exhibitions with care and an adventurous spirit. And today we're honored to have Jacqueline Humphreys and Glenn Lichen in Conversation. The alchemy of the exhibitions on view at the museum within a season is one of the curatorial to team's favorite things to contemplate. And the resonances that emerged between Glenn and Jack Queen's practices have been surprising. Some elements are basic. They share a birth year, they're both New Yorkers. They use stencils, they both attended Whitney ISP—more on that in a bit—but, more broadly, they create work that's hard to see in an age of hyper visibility.

(03:10):

These are exhibitions that require long looking, reading and revisiting. Glenn and Jacqueline have cultivated practices in which everything is up for grabs, including their own artworks, which often find second, third, and fourth lives in new work. These exhibitions are lessons in art and reincarnation. As with all great artists, they're sharp observers of the world around them and know that nothing is fixed or certain. Yet, in spite of the generosity of your work, you're also not afraid to withhold, deny, or conceal, but you often do it with great humor. You're reluctant contrarians. And I think that might be a good place to start. <Laugh>. you both attended Whitney ISP in the mid 1980s, one year apart, and you were embarking on artistic practices that were pretty defiant in their core purpose and mission. You were both painters building upon and troubling art history and departing from figuration. So I guess my question for both of you to kind of kick things off is what did it mean to become an artist in opposition to the world around you?

Glenn Ligon (04:22):

<Laugh>, I heard your name. Jacqueline.

Jacqueline Humphries (04:27):

<Laugh>. Alright. Right. Is this on? Okay. you know, when I moved to New York in the eighties, I think there was more cultural valence given to oppositionality, you know, to like the punk movement and things like that. So, you know, I I think there was just, oh, I know. I always had this feeling that like, the world doesn't really want art. You kind of have to, you're forcing something into the world in a way, you know, and just thinking about all the responsibilities that come with that for, you know, honesty, complexity I'm sure there are other words that I can't think of. Right. so yeah, oppositional, I think it's like there, I mean, there's something of like a confrontation about it, right? Like, there should be like a sort of, you know, the moment of beholding an artwork should be that, you know, with a, some kind of confrontation or, you know, a moment that's special in a way. And I think you know, drama, you know, a sense of drama is always like, you're sort of putting something in the moment that's outside the norm, outside the flow of things that brings the past, that thinks about the future that, you know is, you know, presenting. Yeah. Something that makes you pause, I suppose. Your turn.

Glenn Ligon (05:59):

<Laugh>. Okay. Well, thinking about, I independent study program Whitney Museums program was very theoretically based program. So a lot of readings, tiny studios. When I applied my, we had carousels and slides and all my slides were upside down and backwards. And the committee that let me in said, don't worry about it, which was basically like, you're not gonna be a painter when you leave this program <laugh>. We're gonna beat those bad habits out of you. But I think it, what was interesting about that program, because I was started out really interested in abstract expressionist painting and in the space of that program, even though I hated it and they kicked me out literally they kicked me out.

Jacqueline Humphries (06:49):

I wanna hear all about that.

Glenn Ligon (06:50):

<Laugh>, yes, well talk all will be revealed. It gave me the possibility through looking at work like Barbara Krueger, Martha Rosler, thinking about text as a possibility within my practice. And that's not something that I certainly admired artists like that, but didn't think it had anything to do with my practice. And so in a, in a strange way, being the Whitney program allowed me to move my practice in a different, just in a way that I didn't think was gonna happen. And I was committed to painting, even though that was a program that was very, at that moment, a very anti painting. So I was trying to figure out how do I bring this content that I'm interested in, into the space of pro space of painting. So that in some ways came from the Whitney program, but then I realized I, but I'm committed to painting, so there's my problem. And the solution was just bring the content as make the content, the painting. You know,

Jacqueline Humphries (07:46):

I had a very similar experience that the other fellows got together in a group and came into my studio and told me I had stopped painting. And it was sort of like, I was like, oh, I got their attention. Like, that's interesting. You know, I was making my little monochrome paintings and, you know, Craig Owens told me I should like silk screen pictures of Rambo on them. <Laugh> one does. That's a pretty good idea. But yeah, I don't know something about like, things that grow in hostile environments that makes them strong, I guess. And, but, you know, I, whatever the case and not what matters that it was already too late for me. I was obsessed with painting. I'd spend a year in Paris looking only at painting old paintings, and, you know, I was just too far gone. And it's, but it did sort of push me to kind of rethink things and in it from a very critical point of view.

Daniel Merritt (08:38):

I mean, it's interesting thinking about hostility in the art world in the eighties and things that were really in favor and things that fell out. And we both mentioned Warhol in our conversation yesterday, Warhol someone who actually spent a lot of time in Aspen. And I think that in the eighties you both said, I mean, he was, he was on the outs and, but yet now I think he's a figure that's really integrated into your practices and in, in different ways. And I'm wondering if you could kind of talk about him as a figure who was a bit of an odd man out for you guys.

Glenn Ligon (09:14):

Well, I think, you know, for me, if you see the show upstairs, there's a lot of work that refers to Warhol, either directly. There are these two there's this piece of silver silk portraits. And I was thinking about Warhol's his 13 most wanted 1113 most wanted which were exhibited at the World's Fair in 64 in New York, and then painted over with Silver Paint <laugh>, I believe. But also a lot of my work, most of my work is me looking at something that exists in the world police mugshots other people's work and inhabiting it in a way. And I think Warhol, there's a similar sensibility there too, but also, you know, I was very interested in Warhol. Like the, one of the first shows I ever saw was Warhol's Shadow Paintings at, in Soho in whatever, '77, '78, something like that.

(10:17):

And I didn't know what those paintings were about, but I knew I was seeing something that was important and, and they stuck with me. But also I, you know, there paintings about nothing. And I thought, well, that's, you can make paintings about nothing. And I thought, oh, that's interesting. You know, <laugh> or paintings, like what you said before about that refuse a certain thing, they refuse an image, they're a shadow, but the shadow is a sort of after image from an object. So what are you looking at here? Are you, look, is it a painting of a shadow or painting of an object that's off screen and or he call those paintings disco decor. So I was like, did I miss the party? You know, <laugh> <laugh>. So all of, you know, just, he, he just because he worked in so many different kinds of ways and pushed in so many different directions, he became a way to push my paintings to, you know, and sometimes very directly like silk screening, 50 self portraits and sometimes more obliquely.

Jacqueline Humphries (11:18):

And then they really are like noir paintings, right? I think as them is very New York. But you know, the thing that, you know, pop art is new, right? But Warhol really was, you know, all of his subject matters were very much embedded in historical precedent. You know, he made portraiture and, you know, raising the question of like, you know, in contemporary portraiture, like a portrait of Marilyn, like you think about, of Velasquez's portrait of King Philip, and you're like, is this, you know, a powerful painting or is this a painting of power? And, you know, sort of like, you know, kind of walking that line and you know, tapping genres. But it's true. In the eighties, Warhol was like, really, everyone hated him. And, you know, the Plumpton Gene Stein book about Ededie came out was just really raking over the coals that he was an evil person. And, you know, so it was a bad moment for him and for paintings <laugh>. But for me, he's really a painter, you know, Warhol's, you know, conceptual painter in a way.

Daniel Merritt (12:29):

And yet, you know, there's still this overriding narrative of Warhol and his own kind of like machinic qualities as an artist. But you've also, Jacqueline kind of leaned into this idea of painting and machines, and I think you've said in the past that painting is, paintings are kind of machines for your own thoughts. And the machinic is something that I think is coursing through actually both of these exhibitions. I mean, look at the painting that we're in front of, but then also the technologies of print media thatreally inform early works by Glenn in the nineties. And I think you both kind of approach these things in very different

ways. But I'm curious in your own conversations, walking through both of your exhibitions, what you've kind of gleanedin terms of kind of the role of the mechanic in your art.

Jacqueline Humphries (13:18):

Well, I was, I also was obsessed with New York School, AB Abex, and you know, so I really liked gestural painting, and my thinking was like how to bring that kind of energy—that sort of human energy into painting—how to make gestural painting that reflects new ways that the body is made to behave like with touchscreen. Like you, the touch screens, like the first kind of like ATM touch screens were happening then, or typewriters or, you know, any number of kind the whole history of like sort of, you know, industrialization, fordism, right? Like how to kind of update painting in a way to reflect, you know, recognizable like behaviors that, you know, resulted in kind of reflecting a different kind of subjectivity. You know, in painting, I think I have a much

Glenn Ligon (14:14):

More, I guess, analog approach to painting than, than Jacqueline does because I'm using stencils. Like a lot of my early work, actually, my work now <laugh> uses letter stencils, but they're literally one letter at a time, right? Over and over again. And there are many there are much better ways to do that, much more efficient ways to do that because the technology is there, but I hold onto this stubborn handmade-ness. At the same time, they're stencils, they're not my handwriting. So there's this, when I started using stencils, I thought this is a good way to distance myself from something that the, the content of the text, you know, which is all quotations. So I wanted something that distanced me a little, but at the same time it was very handmade, you know? Yes.

Jacqueline Humphries (15:06):

Well, I think this is f***ing handmade. Yeah. <laugh> machines don't make my paintings. It's AI.

Glenn Ligon (15:12):

I know. Not that, not that, but you're, I think, much more interested in how to use the technology in service of the paintings. And I think I got stuck at a certain kind of low-end technology of the stencil.

Jacqueline Humphries (15:25):

Perhaps. Yeah, I see that. I mean, I think it's not like using technology so much as like using it to reflect on how we use tech or how technology uses us, kind of, in a way.

Glenn Ligon (15:41):

Mm-Hmm <affirmative>.

Jacqueline Humphries (15:41):

But it is sometimes hard to know, you know, like I do use computers and you know, to make stencils to make patterns and things. There's some use of AI. But there's, you know, also like there, there, I would say they're very handmade objects, but that there's, it's a sort of like a challenge, you know, of creating a tension between them.

Daniel Merritt (16:07):

But you, you used a word earlier that feels kind of inherent to our age, and it's this idea of the update being updated. And I think in both ways you kind of do that. I mean, Glenn, I think, no, but I'm thinking, I'm thinking about the way Glenn—

(16:25):

<Glenn Ligon> I'm the old operating system, <laugh>

(16:25):

<Daniel Merritt> You might that might be on the old operating system, but I think—

(16:27):

<Glenn Ligon> Phone number one <laugh>. Yeah, sorry.

(16:31):

<Daniel Merritt> But the text that you've incorporated too, I think, especially Baldwin; I mean, that was, you almost, you really informed this idea of a major update on Baldwin. Maybe it's less of a technologically concerned question, but I think by revisiting what exists in the world and incorporating it into art making, there's something, you know, really inherent to this idea of the update. And I'm curious if you feel that that's something that you're in effect?

Glenn Ligon (17:00):

It's an interesting, I wouldn't quite put it that way. I would say that similar to our discussion about Warhol and his sort of demonization in the eighties, Baldwin wasn't in favor in the eighties. Baldwin is everywhere now, but when I started working with those texts, they weren't in the space, certainly weren't in the space of art. They were things that I had gotten in my, you know, Afro-Am literature class at Wesleyan, but they weren't in the culture and the way they are now. And ISP story tiny little studios, my studio mate had done all of this reading and psychoanalytic theory, Lahan and charco and all of this, all of this stuff—which was all new material to me. And so I said, 'Ugh, this, I'm, it's all these headbanger books I'm struggling with. That's why I never talk in the seminars, 'cause I don't know what you're, what you're talking, sorry, what you're talking about. And I've been reading James Baldwin as his palette cleanser,' and my studio mate said, 'James Baldwin, who's that?' And it wasn't that she had never read James Baldwin, 'cause a lot of people hadn't read it. She'd never heard the name. And I thought in some ways that was a spark for me. It's like, oh, maybe that's my task, is to bring that important work from the past to the present by putting James Baldwin's words into the space of the paintings.

Jacqueline Humphries (18:22):

Mmm-Hmm. I love that about those works that they kind of retrieve something that's there that's not lost, but that is in a book.

Glenn Ligon (18:29):

Yeah. But it's not, wasn't present, which means now, you know, you can Google James Baldwin, he's very present, but at that moment, you know, late in the eighties, not that present. And so that was

Jacqueline Humphries (18:42):

<Crosstalk> seventies. He was very much when I was a teenager. But

Glenn Ligon (18:46):

Yeah.

Daniel Merritt (18:48):

But then I think this idea, too, Jacqueline, in some ways, it gets me thinking about your blacklight paintings. And we have a kind of mini survey of those works downstairs and, you know, those works were works that you had been wanting to make for some time and then you had the opportunity to do it.

But the way those kind of brag all of these different paths into the present, I mean your seventies childhood, the nineties, all of these different kind of generational moments in which this kind of strange idiosyncratic form kind of lives again in what might be considered a serious painting, I think is interesting. And I'm wondering if you could speak a little bit about that work, too?

Jacqueline Humphries (19:34):

I mean, I guess I was interested in like, you know, taking something and which has certain meaning, and making it mean something else. You know, like even like paint drips, you know, again, coming out of like abex—something that means, you know, sort of feckless artistic freedom and sort of insouciance in making or, you know, too busy urgently expressing something to clean up those drips or something—and then turning it into something that is very deliberate and kind of static almost. And similarly with the black light thing, it just was kind of an idea like, oh, you know, growing up with this black light posters, which were like psychedelia or, you know, Rock & Roll, you know, Jimi Hendrix or LSD which had, you know, like low, it was wasn't really a high-low for me thing, but it was like, these materials have certain associations, they're not "serious" materials. And then can you make "serious" painting with it? It was just, you know, sort of like a challenge.

Daniel Merritt (20:50):

Hmm. I mean they also, we, we wrote this in the press release and you made them in 2005, four years after 9-11, which was a kind of seismic event for many. And, and especially in your own life with your studio in lower Manhattan. And I think there was something kind of ilogaic about the work, too. And maybe as a former New Yorker, and you two as kind of like my ideal New York artist, I'm thinking about those almost as these kind of emblems of, New York City. But I'm thinking about the way the city has also informed your, your work in general. We're very lucky to have two New York artists here in Aspen showing at the same time.

(21:28):

<Jacqueline Humphries> From the south, right?

Glenn Ligon (21:31):

<Laugh> Yeah. With some southern roots back there. It's interesting. I wonder if I I think I must have been very—am—still very interested in how I'm influenced by New York, but it's not conscious, I don't think. And maybe the biggest influence is other artists, you know, the, the proximity to other artists. 'Cause There's just so many shows to see, so many artist friends in New York. And so that work seeps into my work just because I'm there. You know? I wonder if I lived somewhere else that didn't have such a robust art community, would I feel, you know, would I be a San Francisco artist in the way that Diebenkorn is to San Francisco, you know, because of quality of light? Or, it's a curious question for me. Also, New York is tough, so—

Jacqueline Humphries (22:21):

I think, I think it demands a certain kind of like, yeah, you're proving your urbanity in a certain way. Like New York, I think of like New York as like, you go, you move to New York and you're knocking on the door and the door doesn't open and you're knocking and it doesn't open and it doesn't open <laugh> LA is like—but when it does open, it's really open. LA is more like you knock on the door, it opens immediately, but then there's another door behind it. You have to knock on that one, then it opens and everyone's like, yes, yes, yes. But then there's just more doors.

Glenn Ligon (22:52):

Yeah <laughs>

Jacqueline Humphries (22:53):

Laura, you can tell us if <laughs> that's accurate.

Daniel Merritt (23:00):

Yesterday Jacqueline had an interview with, with Riley Davidson, and she made, she raised a really nice point and she phrased it really beautifully. And she said in a way you kind of, you often collaborate with your past self. And I feel like that's something that's true for both of you. And I'm thinking about this idea of revisiting, there are many forms and marks in the paintings of Jacqueline's that have recurred. I think if you look at the banners around town, there's like an extracted kind of drip that I think I just pinpointed and in one of the paintings back here. And that kind of felt like a win. But I'm curious <laugh> in some ways, what does it mean for you guys to look back? Yeah.

Glenn Ligon (23:47):

Some of it is about unfinished ideas or ideas that you didn't mind fully enough, you know? There's still some substance in there that can come out of it. And it usually takes me a while to get to that; to figure out, like, sometimes it takes me a while to figure out what the work is about. But sometimes it's like, 'oh, there was another idea in there, maybe mine that idea.' So that's part of what that kind of return is to. But also I think just some idea about the instability of art objects, you know, how people revise what they mean over and over again. You know 10 years on this painting means something different than it did when I first made it. And I'm interested in that and interested in figuring out some ways to engage with that idea or document it, you know, so those condition report prints are about kind of noticing that an artwork changes over time, conceptually, you know? But physically too: That it's not, you know—I said it in a press preview this morning—museums imagine that they keep things stable forever, you know? But that's not how art works work, you know?

Jacqueline Humphries (25:04):

I totally agree. You know, I do a lot of messing around in my studio when I'm kind of starting a body of work. And yeah, a lot of ideas sort of get out there and then don't get picked up. Or sometimes with the red paintings on the back of this installation, I made a body of work in the ni in 1995 that was very similar and, and I felt like I never finished it. You know, I moved on too quickly. And there were other things to explore there that I just, that, that it need, there needed to be more paintings to complete, you know, this idea of like, this kind of like repetition and sort of sameness or difference within sameness. So I didn't realize that that was what I was doing when I started that. But today I—you know, again, kind of like I often don't understand what I'm doing till I finish it is sort of like backing through something, like starting at the end and then ending up at the beginning in a way.

Daniel Merritt (26:06):

I'm curious if that in some ways feels like an achievement as an artist to kind of reach a certain point where you can look back: where you're not constantly fixating on a future or your own future. And I'm wondering when that felt like something that was good to do for the work to look back, because I feel so often artists are pushed to constantly be thinking about something next, or not even to think at all. Just like to, to make and was that something that was present for you from the very beginning?

Jacqueline Humphries (26:39):

I mean, I came to a point where like, I'm like, I made enough paintings now the paintings just make the paintings and you know, like I made these asky versions of paintings I already made. But they, of course, they turned out very different and bring a whole new set of associations. So it's like a weird kind of way to trick oneself into renewal. I know. Do you find that?

Glenn Ligon (26:58):

I find that I'm in—there's a distinction I make between the painting practice and other kinds of things I do in the painting practice. It's very incremental and very slow. And so it might take me a couple of years to figure out what the next step is or maybe even longer. And when I wanna do something different, I make a neon <laugh>, you know? So I have to go kind of totally sideways and do something. It's still language based, but it's a totally different way of working. I'm working with a fabricator, which I don't usually work with when I'm making the painting, so it just gets different parts of my brain working, you know, but I need that. I need to be like, 'I don't have any ideas here, so in the painting <laugh>, so, but I had something about the word America fascinates me right now, so let me figure that out,' you know? So, but it's a way to kind of, I come back to painting. Painting is the important touchstone for me. It's always part of the practice, but that sideways dip, you know—curatorial projects are like that for me, too.

Daniel Merritt (28:06):

I feel like the sideways idea has been important for you, too, Jacqueline, in a lot of ways. It's been, you, I, when you talk about the work, you know, with and kind of a knowing humor, you're like, it's the bad idea that I had to do, you know, this, this or this idea of something feeling silly or or wrong, and then not necessarily knowing how it's going to end, but then integrating it into the work anyway, and kind of dealing with it after. It feels like a, kind of like the driving force of this show in a lot of ways.

Jacqueline Humphries (28:35):

Well, I, I sort of feel like bad ideas can make really good art and good ideas can make really bad art. So <laugh> like, you can't, you can't really judge the quality of the idea until you've made the art. And what happens with like the Tesla thing is like, well, that's a bad idea and it's a little naughty or something, or it just doesn't belong and, you know, but that isn't enough to hold my interest. And then, you know, just starting to work with something and then it becomes like another formal property. And the painting, I mean, I feel like, you know, your relationship to Warhol is also very much like there's a, a deep abiding formalism in your work as well, you know? And of course, like the material engagement is the medium of how those ideas or formal ideas or, you know, even just visualizing something in your mind comes to be. Does that answer your question?

Daniel Merritt (29:30):

It does, yeah. No, I mean, it also gets me thinking about the work that's spreading across the lower level, too: the Logs. I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about that, just because it feels like kinda the most Aspen-specific thing.

Jacqueline Humphries (29:41):

So I did a show in DIA Bridge Hampton that was a black light show, and it's like DIA's smallest space. So I wanted to bring an idea of like the vastness of DIA, you know, from this little basement space. So I started using their logo, but I also madethese like 3D prints of seashells and fluorescent cast of she seashells and 3D printed digital driftwood and found driftwood and cast and fluorescent. And it sort of was like, 'oh, this is a different way to approach sites specificity' because this is like a beach community—there are the seashells on the table. And so I think just this idea of the wood pile came from like a similar place like a more, like a kind of a, gives a site specificity. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. Not that—I just think of Aspen and I don't think of seashells, I think more of like firewood or something. And then of course, then other ideas come in like, 'well, it can be look like it's burning, but it's like a sort of cold fire.' And you know, again, it sort of gained momentum as the work continued.

Daniel Merritt (30:54):

Yeah. I'm curious, you both have been here maybe for like two days together, but you've walked through each show. I kind of wanna turn it over a little bit to you both to maybe ask each other a question about your own kind of experience of making the shows here.

Glenn Ligon (31:13):

Well, I wanna know about the wall <laugh>. 'cause When I first saw the show, I was so mesmerized by the mirror reflections, but I didn't understand what I was looking a. 'Cause I thought, 'are they literally the backs of the paintings?' But that didn't make any sense because the studs are behind them. So I would've seen the studs in the reflections in the mirror

(31:37):

<Jacqueline> Mmm-hmm <affirmative>

(31:37):

<Glenn Ligon> And then, then I thought, 'oh, she did two-sided paintings'—I was totally confused, <laugh>, and I thought, 'are there 10 paintings back there?' And so I was just curious about had you done any kind of intervention like this before where the paintings have a—Daniel talked about a sort of refusal in some ways, and I love that you can't go there, but you can see them and it's like you're looking in a screen because of the mirror. And I'm just curious about how you thought through this.

Jacqueline Humphries (32:06):

So I did a show at the Wexner Center in Columbus, and you know, this is like a piece of architecture not really made that you can't hang paintings in there. They have like rims that are like narrow pizza slices, and these half walls, and there's nowhere to put a painting, really. I think, you know, Eisenman, the architect, was very deliberate that way. And it was a fascinating building. So we hung paintings like on half walls and in odd ways, there was one that was wedged up in this kind of very narrow acute angled room—like, like again, like a pizza slice—and then using studs to hang things in front of windows. And then I did a show in Greenough where I'd made this multi-panel painting during COVID with this Neiman Marcus logo on it that fit perfectly into this kind of alcove Greenough gallery, making it like a department store and asked Rachel Harrison to make a sculpture like a, of a mannequin sculpture. So, and it just has sort of, and then Stuart Shave, I did another show. Like it just kind of has like, I think this is the last one I'm gonna do, but Daniel, I decided to like bisect the room. I thought studs a wall, you can see through, you're blocking access to half the gallery. Like, 'what's back there? Do I put works back there?' And then I just came up with the idea, well I'll put other paintings you can't see behind, but then it just kind of evolved like that.

Glenn Ligon (33:34):

Yeah. Yeah. But I love that responsiveness to the space and I was just, I realized like there's a giant window here, <laugh>, so you're seeing from the outside another kind of thing that lets you see and blocks your view at the same time. Yeah.

Jacqueline Humphries (33:48):

That was kind of the origin, like that was like the sort of position of the viewer, that original position. It was outside the Museum

Glenn Ligon (33:55):

Mm-Hmm <affirmative>.

Jacqueline Humphries (33:56):

Looking in, right? And the animorphosis is sort of designed towards that point of view. So yeah, it's just paintings you can see, can't see, can't, can see differently from different angles.
(34:11):
<Glenn Ligon> Mm-hmm <affirmative>
(34:11):
<Jacqueline Humphries> So my question for you,

Glenn Ligon (34:17):
<Laugh> You don't have to ask me a question. <Laugh>

Jacqueline Humphries (34:20):
No, I'm fascinated with these drawings. Because it's really interesting that you took a painting and then turned that into a painting, to a drawing tool, in a way. And is there, do you have a sense that, is that a big part of your practice? Like it's mostly, you know, multiples, one magnificent painting...But do you make things that make things? Is that like kind of a—

Glenn Ligon (34:45):
I think it's, it's extension of what Daniel was talking about before, about re-looking at older work and rethinking it. This is a little different in that I've been trying to figure out how to make drawings that were rubbings for a long time, but didn't have a way to, I know, just couldn't figure it out. And there was an old painting that I didn't like sitting around and I was like, oh, why don't I just make drawings on top of that painting? Never intending to show the painting 'cause I didn't like the painting <laugh>. But as I made the drawings which were made with carbon water soluble carbon, they just got the painting got dirtier and dirtier. And I thought it's getting better and better <laugh>, but it's getting better and better because I'm not thinking about making it a better painting. It's just the carbon's getting onto the surface of this black and white painting and making better. But I'm not deliberate. I'm always trying in my work to make something that I'm not thinking about. 'Cause I always found that's better. But how do you not think about your work while you're making your work?

Jacqueline Humphries (35:50):
Like, the palette is often better than the painting, right?

Glenn Ligon (35:53):
Yeah, yeah.

Jacqueline Humphries (35:54):
It's like when who's taught painting, like yeah, you often see like an artist studio with a palette that is better than the painting. <Laugh>

Glenn Ligon (36:00):
Exactly. Or the paint looks better in the can than it does. You know, <laugh>, that's a Frank Stella thing. Trying to make paintings that look good, as good as the painting looks in the can, you know?

Jacqueline Humphries (36:10):
I just thought the way he took this painting that wasn't working and you like put it to work, you know, <laugh> and there, you just surprised you're like, by ruining that painting, you finished it, you know?

Glenn Ligon (36:20):

Well that's, I think, yeah, the, the, the freedom. Maybe that's one thing I've learned in my age, my old age, is that you have freedom to like ruin things, which is because there's the market pressure, there's all sorts of pressures to produce in the studio and everything has to be like perfect, you know, and can't, 'oh my God, I wasted four months and this didn't work out.' And I was like, 'mm, put it away. You'll figure something out.'

Jacqueline Humphries (36:49):

Putting things away is really good stuff.

Daniel Merritt (36:50):

<Laugh> Maybe kind of a last question before we, we open it up to the room: I feel like in the conversation we just had, the past weighs heavy actually in both of your work. And I'm thinking about, you know, the, the scars that are on this canvas come from blown up kind of deteriorating film strips. But I wouldn't really describe either of you as nostalgic artists, but I'm curious about your relationship each of you to nostalgia and when you let that in, or how you draw upon it, or how you reject it?

Jacqueline Humphries (37:34):

Again, let's go back to the eighties for a second. Like again this mythos of the New York school, right? And like, you know, this group of artists who like created downtown Bohemian culture and the way they lived and the way they looked in photographs, like the whole thing is powerful, right? And it's like hard to shake, right? Because the thing that it must be done is to, to, you know, make art in the spirit with, which maybe the thing that can't be retrieved through nostalgia is I think just nostalgia is a thing to reject completely. You know, it's a false consciousness, right? You know, nostalgia. 'cause Of course things weren't how you're imagining they were through your nostalgia, right? They're also, you know, like they make the way they make it easy. You know, like Pollock and Krasner in the photo, they make it look easy, you know, and it wasn't mm-hmm <affirmative>.

Glenn Ligon (38:34):

It's interesting to think about too, like Jacqueline talking about Warhol and my engagement with Warhol in the eighties. But I was also thinking like yeah, that was a moment when an artist that's very celebrated now, Jack Whitten for example, one of many, was not present in the galleries and museums. And so for me to be nostalgic about this moment when Warhol's producing work is to kind of not acknowledge that someone like me or someone like Jack Whitten wouldn't have been in those spaces, you know? Or they were in those spaces for a brief period and then the work disappeared. You know, everyone wants a Jack Whitten in there. You know, everybody wants a Sam Gilliam now, you know? But when I was turning into a painter, that work was not available for me to see. And so there is, you know, I guess I am nostalgic in some ways, but I also temper it with this notion of like, yeah, I have to go find some ancestors. 'cause They weren't always presented to me, you know, Warhol, I guess I took as an ancestors, but I have to take Jack Whitten as an ancestor too. But I came to Jack Whitten very late, you know,

Jacqueline Humphries (39:51):

And so did I. And I feel like with these recent shows at DIA and also at MoMA, you know, it made me sad, you know, that I and other artists had been denied you know, this art, seeing this artist work and, and the way that it should have been seen, you know, he was a missing link. In fact, I made a lot of work, a lot of drawings that, look, if you saw the one on the wall, you'd say that's a Jack Whitten drawing, because I was like trying to put the pieces together, you know, connect the historical through line during a time when painting was discounted. And all along there was Jack Whitten making this work. And so seeing the

Greek alphabet paintings at Dia and then the retrospective at MoMA, I felt like a lot of anger and, and rueful that, you know, that there was this, the cost of this to everyone was really deep and abiding. But finally we've seen these paintings presented and, you know, given their proper place and yeah, there is that, you know? Yeah. So yeah, maybe like nostalgia for the lonely artist <laugh>, like not giving up, like working in isolation. It's really quite, you know, heroic. What he did.

Daniel Merritt (41:17):

Yeah, you just closed the loop. Jacqueline. That's perfect. I'm curious if we wanna open up the room to a few questions. Thank you.