

GLENN LIGON (b. 1960, New York City)

For Comrades and Lovers, 2015

Neon

Permanent site-specific installation

Commissioned by The New School Art Collection Advisory Group

Transcript of neon text, from Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*

While there are many points of entry for the reading of the text in this installation, which is meant to be encountered over time, there is a particular sequence one might consider following. Begin on the north wall (over the stage); the two lines here represent one excerpt. From the bottom line on this wall, the eye naturally rises to the east wall, where the text starts with "Walt Whitman..." The text follows the perimeter of the room to the south wall and then to the west wall, where it is suspended. It picks up again on the east wall, on the bottom line under "Walt Whitman..." and then sweeps around the perimeter once more.

**[TOP LINE OF NORTH WALL
(reads as one quote)]**

Dead poets, philosophs, priests,
Martyrs, artists, inventors,
governments long since,

Language-shapers, on
other shores,

Nations once powerful,
now reduced, withdrawn, or
desolate,

I dare not proceed till I
respectfully credit what you
have left wafted hither,

I have perused it, own it is
admirable, (moving awhile
among it,)

Think nothing can ever be
greater, nothing can ever
deserve more than it deserves,

Regarding it all intently a long
while, then dismissing it,

I stand in my place with my
own day here.

**[TOP LINE OF EAST WALL,
THEN SOUTH, THEN WEST
WALLS)]**

Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of
Manhattan the son,

Turbulent, fleshy, sensual,
eating, drinking and breeding,

No sentimentalist, no stander
above men and women or apart
from them,

No more modest
than immodest.

No labor-saving machine,
Nor discovery have I made,

Nor will I be able to leave
behind me any wealthy bequest
to found a hospital or library,

Nor reminiscence of any deed
of courage for America,

Nor literary success nor
intellect, nor book for the
book-shelf,

But a few carols vibrating
through the air I leave, For
comrades and lovers.

Among the men and women,
the multitude,

I perceive one picking me out by
secret and divine signs,

Acknowledging none else, not
parent, wife, husband, brother,
child, any nearer than I am,

Some are baffled, but that one
is not—that one knows me.

Ah, lover and perfect equal,

I meant that you should
discover me so by my faint
indirections,

And I, when I meet you, mean
to discover you by the like
in you.

**[BOTTOM LINE OF EAST WALL,
THEN SOUTH, THEN WEST
WALLS]**

Undrape! you are not guilty to
me, nor stale nor discarded,

I see through the broadcloth
and gingham whether or no,

And am around, tenacious,
acquisitive, tireless, and cannot
be shaken away.

I am the poet of the Body and I
am the poet of the Soul.

The pleasures of heaven are
with me and the pains of hell
are with me,

The first I graft and increase
upon myself, the latter I
translate into a new tongue.

There was never any more
inception than there is now,

Nor any more youth or age
than there is now,

And will never be any more
perfection than there is now,

Nor any more heaven or hell
than there is now.

The smoke of my own breath,

Echoes, ripples, buzz'd
whispers, love-root, silk-thread,
crotch and vine,

My respiration and inspiration,
the beating of my heart,
the passing of blood and air
through my lungs,

Through me forbidden voices,

Voice of sexes and lusts, voices
veil'd and I remove the veil,

Voices indecent by me clarified
and transfigur'd.