

ARTFORUM

Glenn Ligon

REGEN PROJECTS | 633 NORTH ALMONT DRIVE
633 North Almont Drive
September 10–October 10

Glenn Ligon's *Live* dissects the full length of Richard Pryor's 1982 concert film, *Live on the Sunset Strip*, projecting parts of the comedian across seven speechless screens. Suspended in the round are zooms onto hands, head, mouth, shadow, and crotch. Seemingly a formal study, the effect is also vertiginous. The blown-up reds, blacks, browns, and golds of Pryor's face, suit, shirt, wedding ring, and boutonniere wrap sickly around each frame's object, which is pinned to center. Ligon's stated intent is to examine, beyond Pryor's radical words, what made him such a great performer. Yet surrounded by flickering, jostling close-ups, the viewer is more likely struck by an almost violent fragmentation.

Live follows Ligon's series of paintings of Pryor's jokes. While the "joke paintings" take a swing at Richard Prince, say, or at the power dynamics generally played out in contemporary painting—and do so with Pryor's legacy as weapon—the present installation instead quiets and diffuses a man the artist plainly admires. Where is the comedy in that? Ligon appreciates, idolizes, even mythologizes Pryor. He also objectifies him. In this sense, *Live* satirizes a viewpoint that would reduce the entertainer—or, more pointedly, the African American male—to a body. Perhaps the gesture is blunt enough to speak for itself—though Pryor himself is silenced. Or perhaps such an outsize legacy can only be confronted piece by piece. Thus the reverent irony that attends Ligon's double-edged treatment of the figure of Richard Pryor.



View of "Glenn Ligon: Live," 2015.

— Travis Diehl