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WHITE HOUSE CHINA
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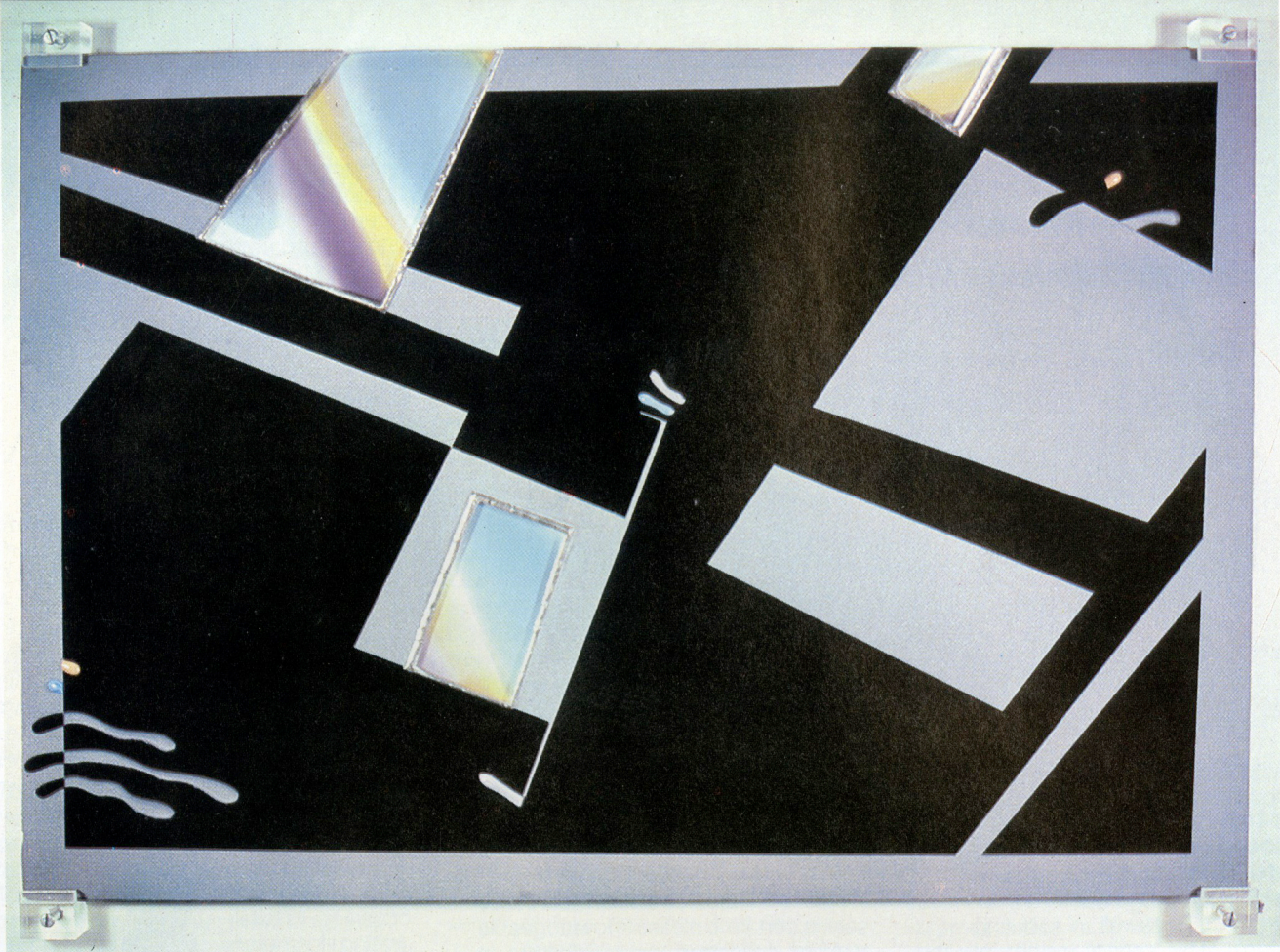
This lovely orange banded dinner plate is part of the "Flower Set." Commissioned by the wife of President Ulysses S. Grant in 1870, the "Flower Set" was manufactured by Haviland & Co. of Limoges, France.

(Photograph courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution)

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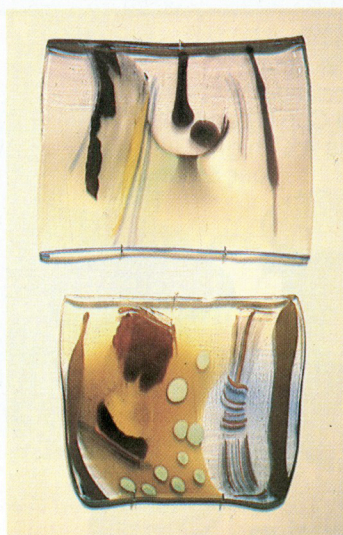
Photos by Henry Halem

Henry Halem Paints A Glass Picture

by Paul Hollister

Like many American studio glassmakers, Henry Halem began as a potter. For some 20 years he worked in clay, earning his Master of Fine Arts degree and a respectable reputation in ceramics. But he was never completely happy in that medium and, in 1968, he discovered the potential for glass when he entered Harvey Littleton's pioneering glass studio at the University of Wisconsin.

Again, like many studio glassmakers, Halem blew the basic modern container shape: the cylinder, which can be further manipulated and decorated internally and externally in a variety of ways. Halem was at first strongly influenced by the expressionist style of West German glassmaker Erwin Eisch. But more significantly for his present work, Halem recalls influences of painting—the French Cubists, Italian Futurists, Russian Suprematists—and such individual painters as Feininger and, especially, Miró, that 87-year old survivor of modern painting. Miró, incidentally, has



Top: Since Halem's paintings are untitled, viewers are free to imagine anything. Colored areas are bordered with lead.

Above: Colored panels pick up light from white glass background like slides of a journey to a mysterious land.

worked in ceramics during the past decade, the reverse of Halem's course.

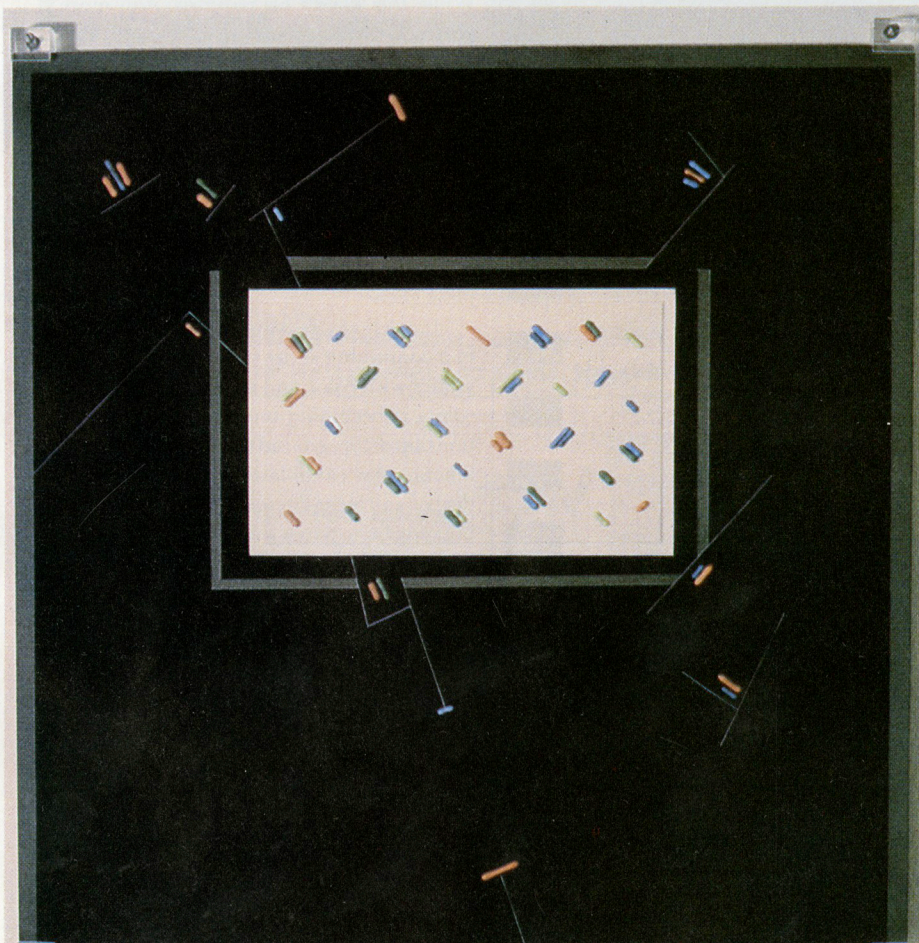
Painting has become important to Henry Halem because glass painting is exactly what he now does. He does not paint with a brush on glass as stained glass artists do, he paints *in* and *with* hot and sandblasted glass. Halem's paintings are highly individual in concept and skillful in execution, but they are not easily appreciated in a casual glance. Since I could not account in words for my own reactions to his paintings, I asked Halem to explain to me what he is trying to do and how he does it. This article is the result.

The bubble is as essential to glassblowing as the lungs are to breathing. The glass container or vase is nothing but an expanded, elongated bubble, with one end removed. If the sides of the bubble are straightened it becomes a cylinder. "I blew lots of cylinders," Halem recalls wearily. Until 1977 Halem had thought of a cylinder as nothing more than a surface to be decora-



Above: *Contours of colored blooms are carried into frosty background in arcs as precise as a figure skater's blades.*

Below: *Decorative but never tiresome plotting of lines and squiggles suggests ordered forces in space.*



ted. Such well known studio glassmakers as Dale Chihuly, Mark Peiser, James Harmon, and Flora Mace had been decorating their cylinders and bubbles by applying delicate colored glass threads to the hot surface and fusing them into the design. But Henry Halem had a further idea. If a decorated hollow cylinder were opened and flattened, it would then be a sheet of colored glass that could serve as material for a flat glass painting. The flattening process that produces sheet glass is the centuries old basis of the window or sheet glass industry. In late 1977 it became the basis also of Henry Halem's glass paintings.

How he does a painting is fascinating. The paintings—he modestly calls them panels—comprise two surfaces: the painted glass areas of the foreground design, and the background or support, the equivalent of an artist's canvas. Halem begins by blowing clear glass cylinders, which he decorates while hot by applying streaks and spots and delicate rods of colored glass to the surface in a manner that amounts to painting with hot glass. Some of these colored designs are sharply delineated, some show soft waves or blooms of color. Now up to this point what he has done differs only in personal style from the work of other studio glassmakers. But from here on Halem is on his own.

He removes the bottom, as well as the top, of the decorated cylinder, and slices open the remaining tube with a diamond saw. The sliced tube is slowly reheated in an annealing oven until it is pliable enough to be opened flat. We now have a flat sheet with a decorated surface. Halem creates a design by cutting the decorated sheet into a variety of sharp-edged, geometrical shapes. His glass 'canvas' is a $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{3}{8}$ inch thick sheet of black, opaque white, or gray plate glass purchased from a commercial glass company. Halem moves the colored shapes over the plate glass surface until they suggest a formal overall design. Then he transfers the design to paper the same size as the plate glass 'canvas' and draws in the background design with a pencil. Interestingly, this procedure is exactly the reverse of that which begins on paper or canvas to produce a stained glass window.

The backgrounds of his glass paintings are as important to Halem as the foregrounds. He decides which background areas should be left positive or shiny and which negative or sandblasted to a mat texture. After the drawing is established on the paper, Halem spreads rubber cement over the surface of the plate glass background, and onto this he pastes a 3-M rubber stencil that will resist sandblasting. He traces the design through carbon paper onto the surface of the glass. He blasts through the stencilled cutout into the plate glass back-

