

'The Evidence of Things Not Seen'

Drawings by Glenn Ligon

Brooklyn Museum
200 Eastern Parkway, at Prospect Park
Through Feb. 9

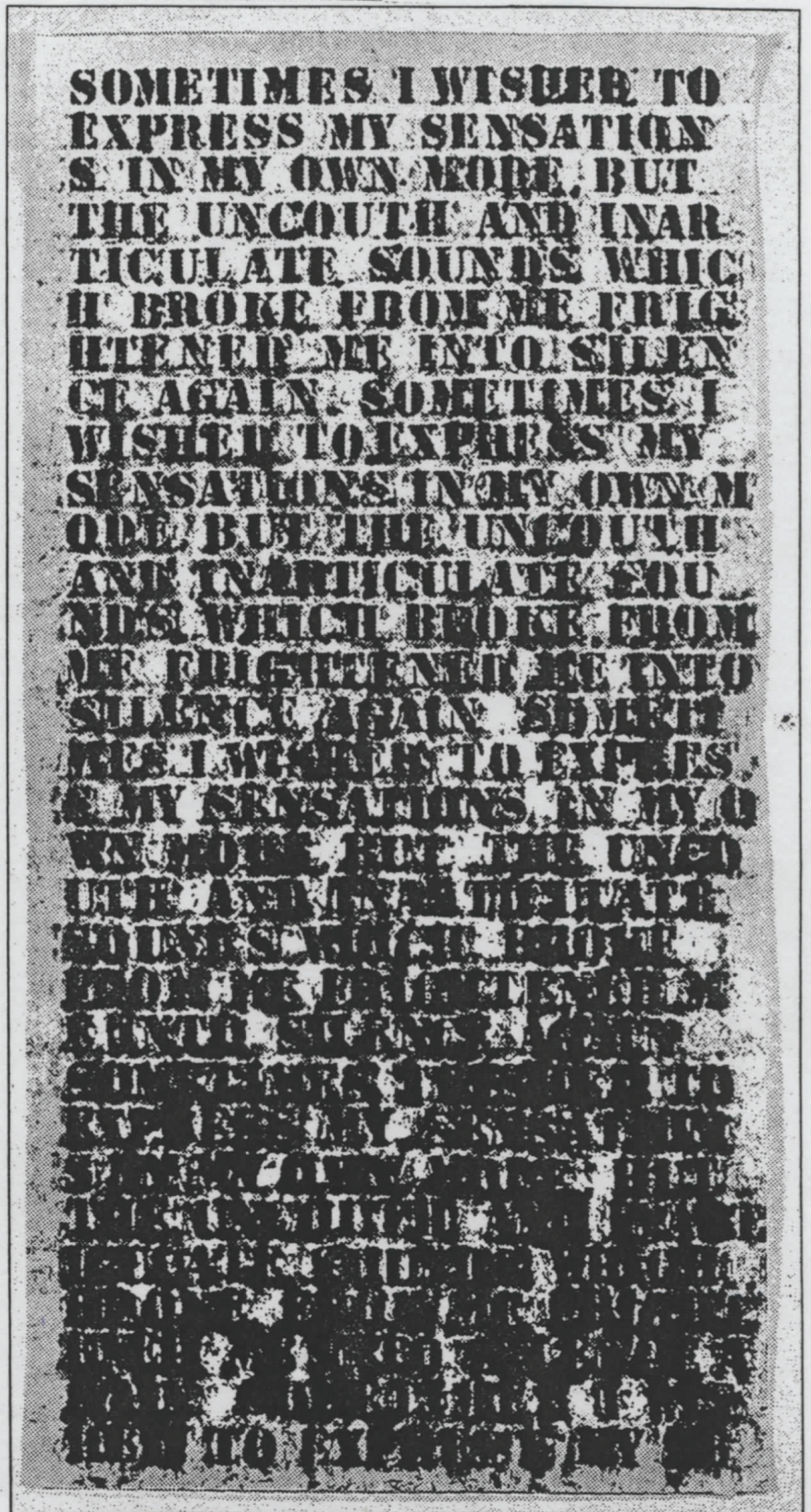
Glenn Ligon has recently produced some provocative installation work. But this small show, organized by Charlotta Kotik for the Brooklyn Museum's "Working in Brooklyn" series, concentrates on the text-intensive painting with which he made his name.

Each of these works on paper, in oil stick, gouache and charcoal, has letters as a main element, spelling out phrases from literature or popular sources. In some pieces, the words start out sharply defined high in the vertical field, then smudge into illegibility as they descend. In others, they are picked out in low relief on coal-black ground, like scarification on skin.

Several of the writers whose words Mr. Ligon quotes — James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison and Zora Neale Hurston — deal with being black in a white America. But a passage from Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein" — "Sometimes I wished to express my sensations in my own mode, but the uncouth and inarticulate sounds which broke from me frightened me into silence again" — gets straight to the emotional heart of what it is to be made to feel monstrous by one's difference, whatever that difference may be.

Mr. Ligon's use of old-fashioned stencil type links his drawings with the early work of Jasper Johns and Robert Indiana, though his direct address to questions of race and sexuality mark a departure from those models. However forthright their content, though, Mr. Ligon's drawn words have their own mystery. Seen through a haze of charcoal or in raking gallery light, they're hard to read, but their ideas are big.

HOLLAND COTTER



Brooklyn Museum

Glenn Ligon's "Study for Frankenstein No. 1," at the Brooklyn Museum