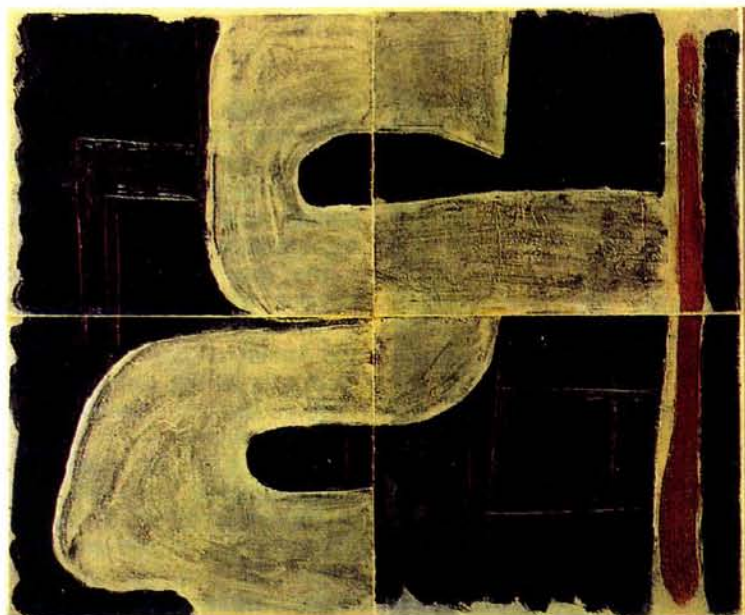


Art in America

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Sam Glankoff: *PP4010*, 1974, ink and casein on paper, 4 panels, 43% by 53% overall; at Victoria Munroe.

Sam Glankoff at Victoria Munroe

After years of formal experimentation and assimilation of modern styles, Sam Glankoff in his 70s produced the unique print-paintings that represent a felicitous meeting of Eastern and Western culture. In both technique and content, Glankoff (1894–1982) found his ultimate inspiration in Oriental art and philosophy, and he was able to fully integrate it with the Western abstract tradition. His large monoprints, complex layerings of color and texture executed with multiple woodblocks in water-based printer's ink and casein paint, show an affinity with Kenzo Okada's work as well as Motherwell's elegies or Gottlieb's "bursts." In his late work, Glankoff was able to achieve a mottled, painterly surface without losing clarity of shape.

Glankoff's work from the '40s represents his first excursions into abstraction, with a graphic style influenced by, in varying degrees, Klee, Miro and Picasso. Taking off from the figure, Glankoff began to experiment with color, anticipating the important role it would play some three decades later. By the early '70s, when finally free of a family business and able to pursue his art unimpeded, Glankoff returned to the medium of the woodcut, inventing a process of multi-layered monoprint (up to ten pulls on thin Japanese paper) to achieve full saturation of color that he sought. He simplified his imagery to suit the large-format print medium; the resulting works, comprising from four to nine sheets, are starkly dramatic and have the impact of paintings.

A work such as *PP4002*, which has the emphatic power of a Kline, can be read as an interior or as a still life, but succeeds primarily as a composition in black and white. Several other pieces, including *PP4023*, retain the figurative element, though fragmented and reduced to a calligraphic gesture. A piece from 1974 incorporates two inverted C-curves, one above the other, the repeated shape flowing across the dark field, with a vertical red streak to one side that holds the composition together. Curiously enough, Glankoff's work retains a considerable freshness despite the laborious nature of the process that he employed.

The works in one series of print-paintings that date from about 1976–81 (Glankoff was inconsistent about dating his work) focus on a central, elliptical form that hovers on a field of deep red that has the soft edges of a Rothko. In each work Glankoff treats the basic shape differently: as an expanding sequence of concentric, boomeranglike curves in green and black, or as a hazy-edged gray-green ovoid that seems to breathe inside a pale white halo. With subtle variations, the character conveyed is similar to a portrait; the elliptical form can be read as a disembodied head. Glankoff's search for a figurative equivalent, through years of technical refinement, resulted in works that are both primal and evocative. —Robert G. Edelman