

JOHNSON LOWE GALLERY

Press Release:

Sam Glankoff, *Inventing an Image*

On view February 27, 2026 – March 28, 2026

Opening Reception: Friday, February 27th from 6:00 to 8:00 pm

Atlanta, Georgia – Johnson Lowe Gallery is pleased to present *Inventing an Image*, an exhibition of works by Sam Glankoff (1894-1982), the late New York-based American artist whose innovative melding of printmaking and painting earned him a distinct place in the history of modern abstraction. Glankoff spent the better part of his early career, from the 1920s through the 1960s, illustrating the stories, characters, and scenes of novels and comic strips, even designing the first stuffed toys of Babar the Elephant and Dr. Seuss. As peripheral to the discourse of serious fine art as these commercial beginnings were often regarded, the artist nevertheless maintained a rigorous private studio practice throughout this same period. By the 1970s, he devoted himself fully to works of his own conception and imagination, ultimately arriving at a hybrid method so singular that it prompted the invention of a new term: *print-painting*.

After decades spent rendering legible figures for magazines, books, and commercial commissions, Glankoff began to interrogate the very premise of depiction itself. In the isolation of his studio, the clarity and narrative function that had defined his professional output gave way to a more exacting inquiry: how might an image carry emotional and psychic force without relying on description? The human figure, long his point of departure, became the site of that experiment. He compressed it, fractured it, pared it down until anatomy dissolved, and only a residue remained. “I distorted it so that you could hardly trace the fact that it was originally a human,” he later recalled. This was an act of distillation. Glankoff rather than abandoning the figure, tested how much of it could be removed while still retaining its essential charge. In that charged remainder, somewhere between body and sign, the artist began to invent an image no longer bound to narrative clarity but constructed from sheer necessity.

The works gathered in *Inventing an Image* make visible the vocabulary Glankoff forged through a sustained engagement with ancient writing systems and East Asian brush traditions, where drawing and writing share a common origin. Thick, matte blacks advance across fields of muted blue, earthen red, and chalked white, forming shapes that read at once as bodies and as characters. Limbs hinge at abrupt angles; torsos compress into block-like masses; heads flatten into discs or dissolve into ovoid silhouettes. The figure is translated and distorted until it functions less as anatomy than as sign and signal. In several compositions, circles hover within rectangles or are split and doubled; their symmetry held in suspension. For Glankoff, the circle was consummate, primitive, a form dense with psychic and symbolic implication. Pressed, dragged, and layered, the ink retains the immediacy of the hand, as if each image were being written into existence. What emerges is a language constructed from the remnants of the human form, a calligraphic abstraction in which body becomes glyph and painting becomes script.

In the early 1970s, after encountering Japanese woodcut polyptychs, Glankoff began joining separately printed sheets into compound works, allowing the image to extend across visible seams and into real space. From this modular construction emerged the mature print-painting: neither reproduction nor conventional canvas, but an object built from increments and held together by intention. The scale placed his work in conversation with the ambitions of postwar abstraction, yet its authority remained distinctly his own, forged from the steady translation of the body into sign and the circle into emblem. What had originated in inward pressure resolved into compositions of rare equilibrium.

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About Sam Glankoff

Sam Glankoff (b. 1894 - d.1982, New York) was a self-taught painter and an accomplished woodcut artist. Technically innovative, decidedly individualistic and, by his own choice, routinely isolated from the broader society and art world he found so distracting, Glankoff developed an original technique that combined aspects of printmaking and painting in an all-new, modernist genre.

Glankoff invented “print- paintings,” richly layered works made with colored, water-based inks applied to delicate Japanese papers. Joining several sheets of paper together to create large-format works, he produced eloquent abstractions whose primordial symbols, bold brushstrokes and spiritual energy found affinities with both the monumental art forms of ancient civilizations and the aspirational expressions of the art of his time.

During his lifetime, the artist never made any effort to gain public attention for his art. Today, his works may be found in many public, private and corporate collections, including those of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York.

About Johnson Lowe Gallery

Johnson Lowe Gallery champions emerging, mid-career, and established artists from our region and beyond. Our program reveres the transformative power of artistic expression, honoring the profound nature of visual language and its ability to drive personal and societal paradigm shifts.

Founded in 1989 by Bill Lowe, the gallery’s extensive exhibition history includes renowned artists such as Thornton Dial, Michael David, Ida Applebroog, Markus Lupertz and Leiko Ikemura. In 2023, the gallery was re-established as Johnson Lowe Gallery under the Direction of Donovan Johnson with *The Alchemists*, a historic exhibition co-curated by Seph Rodney. This exhibition featured works by Sanford Biggers, Mark Bradford, Ebony G. Patterson, Thornton Dial, William Downs, Shanequa Gay, Trenton Doyle Hancock, and many others.

Notes to Editors

Artist: Sam Glankoff

Title: *Inventing an Image*

Dates: February 27, 2026 – March 28, 2026

Address:

764 Miami Cir NE #210, Atlanta, GA 30324

Hours:

Tuesday – Friday | 10:00 am – 5:30 pm

Saturday | 11:00 am – 5:30 pm

Sunday, Monday, and Evenings by appointment

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For all media inquiries, please contact info@johnsonlowe.com

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