**ARTIST**
Antony Gleaton

**TITLE**
Pero No Hay Negros En El Salvador (But There are No Blacks in El Salvador), Santa Rosa De Lima, El Salvador, from the series 'Africa's Legacy in Central America'

**DATE**
1992

**DIMENSIONS**
14 in H x 14 in W

**MEDIUM**
Gelatin Silver Print

**CATALOGUE NUMBER**
2007.042

**CURRENT LOCATION**
2024-16B

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**ANTONY GLEATON**

**BORN**
1948

**DIED**
2015

**BIRTHPLACE**
Detroit, MI

**GENDER**
Male

**CITIZENSHIP**

United States

**CULTURAL HERITAGE**

African-American

**LIGHT WORK RELATIONSHIP**

Artist-in-Residence, 1991
Fine Print Program, 1993
Robert B. Menschel Gallery, 1996
Group ExhibitionMain Gallery, 2002
Artist-in-Residence, 1998
Lecturer, 2002
Platinum Editions, 2003
Fine Print Program, 2012
Fine Print Program, 2003
Kathleen O. Ellis Gallery, 2018
Be Strong and Do Not Betray Your Soul

**LIGHT WORK PUBLICATIONS**

Contact Sheet 73
Contact Sheet 97
Contact Sheet 102
Contact Sheet 116
Contact Sheet 182
Menschel Gallery Catalogue 45
Contact Sheet 173
A Just Image: Selections from the Light Work Collection
Contact Sheet 198

**BIOGRAPHY**

Tony Gleaton

*Tony Gleaton in a 1998 photograph. Credit: Bruce Talamon*

Tony Gleaton, a photographer who turned his back on a career in New York fashion and embarked on an itinerant artistic quest, documenting the lives of black cowboys and creating images of the African diaspora in Latin America, died on Friday in Palo Alto, Calif. He was 67.

The cause was oral cancer, his wife, Lisa, said.

Mr. Gleaton made his photographs in the American West and Southwest, and then, most prominently, in Mexico, where he lived among little-acknowledged communities of blacks — descendants of African slaves brought to the New World centuries earlier by the Spanish — in villages on the coastal plains of Oaxaca, south of Acapulco.

An exhibition of those photos, “Africa’s Legacy in Mexico,” which appeared in galleries around the country for more than a decade beginning in the 1990s, was sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution.

Mr. Gleaton specialized in black-and-white portraits, their subjects — children and adults, alone or in groups — almost always in direct engagement with the camera and usually in tight frames that suggest but do not explore a specific setting, like a workplace or a barroom. In an interview with The Los Angeles Times in 2007, he called his pictures “abstractions from daily life,” saying “they may look natural but they are extremely crafted, very calculated.”

“This is not journalism,” he added. “I am making art.”

The images he captured — or, better, created — cannot be called intimate so much as defiantly vivid, as if Mr. Gleaton were helping people emerge from obscurity, allowing them to announce their very existence. Indeed, this was his stated purpose.

“These are beautiful photographs of people who are not normally portrayed in a beautiful way,” he said.

Leo Antony Gleaton was born in Detroit on Aug. 4, 1948. His father, Leo, was a police officer; his mother, the former Geraldine Woodson, taught school. In the late 1950s the family moved to Los Angeles, where Tony graduated from high school.

He enlisted in the Marines and served in Vietnam; when he returned, in the early 1970s, he enrolled at the University of California, Los Angeles, where his interest in photography was sparked. He also attended the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena and the University of California, Berkeley, though he never earned a bachelor’s degree.

He spent three years in New York, working as a photographer’s assistant in the fashion industry and taking pictures for Details and other magazines before deciding that there was more meaningful work elsewheHe was in his early 30s, and he began hitchhiking, ending up in Nevada, where he took pictures of Native American ranch hands and black rodeo riders.

Plumbing the culture of nonwhite cowboys, he traveled to Texas, Colorado, Idaho and Kansas; his show “Cowboys: Reconstructing an American Myth” appeared in galleries in Oklahoma, Nevada and California. His years of traveling and photographing in Mexico began with an interest in Mexican rodeo.

“One of the interesting things about Tony was that he could do more with less,” Bruce Talamon, the executor of the Tony Gleaton Photographic Trust, said in an email. “By that I mean as we live in a time of celebrity photographers with big budgets, and untold numbers of assistants and stylists, Tony would have a small bag with one medium-format camera, one lens, $5 in his pocket, and a few rolls of Tri-X film.

“He always shot in available light. He could find beautiful light everywhere he went.”

For his trips to Mexico and Latin America, Mr. Talamon said, Mr. Gleaton “would buy a one-way ticket on a Greyhound bus.”

“These were self-financed trips. And because he was on a budget, he had figured out that there was always a spare bed at the village church, and that was good for at least five days. He would offer to work for meals and then, based on the priest’s introductions, he would start to photograph, staying for a few weeks, and then he would return home with magic.”

A big man — he was well over 6 feet tall and weighed more than 300 pounds — Mr. Gleaton was known as a charmer, especially with his subjects and with students of photography. He was divorced three times before he married Lisa Ellerbee, a teacher, in 2005. She is his only immediate survivor. They lived in San Mateo, Calif.

Mr. Gleaton, who was light-skinned with green eyes, said he often had to explain to people that both his parents were black and that he was not biracial, and that the preconceptions people had of him found their way into his work.

He would not describe his subjects as Afro-Mexican, a label applied to them by outsiders; race, he said, is “a social construct, not a bio-empirical fact.”

In recent years Mr. Gleaton expanded his work to include other nations in Central and South America.

“What’s important about these photographs is that they gave a face to something that nobody had really thought about before,“ he said in 2007 about his Mexican photographs. “And it’s a place to begin the discussion about what we suppose Mexico to be.

“We have a stereotypical view of what Mexico is, and Mexico is many things. You can have freckles and red hair and be Mexican — and you can have very black skin and be Mexican.”

Bruce Weber, August 18, 2015
NYTimes.com

**ESSAYS**

No one seems to be in a hurry in Gleaton, Antony's photographs. There are no frenetic gestures or moments of uncomfortable tension. His photographs look like he has made the air stand still under a quiet blanket of brilliant moisture, and that his subjects have paused in the refreshment. This atmosphere of connection is a deliberate and passionate gaze that travels in a circle from subject to photographer. Over the past several years Gleaton has been committed to exploring 'every nuance of African influence in the Americas.' With confidence that matches the ambition of this goal, his aim is to 'make my own culture look beautiful...and in doing that, I become beautiful.' In pursuit of this goal, Gleaton has documented black cowboys in the American West, fisherman in Guatemala and the daily life of residents in remote villages in Mexico. To find graceful and spirited connections in such uncommon places confirmed the importance of his efforts and renewed his urgency to bring the work to a wider audience. In a recent exhibition at the Watts Tower Art Center in Los Angeles, his series titled Black Mexico, The African Legacy, helped highlight common bonds within the Watts community that is rapidly changing from predominately Black to mostly Latino. By celebrating and acknowledging the influence of people who are separated from any dominant group Gleaton, Antony is able to locate common affinities that bind us together in the human condition. Like a mirror that shines back at us with unflinching resolve, Gleaton clearly acknowledges that the integrity of any culture is reflected in the identity of every individual. Gleaton, Antony lives in Los Angeles, CA and participated in Light Work's Artist-in-Residence program from August 15 - September 15, 1991. Jeffrey Hoone (c)1992I know you Negro The heart of you is silent in wondering at the landscape Succulent plants like me take in juice from the root But you with your incisors bite the fruit off the branch And leave a scatter of seeds in your tracks Lois Elaine Griffith excerpt from the poem Para Tono   Tony Gleaton is a wanderer.

Although he has been based in Los Angeles for a number of years, he has spent most of that time traveling, leaving him little time to grow deeper roots in California. Making photographs has been the reason for his wanderings, and like slowly peeling back the skin of an onion, one project has always revealed the beginning of another. In the early 1980s Gleaton completed a project in the American West titled Cowboys: Reconstructing an American Myth. When he began this project he started with the notion that most cowboys were European. But the ranches that he went to in northeastern Nevada were adjacent to Indian reservations, and a number of cowboys were Indian. There were no black cowboys then, but in the past there had been one or two all-black crews. The most famous cowboy of local lore, “Nigger Henry,” had lived and worked in the area before the turn of the century. That is why the series is titled En Recuerdo de Henry (In Remembrance of Henry) and it forms the exhibit Cowboys: Reconstructing an American Myth. During the project Gleaton began to travel with Mexican American rodeo cowboys (charros) and eventually ended up living with indigenous grouts in the Sierra Madre Occidental region in Mexico. It was from there, after finding out that in the early 1700s there had been 5,000 black African slaves working in the mines of that area, that Gleaton first began his journey exploring the diaspora in Mexico, Central and South America. In 1992 Gleaton came to Light Work to print images from Mexico and returned to Light Work last year to continue work on a book that we are planning to publish later this year titled Tengo Casi 500 Años: Africa’s Legacy in Mexico, Central and South America. The expansion of this project from Mexico to South America hasn’t been a simple process of moving south like a map maker charting the physical terrain where Africans and their descendents have walked throughout the Americas, but a process of discovery and awareness that became both personal and far reaching. When he began the project Gleaton had a clear understanding that his goal was to “give a narrative voice by visual means to people deemed invisible by the greater part of society and in doing so deliberately crafting an alternative iconography of what beauty and family and love and goodness might stand for, one that is inclusive not exclusive.” Gleaton’s considerable skills as a photographer and his ability to make easy connections with a wide range of people have combined to produce portraits that are tender and intimate, impeccably crafted, and fully realized gems of description and passion. While Gleaton rarely questioned his satisfaction with how the portraits looked—as he moved farther and farther ahead into the project he began to question his motivations and the overall meaning of the work. The questions that would continue to be on his mind include, Who am I making these pictures for? Am I getting closer to any larger truths about race and racism in the Americas, or am I just using the people I photograph to help define my own identity as an African American and my skills as a photographer? By showing only a limited view of peoples lives, are these portraits just propaganda with good intentions? Am I smart enough to embrace the dialogue of racial politics that these pictures begin? Perhaps these questions weigh heavily on Gleaton because of the tension between making pictures that are extraordinarily beautiful and crafting a larger view of what they could mean and how they might function beyond that simple pleasure. At the beginning of the project Gleaton was content with making portraits that celebrated individuals he recognized as kindred spirits who were bound together by a common African heritage. As he brings this project to a close he realizes that any common heritage is much more complex than he originally envisioned. Even in the small sampling of images from the project reproduced here, we cannot help being seduced by the beauty and grace of Gleaton’s portraits. Seduction is usually the first step towards pursuit, and in these pictures Gleaton has offered us the opportunity to pursue the questions they pose with the encouragement that any artist would envy. Jeffrey Hoone Tony Gleaton lives in Los Angeles and participated in Light Work’s Artist-in-Residence program in October 1999. Of the more than ten million Africans brought to the Americas as slaves, only six percent were taken to the territory now known as the United States, with the rest being taken to the Caribbean, Mexico, Central and South America. These estimates might come as a surprise to many and beg the question that given these numbers, why are blacks in the U.S. at the center of racial consciousness in the Americas to the extent of appropriating the term “African American” only for residents of the U.S.? One answer is that the United States is the most powerful and developed nation in the Americas, and the consciousness of blacks in the U.S. has created a well-defined movement and led to changes in laws and legislation. That racism continues to be a cultural and social struggle in the U.S. with ongoing progress and failure helps to overshadow race relations in the rest of the Americas. Another answer is that after five-hundred years of nation building, culture, language, and national borders have prevented any unified black consciousness from developing in Mexico, Central and South America, and in some instances the legacy of Africa is all but invisible from the cultural dialogue. In many countries in Latin America the cultural dialogue revolves around class, but most often the reality is that the darker one’s skin, the lower one’s social status. With these issues, ideologies, and contradictions as a backdrop Tony Gleaton’s portraits serve to illuminate political issues of black consciousness in the Americas and at the same time express motivations that are highly personal and closely held. Gleaton’s ancestry is African and European, and with fair skin and hazel green eyes he could fit a variety of ethnic descriptions. Born in Detroit and growing up in Los Angeles in the 1950s as an African American who didn’t always fit in, he easily gravitated to investigating how black people can become forgotten when they don’t fit into neat historical categories. In one of his earliest bodies of work titled Cowboys: Reconstructing an American Myth, Gleaton made photographs and portraits of Mexican, African-American, Native-American, and European-American cowboys. This body of work challenges a widely held vision of the United States’ pioneering roots with portraits that are as carefully crafted as they are culturally revealing. In the process of working on this series Gleaton was introduced to Mexican rodeo and began traveling to and from Mexico with a group of charros (Mexican rodeo performers) from Los Angeles. Sharing an apartment with a stunt man from Churubusco Studios in Mexico City from 1982 to 1988 began a seven-year period of extensive travels in Mexico. Two years later Gleaton established a household with the Yarahumara Indians of Northern Mexico where he began making portraits of the present day descendants of African slaves brought to what was then New Spain in the 1500s, 1600s, and 1700s. In these portraits which resulted in the exhibition Africa’s Legacy in Mexico, which was extensively exhibited by the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service in the U.S. and in Mexico and Cuba by the Mexican National Council for Culture and the Arts, Gleaton had developed a style that would allow him to explore issues of cultural identity and present his own personal descriptions of beauty, family, and goodness. Gleaton continued to expand this project into Central and South America until he had logged over 50,000 miles on the ground to produce the work for this catalogue and exhibition. While Gleaton has expanded the territory of his work geographically from the American West to the fringes of the Amazon Basin, he has also crossed borders that have separated documentary and directorial approaches to photography. Regardless of the craft and care that Gleaton brings to his portraits, the basic documentary information in his work can be linked easily to some of the work Adrian Piper has produced in a directorial mode that explores the tension experienced by people who are not easily defined by rigid categories of race, gender, and class. In many of his portraits Gleaton strives to present his subjects as the epitome of beauty and grace. The best of these pictures achieve that goal in the same way that some of Lorna Simpson’s work insists that universal expressions of sensuality and beauty be represented though images of people of color. Since the invention of photography the portrait has been the medium’s most ubiquitous form. Our interest in how we look and how we look at others has survived from the daguerreotype to the digital image. Gleaton’s work fits squarely into that tradition. Using a medium format camera his portraits combine the clarity found in the work of Walker Evans, the long subtle range of tone that Roy DeCarava mastered in his photographs, and the unflinching eye contact and connecting spirit that informs the work of Fazal Sheikh. In the work in this catalogue and exhibition Gleaton is not just providing us with photographic evidence of Africa’s legacy, he is making that evidence a partner to his own personal desire of “crafting an alternative iconography of what beauty, and family, and love, and goodness might stand for—one that is inclusive not exclusive.” Gleaton presents his work in the style of pre-postmodern art photography. His prints are expertly

crafted to extend the gray scale to its limits allowing all possible shades from black to white to be completely revealed. His prints are presented in traditional white mats in sizes ranging from 8 x 10” to 16 x 20” which by today’s standards seem quiet and quaint. Although his work seems to live in the past it has an urgency informed by identity politics that makes it contemporary. Many academics and scholars would like us to think that identity politics are over and done with, but current events remind us that we make assumptions and judgements and take actions against individuals based on what they look like all the time. In producing this body of work Gleaton didn’t start out to explore specific kinds of questions about race and representation, nor did he want his work to be just elegantly crafted portraits of ethnographic study. In order to accomplish this task Gleaton walked a fine line between motivation and manipulation. His motivation was to connect with individuals with whom he shared a common story and to celebrate that bond with images of beauty and grace. To make these kinds of pictures in places where life is often hard would require a selective eye focused on his own point of view. While Gleaton doesn’t ignore that the people in his photographs appear at times to be living in circumstances less privileged than his own, he doesn’t make a point of it either, because that would be a different story to tell. His story is about making connections of the human spirit based on a shared history. In every one of his pictures the feeling of connection between subject and photographer is so fully realized, so intimate and expressive that we cannot escape how powerfully Gleaton has embraced this bond. If you saw only a few of Gleaton’s photographs at one time it might be harder to recognize the bond between photographer and subject. It might be especially lost in the portraits of children, who respond to suggestions and direction more readily than adults. When making his portraits Gleaton gives direction so that certain gestures and expressions of intimacy might only exist in the moment the shutter is released. By understanding and encouraging these moments Gleaton creates a consistency of adoration and respect throughout portraits made in many countries, cultures, and circumstances. Gleaton is not looking for a document of life. He has engaged in a process of call and response that began in Detroit and found its way through the Americas. Calling out with a singular voice and hoping for a chorus in response. Jeffrey Hoone, Director Light Work This project was made possible with the support of Light Work’s Endowment Fund for Mid-Career Artists. A Just Image As it plays out in the headlines, justice means equality, fairness, and the rule of law. Yet beyond the events broadcast on television and the news alerts flashed instantly to laptops and PDAs, there is a large realm of justice that eludes reporters. Throughout daily life - at home, in school, doing errands, tending children,m making dinner, playing sports - perceptions of justice often float just below the radar. The Light Work Collection offered plentiful proof that photographers frequently make images of routine daily life and its relationship to a sense of justice. However, as members of the Fine Arts 395 "Art and Identity"class noticed, scholars seldom extend the concept of justice into aspects of living that are legal, but sometimes ethically questionable. Counselors, social workers, and therapists seem to take over where the justice system stops. Nevertheless, the line between the legal system's purview and personal life is not fixed. Class members were careful to insist that the law is often less subtle in its grasp of situations and unaware of complexities than are the images included in this show. Nowhere in the law is it written that by embracing a stereotype one can sometimes achieve influence skin to contesting the mold. Thoughts and feelings such as these coalesced as the subject of this exhibition. Work and family emerged as sites where what is fair is not always what is equal. , and what is equal is not always fair. However fair or unfair, the triumphs and annoyances one experiences at work mostly fall below the threshold of the law. It is conventional wisdom, not the IRS, which suggests that wealth carries no guarantee of happiness. Creating this nuanced exhibition about justice in everyday life led the class into hearty and un-nuanced discussions about the slights, snubs, and rebuffs of an ordinary day. The students chose the title A Just Image for this exhibition before they read about the expression in Roland Barthes' Camera Lucida. With the phrase, he and they recognize that art coaxes the world of appearances to create symbols signifying ideas for which there are no words. Just an image becomes A Just Image. Mary Warner MarienA Just Image: Selections from the Light Work Collection is the result of a collaborative effort by thirty-one Syracuse University students enrolled in Professor Mary Warner Marien's "Art and Identity" course. The exhibition examines the Fall 2007 Syracuse Symposium theme of justice. The students chose images from the Light Work Collection, considering the personal and societal meanings of justice. They have created an interactive exhibition, where, as the students write in the exhibition catalogue, "ironically... the viewer is still judging."A Just Image invites viewers to explore the photographs and rethink their definition of justice. As the students of the "Art and Identity" course discovered, though justice is a universal concept, it does not necessarily carry the same meaning for everyone. This can be seen in the different perceptions of stereotypes, families, occupations, and leisure activities, which are some of the topics examined by the class. According to the students, " The Pictures we have chosen require more than just superficial judgment; they require the viewer to acknowledge their own stereotyped projections." Roslyn Esperon