

# OWINGS-DEWEY FINE ART

A GALLERY FOR 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN ART  
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## GENE KLOSS

(b. 1903 Oakland, CA – 1996 Taos, NM)

Media: aquatint; drypoint; etching; mezzotint; oil; watercolor

Education: University of California at Berkeley; California School of Fine Arts, San Francisco; College of Arts and Crafts, Oakland.

Public Collections (partial list): Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, PA; Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, Texas; Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, PA; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City; Museum of New Mexico, Santa Fe; Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC; New York Public Library, New York City; San Francisco Art Museum, CA.

Awards: Associate Membership Award, California Society of Etchers, 1934; Eyre Gold Medal, Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, 1936; Henry B. Shope Prize, Society of American Etchers, 1951; First Prize, Chicago Society of Etchers, 1952; Purchase Prize, 1961, Print Club of Albany; Anonymous Prize, National Academy of Design, 1961.

## Selected Bibliography:

Adams, Clinton, *Printmaking in New Mexico, 1880-1990*. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1991.

Bishop, Bill and Gail, "Gene Kloss, Fifty Years in Taos," *Southwest Art*, March, 1975.

Nelson, Mary Carroll, *The Legendary Artists of Taos*. Watson-Guption Publications, New York, 1980

Gene Kloss arrived in Taos in 1925 while on a camping honeymoon trip with her husband, poet-composer Phillip Kloss. Ms. Kloss brought with her very little other than her 60-pound etching press. From that time until the 40s, Kloss spent most of the year in Taos and wintered in Berkeley, until she and her husband settled permanently in New Mexico. Kloss was born in Oakland, California in 1903 and established her reputation on the West Coast in the 20s and 30s with several one-woman shows of paintings and etchings in San Francisco and elsewhere. Her reputation spread across the nation through her participation in highly successful group shows. *Art News* wrote, "Gene Kloss is one of our most sensitive and sympathetic interpreters of the Southwest." One critic called her a "landscape mythic," another a "portrait psychologist," but perhaps the highest praise came from a Taos Indian who said on looking at one of her etchings of a pueblo

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interior, “Yes, that is the way it was that night at our house.”

Kloss worked predominantly in three media – etching, oil, and watercolor – but is best known for her prints of New Mexico subjects. Her etchings demonstrate an imaginative command over the process. The prints display a power and simplicity that make sensitive use of bold, black areas. Frequently there is a minimum of middle tones while rather generous but strategically placed areas of white represent New Mexico light. Despite their relatively small size, Kloss’s landscape etchings capture quite convincingly the feeling of vast space associated with New Mexico’s northern mountains. She selectively animates the scene and dramatically calls attention to the schism between the slightness of man and the magnitude of his natural surroundings in the Southwest. All of Kloss’s compositions are energized by upward rising diagonals, the mark of her own affirmative disposition and of her response to the unique Taos landscape. She would often say, “In this country everything lifts – the trees, the mountains, the sky.”

The body of her works has a consistent harmony in its balanced concern for the subject and for abstract principles of design. “I want the finished print to enable the viewer to see the design, the subject matter from across the room, at arm’s length or under a magnifying glass – also upside-down for satisfactory abstract design.” Whether realistic or illusionistic, a Kloss is remarkably free of detail. As a pattern of line, shape and value, her work is imbued with the power of contrasts, the force of motion, and a grace which is distinctly Kloss. Kloss never sketched or used a camera to record the images she saw in the pueblos. Instead, she committed the feeling and the event to her mind as patterns – as in music. The observer in Gene Kloss was filled with sensitivity for the subject matter and an awareness of the musical rhythms of Indian rituals. As she proclaimed, “There has always been a close alliance between my art and music...”

Every Kloss etching was printed by the artist herself, and it was only in the late 70s that she bought a power-driven massive press built to her specifications. She was a meticulous craftswoman. She did not complete an edition in one printing. There may be years between the concept and the final print in an edition; yet in her inking, wiping and printing of the etching, there is no detectable difference between prints. Quality control of printing was essential in a Gene Kloss etching because her handling of etching ink during the print process was akin to painting. There are deep black areas, sharp whites as clean as fresh paper, and a range of grays. In all the seventy years she so successfully employed this medium, she did not once hand over the printing process to anyone else.

In 1950, Gene Kloss was elected an associate member of the National Academy of Design, and to full membership in 1972. However, Kloss elected not to follow her prints on their journeys. A true Westerner, the artist never went east of the Mississippi River. She remained content to stay in the West, where her remarkable career which spanned

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over seventy years had its source.