



GLENN O'BRIEN: CENTER STAGE

— Off Paradise

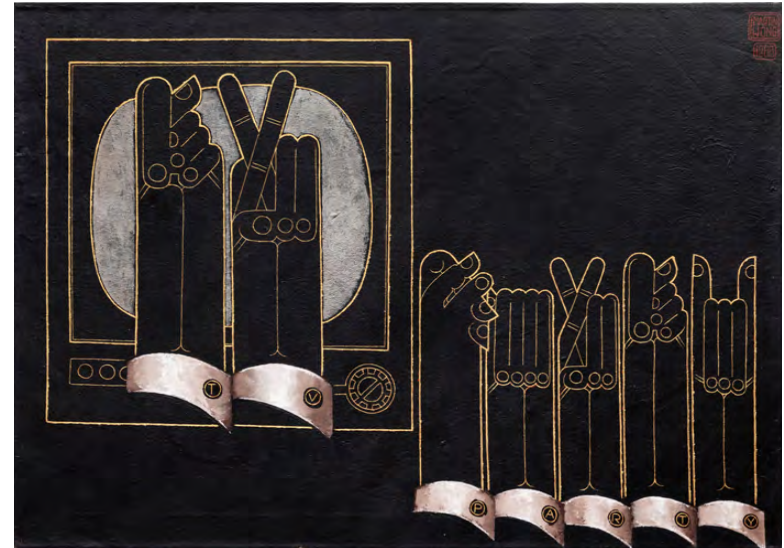
120 Walker Street New York

10013

Alvin Baltrop, Sarah Charlesworth, Dan Colen, Sara Cwynar, Les Levine, Eileen Myles,
Dennis Oppenheim, Richard Prince, Rene Ricard, Walter Robinson,
Claude Rutault, André Saraiva, Tom Sachs, Dash Snow,
Andy Warhol, Ouattara Watts, and Martin Wong

GLENN O'BRIEN: CENTER STAGE

September 17 – November 27, 2019



Martin Wong, TV Party, 1988

Glenn O'Brien was a great many things to a great many people. Editor, television producer, screenwriter, critic and cultural scene maker, he began his career at *Andy Warhol's Interview* magazine. Glenn also was a formidable creative director who elevated advertising to the realm of art. "I can't help but feel like my ads are better than Barbara Kruger's," he once famously declared. "Although hers are art and mine, well they are just ads. They have a logo. But I think art has logos now, too, so maybe there is no difference." And I loved him for that.

Glenn was brilliant at so many things, moving effortlessly from one to the other, or doing them all at once and adding more, all the while making you believe that you could do it, too. "I like to keep busy," he would say, deadpan. High and low. Facetious and profound. Punk and regal.

With a youthful spirit that never left him and a steadfast refusal to stay in any lane, Glenn was of the race of conquerors who forever exists in the continuous present.

In fact, conqueror he was from our very first interaction. I had sought Glenn out, years ago, while reaching a handful of artists to take on the Saint James nautical shirt. I had spent a day or two guessing his email by trying multiple combinations of his first and last names. One worked. Within minutes he gave me this answer, forever incised in my memory: “These are my favorite shirts in the world. I’d be really into it. And if you can believe ancestry.com, I’m descended from William the Conqueror.”

Generous, inclusive, but also grander than life. Extra-ordinary. Glenn catapulted himself into the pantheon of great heroes, and for this he was right. Glenn was *sui generis*.

For me, Glenn was a pivotal *rencontre*.

It would be impossible to claim exhaustiveness with any portrait of Glenn. This exhibition proposes one possible approach, in the manner of a *portrait en creux*, which in literature is when the author defines a character by focusing our attention on the background, on the company he keeps, as well as his actions in the world.

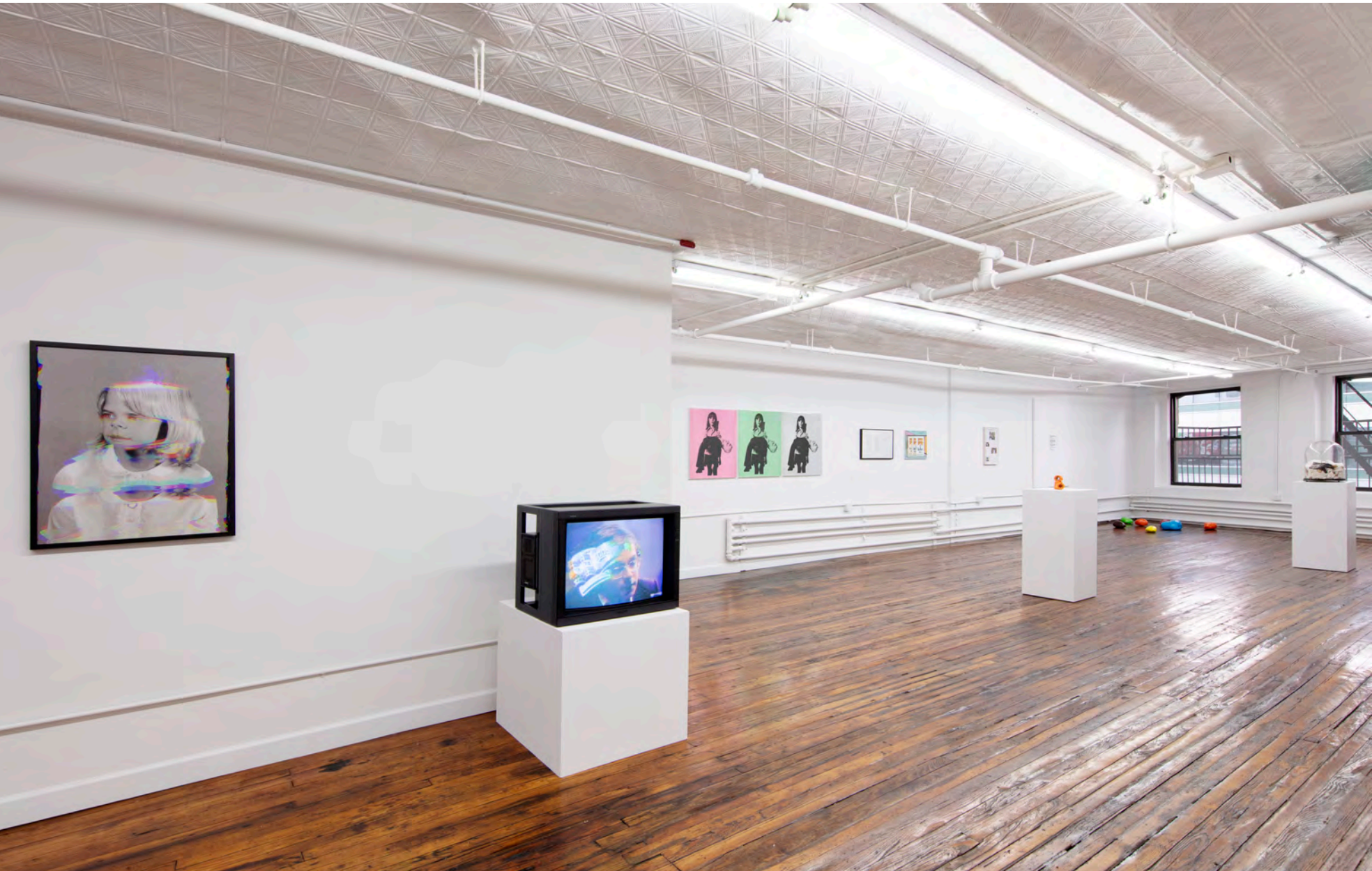
The expression “*en creux*” refers to the engraving technique *intaglio*, in which a surface is etched or incised to hold the ink. It is the opposite of relief engraving, and the literary equivalent of the quiet, but often revealing, negative space we find in sculpture and painting.

Glenn defined himself above all as a writer. Words are the continuous thread of the exhibition—in their presence, absence, repetition and silence.

This *portrait en creux* of Glenn is meant to suggest, but not to impose. Collectively, the artists and works offer a faceted reflection of his profound optimism, wit and spirit.

My deepest gratitude to Gina Nanni for her wonderful support and friendship.

— Natacha Polaert





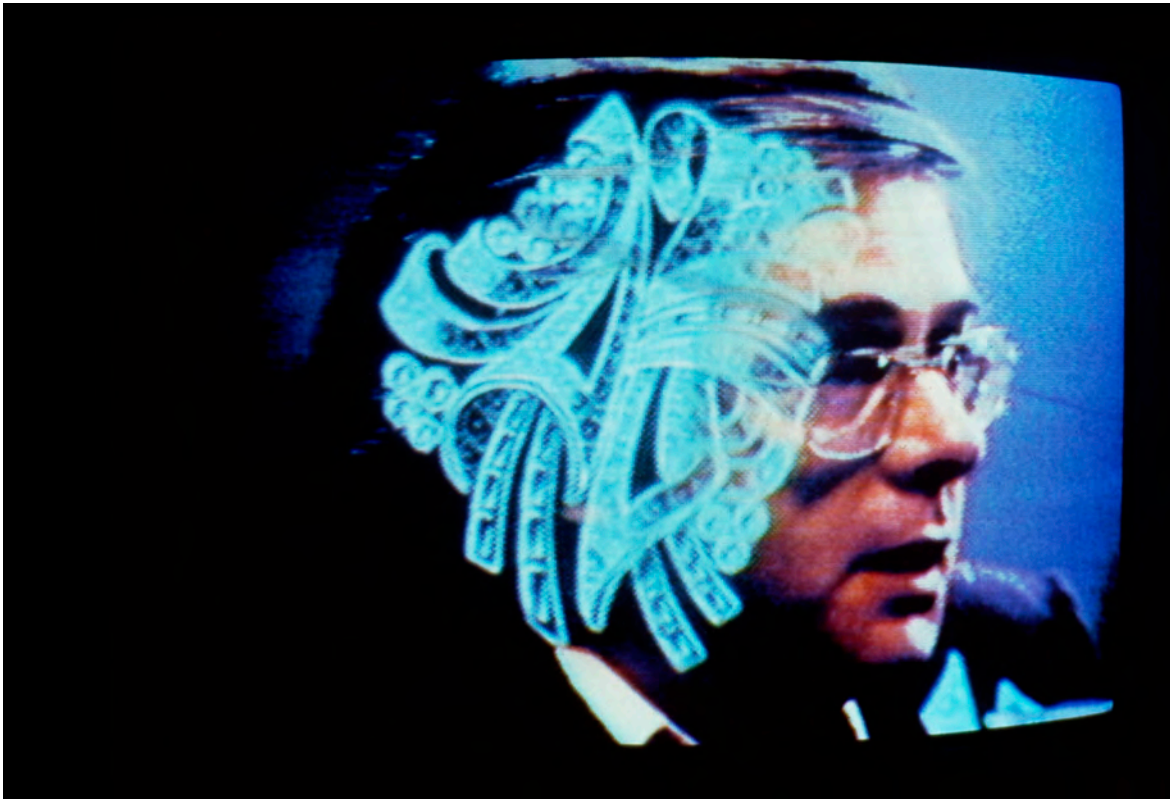
Martin Wong, TV Party, 1988

TV Party was Glenn O'Brien's magnum opus, a public-access television show in New York City that ran from 1978 to 1982. Part performance art, part improv, part experimental video, it started as a nod to Hugh Hefner's *Playboy After Dark*, but for the downtown set. Martin Wong's "TV Party" was made years after *TV Party* ended. Part of Wong's hand-signs series, "TV Party" was first shown at his 1988 solo exhibition at Exit Art in New York City.



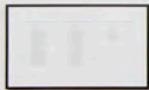
Sarah Cwynar, Girl from Contact Sheet (Darkroom Manuals), 2013

"Girl from Contact Sheet (Darkroom Manuals)" could evoke a first crush, but she could also be a young fan of *TV Party* whose mind is being blown by Glenn O'Brien.



Les Levine, Diamond Mind, 1977

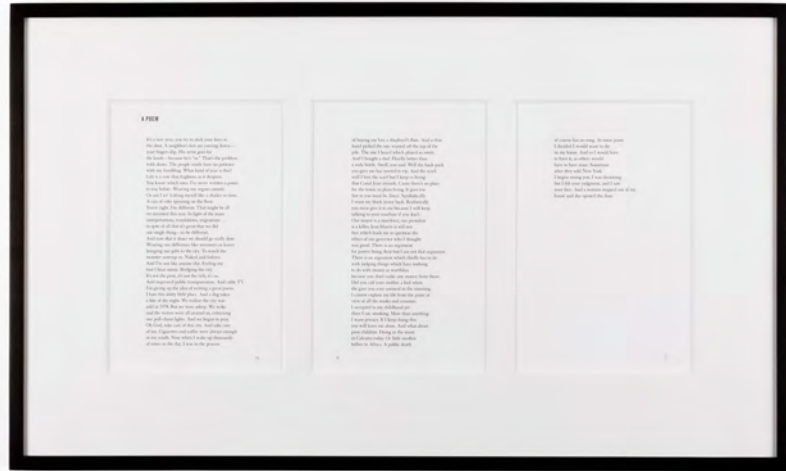
The first artwork Glenn O'Brien ever purchased, while still a student at Georgetown University, was a set of "disposable" sculptures by Les Levine from Max Protetch. "Diamond Mind" is a performance videotape set in a control room at Syracuse University. Levine's speech also relates to "various connections and partings one goes through in life... being born, dying, being unattached from the physical sense of image as we can know it. Understanding this process or image modulation of self is like finding a diamond in your mind."



"A Search For Clues" was an ad campaign conceived and produced by Dennis Oppenheim on the occasion of his 1976 solo exhibition at M.L. D'Arc Gallery. It features his then seven-year-old daughter, Chandra Oppenheim, with a surrogate of the artist in an entirely silent ad. As an ad man himself, Glenn O'Brien worked on some of the most iconic advertising campaigns of his time. Among them was the infamous Calvin Klein campaign shot by Steven Meisel that was attacked by Bill Clinton as child pornography, investigated by the Justice Department, and parodied by Beavis and Butthead. "To me," Glenn said, "that was the highest compliment."



Dennis Oppenheim, A Search for Clues, 1976



Eileen Myles, *A Poem*, From *I Must Be Living Twice: New and Selected Poems*, 1994

Eileen Myles wrote "A Poem" inspired by a conversation she had with Glenn O'Brien. Glenn never knew the poem existed. "Glenn spoke to me about poetry once in the 80s and about the problem of making no money from it. The conversation stuck with me and totally inspired 'A Poem,' which was pretty much an inventory of the moment and maybe writing's attempt to value it, or it value poetry."

Glenn stopped smoking a while back, but when he did smoke, it was Marlboro Lights. Walter Robinson's "Marlboros" evoke the writer's staple, an artifact of a bygone era that finds resonance in Myles's poem, "Cigarettes and coffee were always enough in my youth."



Walter Robinson, *Marlboros*, 2019

A Poem

It's a new year; you try to stick your keys in
the door. A neighbor's feet are coming down—
your fingers slip. His wrist goes for
the knob— because he's "in." That's the problem
with doors. The people inside have no patience
with my fumbling. What kind of year is this?
Life is a vow that frightens as it deepens.
You know which ones. I've never written a poem
to you before. Wearing my organs outside.
Or am I in? Lifting myself like a chalice to time.
A can of coke spinning on the floor.
You're right. I'm different. That might be all
we invented this year. In light of the mass
interpretations, translations, migrations . . .
in spite of all that it's great that we did
one single thing— to be different.
And now that it shows we should go really slow.
Wearing our difference like streamers or leaves
bringing our gifts to the city. To watch the
monster unwrap us. Naked and forlorn.
And I'm not like anyone else. Feeling my
foot I hear music. Bridging the city.
It's not the poor, it's not the rich, it's us.
And improved public transportation. And cable TV.
I'm giving up the idea of writing a great poem.
I hate this shitty little place. And a dog takes
a bite of the night. We realize the city was
sold in 1978. But we were asleep. We woke
and the victors were all around us, criticizing
our pull-chain lights. And we began to pray.
Oh God, take care of this city. And take care
of me. Cigarettes and coffee were always enough
in my youth. Now when I wake up thousands
of times in the day. I was in the process

of buying my love a shepherd's flute. And a thin
hand picked the one wanted off the top of the
pile. The one I heard which played so sweet.
And I bought a dud. Hardly better than
a soda bottle. Swell, you said. Well the back-pack
you gave me has started to rip. And the scarf,
well I love the scarf but I keep re-living
that Canal Jean remark. Cause there's no place
for the ironic in plain living. It goes too
fast so you must be direct. Symbolically
I want my black jersey back. Realistically
you must give it to me because I will keep
talking to your machine if you don't.
Our mayor is a murderer, our president
is a killer, Jean Harris is still not
free which leads me to question the
ethics of our governor who I thought
was good. There is an argument
for poetry being deep but I am not that argument.
There is an argument which chiefly has to do
with judging things which have nothing
to do with money as worthless
because you don't make any money from them.
Did you call your mother a fool when
she gave you your oatmeal in the morning.
I cannot explain my life from the point of
view of all the nooks and crannies
I occupied in my childhood yet
there I sat, smoking. More than anything
I want privacy. If I keep doing this
you will leave me alone. And what about
poor children. Dying in the street
in Calcutta today. Or little swollen
bellies in Africa. A public death

of course has no song. At some point
I decided I would want to die
in my home. And so I would have
to have it, as others would
have to have none. Sometime
after they sold New York
I began seeing you. I was dreaming
but I felt your judgment, and I saw
your face. And a woman stepped out of my
house and she opened the door.

The New York Times

Lawyer Rights Fighter Woman Prize

larger country women liberation rights women things rights prison work children world person prizes award elections elections public head rights hours reports announcements movement turbulence news interest news television



ANGER FEARS SOLDIERS

anger American district night soldiers violence surge fears dan get soldiers force threat loyalty people during men



Critics Policy Iraq

President critics policy terrorism tyrants strike terrorism speech campaign support effort remarks Iraq force Iraq face actions words arrangements week speech comments war campaign linkage administration terror picture part picture light activities

RALLY

Followers Cleric Funeral Victims Protest

Signs Way Nowhere

operator road tripper cabriole way just choice



Show Habit Clinic

show habit clinic



Patients Choices

patients choices

Chaplain Summary

Chaplain Summary

Clampdown

Clampdown

Sarah Charlesworth, Nouns, 2003

Glenn defined himself above all as a writer. "Nouns" is related to Sarah Charlesworth's *Modern History* series from 1977-1979, in which she isolated the images printed in various newspapers and removed the text in which they appeared. In this front page of the *New York Times* from October 11, 2003, all words other than nouns—and the nameplate—were redacted.

Richard Prince and Glenn shared an affinity for great jokes, especially Borscht Belt humor. Bingo!



Richard Prince, Untitled (Joke), 2014

QUIZ MASTER: SO CAN YOU TELL ME FOR 1000 DOLLARS, WHO WAS THE FIRST MAN ON EARTH?

LADY CONTESTANT: ADAM?

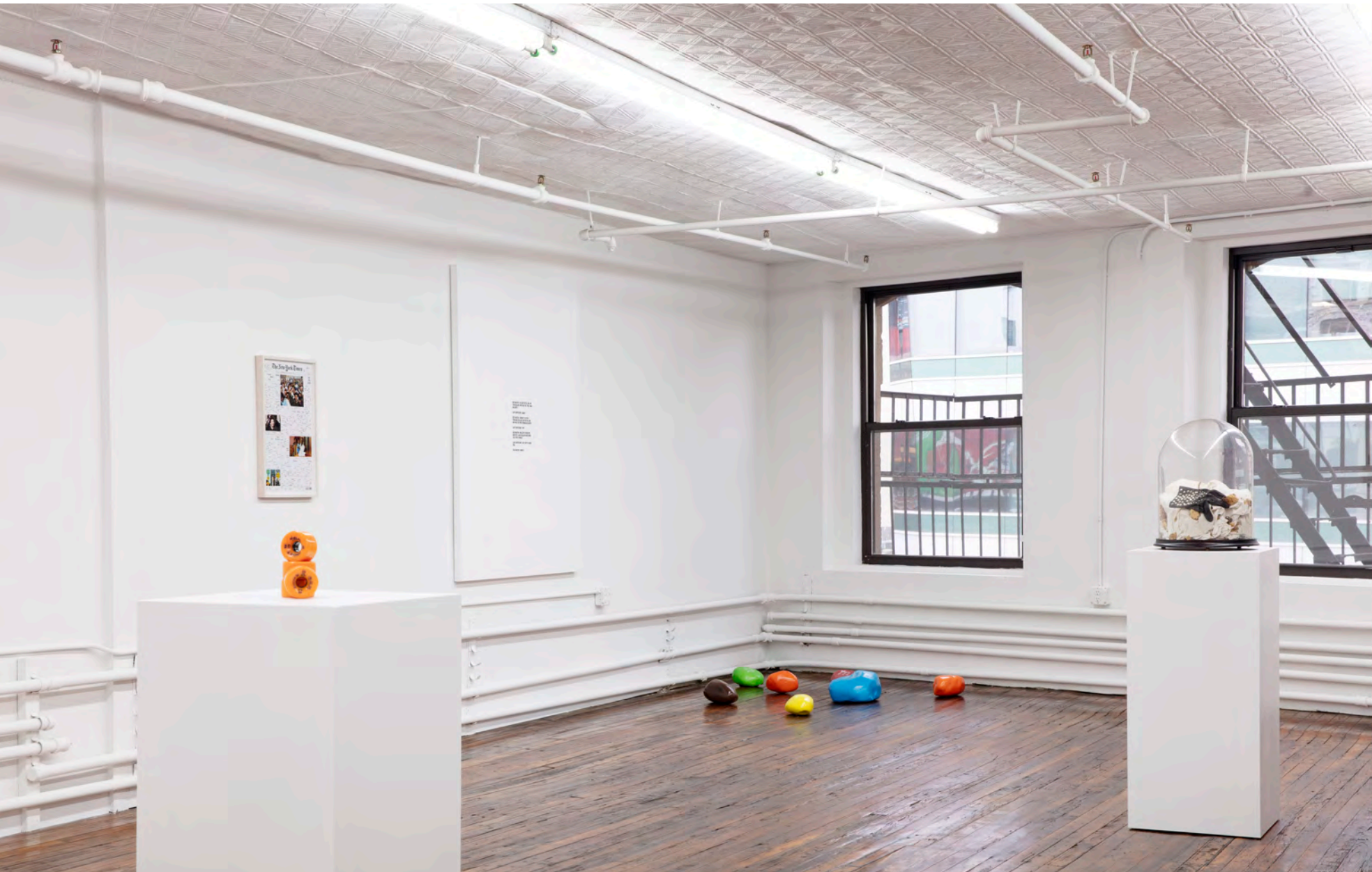
QUIZ MASTER: CORRECT! SO FOR 5 THOUSAND DOLLARS CAN YOU TELL ME WHO WAS THE FIRST WOMAN ON EARTH?

LADY CONTESTANT: EVE?

QUIZ MASTER: BULLSEYE! FANTASTIC. NOW FOR 10,000 DOLLARS WHAT WERE EVE'S FIRST WORDS?

LADY CONTESTANT: GEE, THAT'S A HARD ONE.

QUIZ MASTER: BINGO!!!





Dan Colen, M&M's, 2014

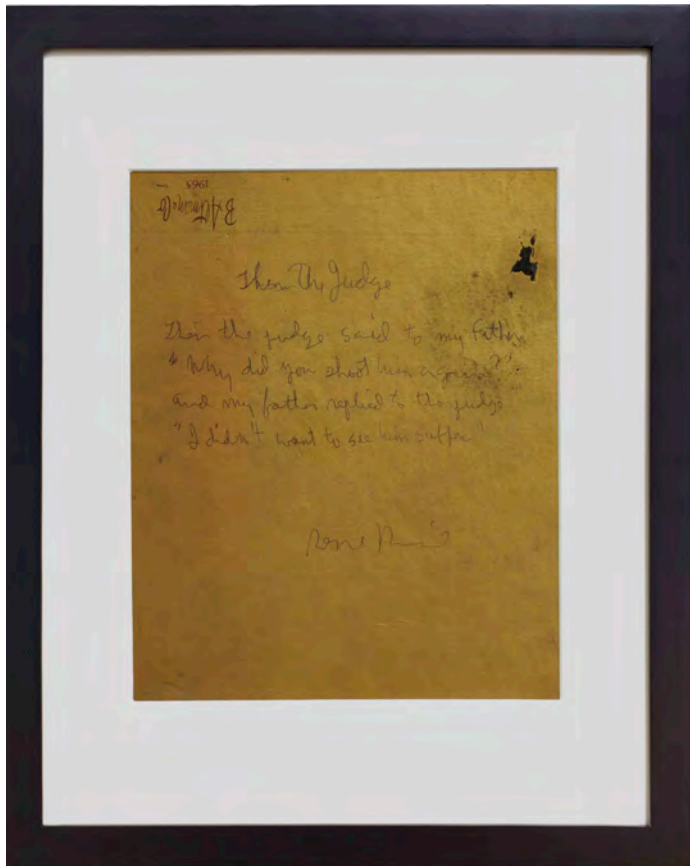
In this series of sculptures, Dan Colen rendered rocks to look like enlarged M&M candies. The scale, texture, and saturated color of the faux M&M's create a physical experience that teases out our personal associations—nature versus artifice. And what could be more iconic than M&M's in today's pop culture?



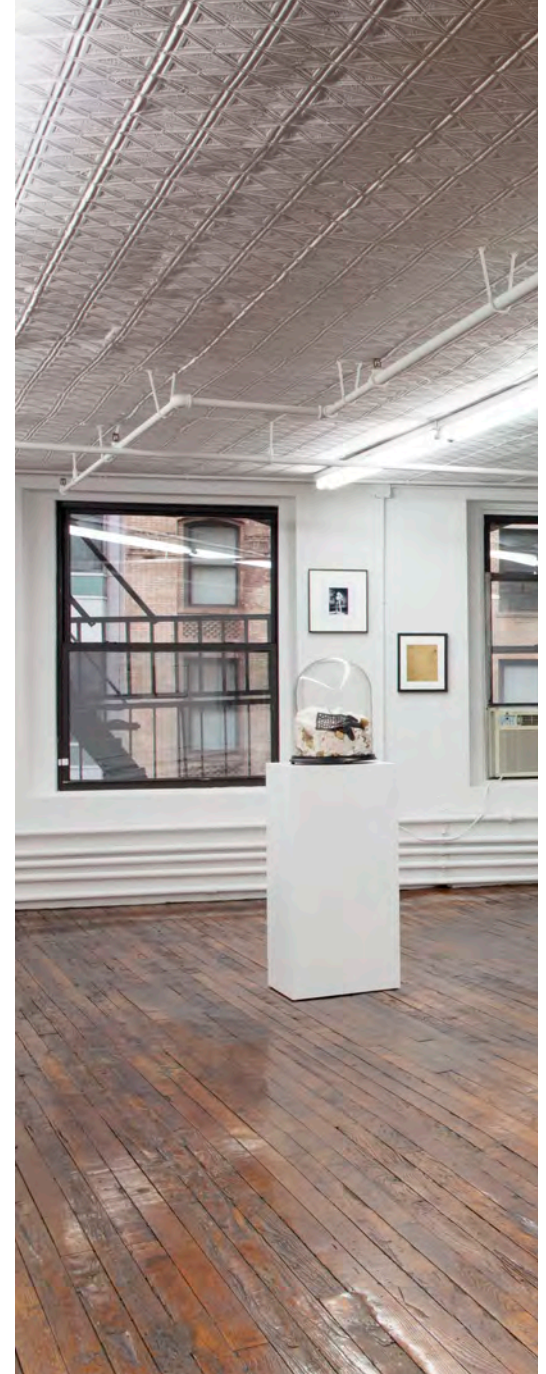
"Alvin Baltrop's pictures show a gone world, but the ghosts that inhabit these images retain the power to haunt our own time," Glenn once wrote. Baltrop portrays the derelict, abandoned West Side piers along the Hudson River, the scene of gay cruising, drugs, and prostitution. This teenage runaway is enveloped in an almost beatific light—a light that could have been streaming from "Day's End," Gordon Matta-Clark's "sun and water temple" intervention at Pier 52 in 1975.

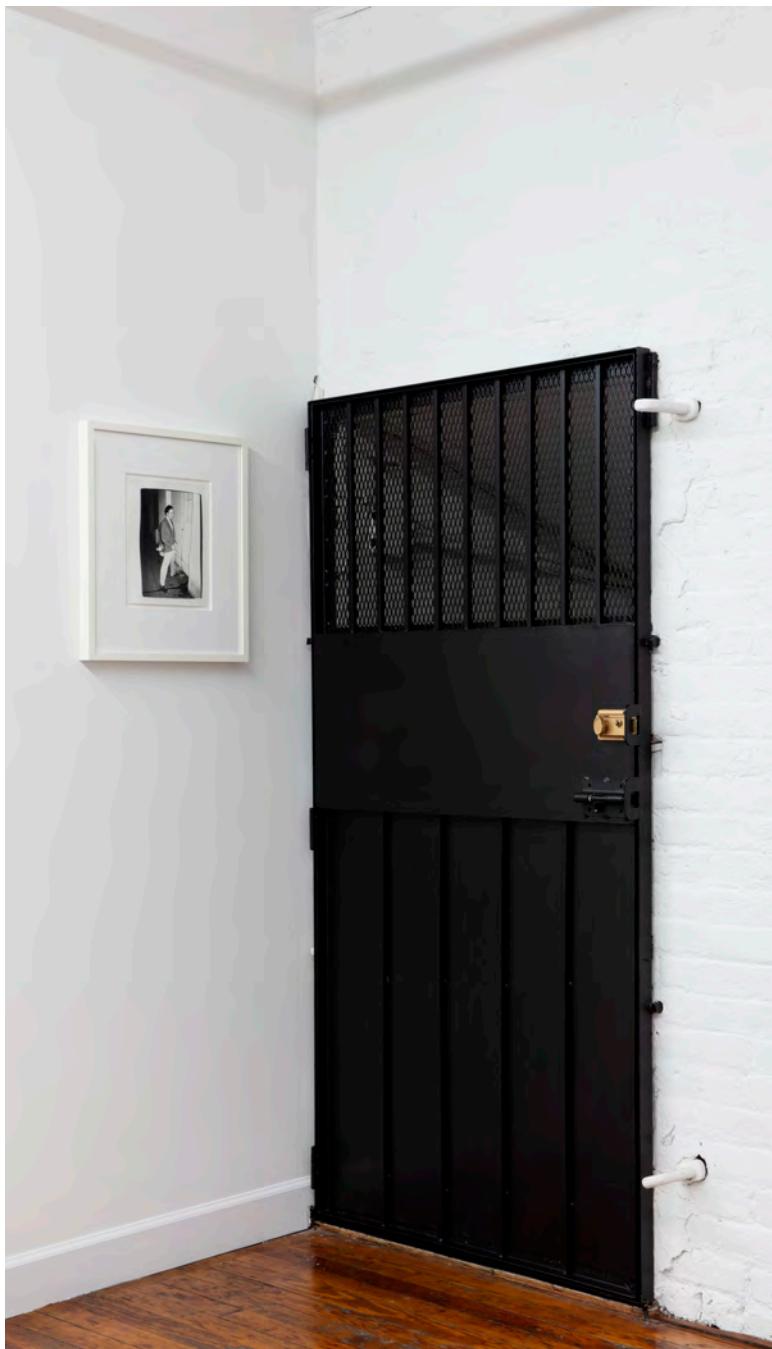
Alvin Baltrop, The Piers (male portrait in sunlight) n.d. (1975-1986)

Rene Ricard grew up in the small town of Acushnet, Massachusetts. "Judge" is about his abusive, alcoholic father, who went to jail for life on a murder charge—*this* murder charge. Perhaps like Baltrop's teenage runaway of the West Side piers, Rene also is the gay son of a violent father who found solace in New York. Both works evoke what you leave behind when you come to New York and the family you make for yourself.



Rene Ricard, Judge, 1989





Andy Warhol, Fred Hughes, 1978

Frederick Hughes was Glenn's mentor during his years at *Interview*, where Andy Warhol hired Glenn straight out of college as art director for his magazine.



Ouattara Watts makes paintings to be read. After a chance encounter with Jean-Michel Basquiat at Basquiat's 1988 Paris opening, Basquiat convinced Ouattara to come to America. Glenn was the first person Basquiat promised Ouattara he would meet on arriving to New York. ("My best friend Glenn," Jean-Michel would say.) "They were kindred spirits who hit it off immediately," Glenn later wrote. "Both men had a princely attitude and the sensibility of a magician, not to mention a gift for painting." "Le Faiseur de Roi" ["The King Maker"] portrays the Glenn who launched and championed a thousand careers.



Ouattara Watts, Le Faiseur de Roi, 2019



Claude Rutault, Bookshelves (A Portrait From Afar), 2019

Claude Rutault was the first French artist invited to a residency at MoMA PS1, the same winter *TV Party* launched. Rutault considers himself a painter, although he does not physically touch paint or his canvases. Instead he has a set of instructions, “de-definitions/methods” to guide the works.

“glenn o'brien was a writer. my work starts with writing, i write paintings, my work consists in painting canvases the same color as the wall on which they're hung; painting without end, perpetually actualized. beyond monochromes. for this show, all the paintings and photographs on glenn o'brien's bookshelves that are not portraits of glenn will be covered by canvases painted the same color as the wall on which the bookshelves are hung. a portrait by subtraction. painting that reveals.”



Tom Sachs, Skateboard Wheels, 2008

These four orange skateboard wheels, hand-embossed by Tom Sachs and his team, evoke Glenn's youthful spirit, the freedom and hunger of youth that he continuously fed, but also his constant motion and steadfast refusal to stay in any given lane.



BY AMY WAGNER
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BY AMY WAGNER
BY AMY WAGNER

LEO VILLAREAL
SPROUSE
LUCAS VALLERON
VANILLA

BAUHAUS
VANITY FAIR
GUESS WHO
ERIK

IRVING PENN
QUARTZ

CHARLES SMITHS
SMITHS

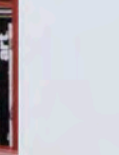
JOHN CURRIN
PETER DOG

JOHN BROWN

OSCAR DE LA RENTA

OSCAR DE LA RENTA

OSCAR DE LA RENTA



Dash Snow often used bell jars as containers for arrangements of objects. In "Secret Conception" (2006-2007) crumpled sheets, a studded glove, dead flowers, and human hair are heaped on top of each other. The title "Secret Conception" refers to Snow's daughter, Secret. Glenn once said, "There aren't too many romantic artists, but I think Dash was one of them."



Dash Snow, Secret Conception, 2006-2007

André Saraiva's "Love Letter," made with an actual letterbox from La Poste Française, stands as a larger metaphor for the show: a letter to Glenn, for the afterlife.



André Saraiva, Love Letter, 2012



Martin Wong

TV Party, 1988
Acrylic on canvas
34 x 47.5 in. (86.4 x 120.6 cm)
Private Collection
Courtesy of the Estate of Martin Wong and P•P•O•W, New York

Sara Cwynar

Girl from Contact Sheet (Darkroom Manuals), 2013
Chromogenic print
30 x 24 in. (76.2 x 61 cm)
Courtesy of Sara Cwynar, Cooper Cole, Toronto, and Foxy Production, New York

Les Levine

Diamond Mind, 1977
Color video
30:29 minutes
Courtesy of Les Levine

Dennis Oppenheim

A Search for Clues, 1976
Ad campaign from the exhibition at M.L. D'Arc Gallery, New York
Silkscreen print on metallic paper
Edition 239/250, Triptych
30 x 80 in. (76.2 x 203.2 cm)
Collection Dennis Oppenheim Estate
© Photograph by Harry Shunk

Eileen Myles

From I Must Be Living Twice: New and Selected Poems, 1994
Archival pigment print
15 7/8 x 26 1/2 x 1 1/8 in. (40.3 x 67.3 x 2.8 cm)
Courtesy of Eileen Myles and HarperCollins Publishers

Walter Robinson

Marlboros, 2019
Acrylic on canvas
16 x 20 in. (40.6 x 50.8 cm)
Courtesy of Walter Robinson

Sarah Charlesworth

Nouns, 2003
Fuji Crystal Archive print
22 3/4 x 15 in. (57.8 x 38.1 cm)
© The Estate of Sarah Charlesworth. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

Richard Prince

Untitled (Joke), 2014
Ink jet on canvas
60 x 48 in. (152.4 x 121.9 cm)
Courtesy of Richard Prince Studio

Dan Colen

M&M's, 2014
Rocks and acrylic paint
various sizes
Courtesy of Dan Colen and Gagolian

Alvin Baltrop

The Piers (male portrait in sunlight) n.d. (1975-1986)
Exhibition C-print, 2019
6.78 x 4.5 in. (17.2 x 11.4 cm)
Courtesy of The Alvin Baltrop Trust, © 2010, Third Streaming, NY, and Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne/New York, all rights reserved

Rene Ricard

Judge, 1989
Pen on cardboard
15 x 12 in. (38.1 x 30.5 cm)
Courtesy Half Gallery

Andy Warhol

Fred Hughes, 1978
Gelatin silver print
10 x 8 in. (25.4 x 20.3 cm)
Private Collection

Ouattara Watts

Le Faiseur de Roi, 2019

Mixed media

30 x 24 in. (76.2 x 60.9 cm)

Courtesy of Ouattara Watts

Claude Rutault

Bookshelves (A Portrait From Afar), 2019

Mixed media

Wallpaper, acrylic paint, canvases

255 x 106 in. (647.7 x 269.2 cm)

Courtesy of Claude Rutault and Perrotin

Tom Sachs

Skateboard Wheels, 2008

Embossed rubber

(4) 1.375 x 2.5 x 2.5 in. (3.5 x 6.3 x 6.3 cm)

Courtesy Tom Sachs Studio

Dash Snow

Secret Conception, 2006-2007

Mixed media

19 x 14 x 14 inches (48.3 x 35.6 x 35.6 cm)

Collection of Vito Schnabel

Courtesy of the Dash Snow Archive, New York City and Vito Schnabel, New York

André Saraiva

Love Letter, 2012

Iron and Enamel Paint

20.87 x 16.93 in. (53 x 43 cm)

Courtesy of André Saraiva



All installation views by Guillaume Ziccarelli

Published by Off Paradise, 2019

Glenn O'Brien: Center Stage was the inaugural exhibition at Off Paradise, a new project space on Walker Street. The name evokes the old neighborhood of Five Points, at the center of which was a small, triangular park, full of hopes and grime, called Paradise Square. It also invokes Paradise Alley, the artists' and poets' colony on the then-godforsaken corner of Avenue A and East 11th Street that is referenced in Jack Kerouac's novel *The Subterraneans*. Off Paradise is a fictional place, right *off* Paradise, adjacent to it, but not exactly it.

Thanks to all of the artists who generously participated in Glenn O'Brien: Center Stage.

Thanks to all the collectors who kindly loaned works from their personal collections.

Thanks to Paula Cooper, Perrotin, P.P.O.W, Third Streaming, Cooper Cole, Foxy Production, and Gagosian.

Thanks to everyone—to my friends and the great team who made this exhibition possible.

My deepest gratitude to Gina Nanni for her wonderful support and friendship.

