

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

August 17, 2016

Line into Color, Color into Line Helen Frankenthaler

Paintings 1962–1987

September 16–October 29, 2016
Opening reception: Friday, September 16, 6–8 pm
Gagosian Gallery
456 North Camden Drive, Beverly Hills
www.gagosian.com



...A line, color, shapes, spaces, all do one thing for and within themselves, and yet do something else, in relation to everything that is going on within the four sides [of the canvas]. A line is a line, but it is a color...
—Helen Frankenthaler

Gagosian Gallery is pleased to announce an exhibition of paintings by Helen Frankenthaler.

The exhibition comprises eighteen canvases by Frankenthaler from a twenty-five year time span, selected to reveal how the renowned abstract painter articulated the relationship between drawing and color during this period. In her pioneering work of the 1950s, inspired by Jackson Pollock, Frankenthaler had poured both linear tracks and spreading areas of thinned paint onto unprimed canvas. She continued with this approach in the early 1960s, but with a difference: in paintings like *Pink Field* (1962), broad areas of color combine with linear elements so narrow as to seem drawn, resulting in canvases with no sense of division between the drawn and the painted. In such works as *Parade* (1965), she set aside the landscape association that had aided the cohesion of the earlier work for an abstract parade of colored lines and areas. The contours of these areas, vividly contrasted against white canvas, look as much drawn as do the narrow, cursively shaped lines of paint.

In 1970, Frankenthaler reintroduced individual elements of drawing into her work. In paintings such as *Mornings* and *Barbizon*, she began by setting down large areas with drawn contours, before running slender graphic filaments across them. In later works of that decade such as *Rapunzel* (1974), she carried this further by pre-painting the entire canvas with one color before setting down the drawing, together with color patches, on top. Then, in a group of paintings from 1976, which includes *Blue Bellows* and *Sentry*, she created the drawn elements by masking out strips of bare canvas close to the vertical edges of the works before applying a single color over them in a looser, more painterly fashion. Later that decade, in works like *Mineral Kingdom* (1976), she gave prominence to richly varied applications of paint, drawn over the surface with a variety of spreading tools. By the early 1980s, this led to the extraordinarily complex, visually stunning surfaces of *Grey Fireworks* (1982) and *Brother Angel* (1983), composed of swathes, areas, and clumps of paint, with drawn elements snaking among them.

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The final section of the exhibition presents work from the mid-1980s in which Frankenthaler brought together several of the themes that she had been exploring over the preceding two decades: pre-painted, single-colored grounds, sometimes flatly painted, sometimes varied in application; filaments and broader tracks of drawing juxtaposed with discrete areas, some with cursively drawn contours; clumps of heavier and sometimes very heavy paint; and vertical formats with drawing that echoed the framing edges of the paintings. The exhibition concludes with five paintings from 1985–1987 that reflect these themes, conveying the sense of an artist at the height of her powers, consolidating her resources to create extremely original canvases that are both rigorous and sensuous.

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue, with a preface by John Elderfield and new essays by Yale University art historian Carol Armstrong and novelist Francine Prose.

This is the third exhibition of Helen Frankenthaler's art to be presented by Gagosian Gallery, following "Painted on 21st Street: Helen Frankenthaler from 1950 to 1959" (2013) at Gagosian West 21st Street, and "Helen Frankenthaler: Composing with Color: Paintings 1962-1963" at Gagosian Madison Avenue (2014).

Helen Frankenthaler (1928–2011), whose career spanned six decades, has long been recognized as one of the great American artists of the twentieth century. Heir to first-generation Abstract Expressionism, she brought together in her work a conception of the canvas as both a formalized field and an arena for gestural drawing. She was eminent among second-generation postwar American abstract painters and is widely credited for playing a pivotal role in the transition from Abstract Expressionism to Color Field painting. Her works are included in major museums and collections worldwide, and her career has been the subject of three major monographs and numerous monographic museum exhibitions, including "Helen Frankenthaler: Paintings," The Jewish Museum, New York (1960); "Helen Frankenthaler," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1969, traveled to Whitechapel Gallery, London; Orangerie Herrenhausen, Hanover; and Kongresshalle, Berlin); and "Helen Frankenthaler: A Paintings Retrospective," Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth (1989–90, traveled to Museum of Modern Art, New York; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; and Detroit Institute of Arts).

For further information please contact Alexandra Magnuson at alex@gagosian.com or at +1.310.271.9400. All images are subject to copyright. Gallery approval must be granted prior to reproduction. Additional information can be found at the [Helen Frankenthaler Foundation](#) or [Gagosian Gallery](#) websites.

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Image: *Grey Fireworks*, 1982, acrylic on canvas, 72 × 118 1/2 inches (182.9 × 301 cm) © 2016 Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, Inc./Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo by Rob McKeever.

Gagosian Gallery was established in 1980 by Larry Gagosian.