

Glenn Ligon

Early Life

- Born 1960 in the Bronx
- Divorced parents were able to raise money to send him to a prestigious independent school in Manhattan
- Attended Wesleyan University for undergraduate study

To Disembark



- 9 crates with speakers playing different sounds
- Each crate is 3 feet long and 2 feet wide, inspired by a slave, Henry “Box” Brown who described escaping from a box this size
- Sounds are all related to race

Continued

- Around the boxes, Ligon hung posters on the walls portraying himself as an escaped slave in 19th century style “broadsheets”
- Ligon stenciled quotes from Neale Hurston’s “how it feels to be colored me” onto the walls
 - “I feel most colored when I am thrown against a sharp white background”



To Disembark, space

- This installation is only able to reach its full potential if it is installed in a specific space. The room must have clean, white walls to reinforce the Zora Neale Hurston quotes that are surrounding the boxes
- The room must be completely open, so the viewer can move between the 9 boxes and experience the sounds without distraction



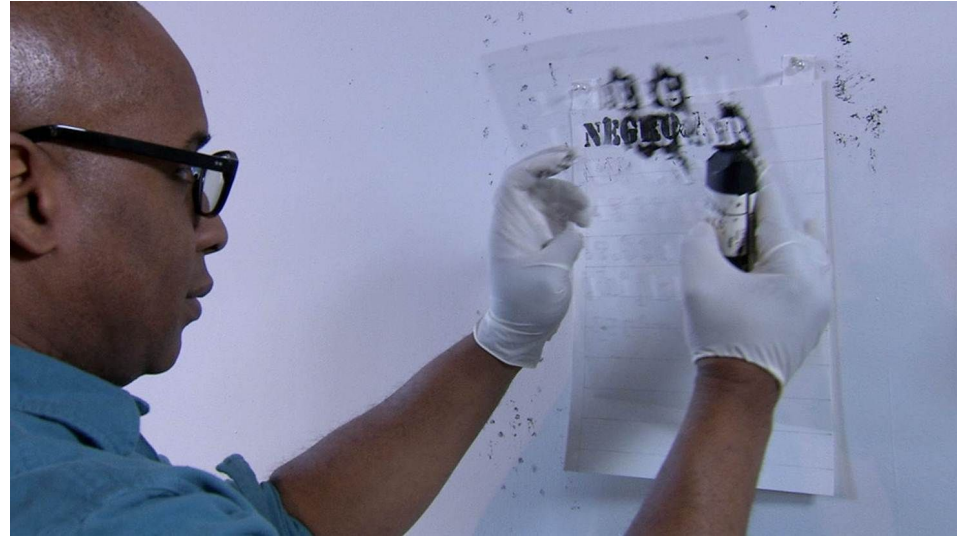
...time

- The viewer must spend a specific amount of time at each box to hear the full audio recording, the same goes for the wall pieces, which contain small amounts of text, but require careful reading



Artist's role

- Ligon attempts to contextualize his experience as a black man in America, and the battle of obtaining freedom
- Runaway slave posters with images of himself, and shipping crates are used to portray the artist as a contemporary slave



Viewer Experience



- The viewer experience is one of being drawn in more closely to the life of a black person in America
- The more privileged demographics are the ones who would get the most out of experiencing this installation; it puts their privilege into perspective

To Disembark cont.

At first glance, this installation might seem visually bland: The shipping crates are not elaborately decorated, and the wall pieces are intentionally simple. The seemingly haphazard arrangement of the crates draws the visitor in close to listen to what is being said, making the experience exceedingly intimate.

Ligon uses black-cultural sounds from multiple generations to make the point of unchanging conditions for African Americans: The same box, no matter the era. The evolving sounds help to sustain the visitor's attention, there is something new and different at every stop, from slave era dialogue to contemporary hip hop.

