

## Translating Pam Poquette's *Glyphs*

By Robert R. Shane

The exhibition title *Glyphs* evokes one of the earliest forms of writing—pictograms conveying codified ideas, pointing to meanings outside the boundaries of their contours carved into stone. As such, this title calls upon us to become archaeologists of the present who have just entered the gallery and discover on its walls a series of 11 x 8 inch works of ink, paint, and thread on paper, composed of tensile linear structures nested within fields of pulsating color, whose meanings have yet to be translated. We have uncovered Pam Poquette's *Glyphs*, wordless texts that speak to us as they cross borders between the visual and the corporeal, image and idiom, the ancient world and our own.

The notion of the glyph confounds the clear boundary we assume separates word from image in the West. This border, however, has always been transgressed: from one direction by typographers crafting the visual appearance of words, and from the other by art critics whose ekphrastic writing makes art appear visually in the mind of the reader. In our digital age in which images, icons, and emoji constitute the lingua franca employed in social media, memes, and image boards, we all cross this border more and more. Poquette's *Glyphs* cross this border and others, stylistic and temporal, switching among the modernist idiom of pure abstraction—with ostensibly no reference to the world outside its own borders—the idiom of contemporary graphic novels evident in her stylized lines, and the idiom of embroidery with its history of domestic, traditionally feminine labor.

Poquette aptly refers to her *Glyphs* as both “shape-shifters” and “beings.” They metamorphose and respire before us: expanding and contracting, gnarling and untangling, reaching and retracting. The movements of Poquette's linework, strewn like fascia liberated from organs and muscles and connecting cavities of brilliant color, translate themselves into kinesthetic sensations within our bodies: an energetic dance of lines striving upward into the yellow ether of *Glyph 12*, the melancholic disintegration of blue and green orifices in *Glyph 18*, the exhilarating aggression of jagged forms tearing through fleshy pinks and reds in *Glyph 19*.

Poquette's process is a series of translations between media. First, she observes her own handheld sculptures—never seen by us the viewers—made of found wood and debris wrapped in copper wire, translating them into two-dimensional contour drawings. In turn, she virtually collages those drawings in Photoshop, drafting a template for the linear structure of her compositions. She paints colors in response to the emotional valence of those linear forms. Finally, she transforms the paintings into relief sculptures by stitching into the paper metallic threads that echo the lost language of the copper wire.

The tattered edges of Poquette's *Glyphs* suggest we have discovered long-lost artifacts, even though they glow with the vibrancy of our electronic screens. These deckled edges signal the permeability of the artworks' borders; the animate forms yearn to burst past the boundaries of their paper. Inexorable, the force of Poquette's *Glyphs* spills into our realm, calling on us, the viewers, to translate them yet again.

Robert R. Shane received his Ph.D. in art history and criticism from Stony Brook University and is an associate professor at The College of Saint Rose, Albany, NY. [www.RobertShaneAesthetics.com](http://www.RobertShaneAesthetics.com)



*Glyph 20*, 2018  
flashe, ink, and thread on cotton rag paper, 11 x 8 inches