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**Absorption/Reflection –  
The painted surfaces of Kerry James Marshall and Glenn Ligon**

This article explores, how Marshall and Ligon use the colors black and white to reflect alterity and hybridity in contemporary painting. In comparing the strategies of both artist, who became known in Europe with documenta X and XI, this article makes clear that black is used differently: Marshall works with an absorbing color, drawing attention to the invisibility of black (art)history. At the same time he is creating images for an African-American community to identify with. Glenn Ligon's shimmering surfaces made out of coal dust can be linked to the discourse spinning around the images of black skin in Robert Mapplethorpe's *Black Book*. The glance in Ligon's painting is not only attracting the gaze but also obscuring it at the same time, a process that points out how we regard the unknown other. And furthermore, the reflecting and absorbing surfaces play with references to abstract expressionism in queering their "male black".