

Press Contact (including information on spokespeople): Jeanne Collins & Associates, LLC,
New York City, +1-646-486-7050, info@jcollinsassociates.com

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**HELEN FRANKENTHALER, ESTEEMED ABSTRACT ARTIST
FOR SIX DECADES, DIES AT AGE 83**

With profound sadness, the family of Helen Frankenthaler announces the death of Ms. Frankenthaler on December 27, 2011, at age 83, following a lengthy illness.

Frankenthaler, whose career spanned six decades, has long been recognized as one of the great American artists of the 20th century. Heir of the first-generation Abstract Expressionists, she brought together in her work—always with prodigious inventiveness and singular beauty—the idea of the canvas as both an arena of gesture and a formal field. She was eminent among the second generation of postwar abstract American painters and is widely credited for playing a pivotal role in the transition from Abstract Expressionism to Color Field painting. One of the foremost colorists of our time, she produced a body of work whose impact on contemporary art has been profound.



Helen Frankenthaler, 1964. (detail)
Photograph by Alexander Liberman.
Alexander Liberman Photography Archive,
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Frankenthaler, daughter of New York State Supreme Court Justice Alfred Frankenthaler and his wife, Martha (Lowenstein) Frankenthaler, was born on December 12, 1928, and raised in New York City. She attended the Dalton School, where she received her earliest art instruction from Rufino Tamayo. In 1949, she graduated from Bennington College, where she was a student of Paul Feeley, following which she went on to study briefly with Hans Hofmann.

Frankenthaler's professional exhibition career began in 1950, when Adolph Gottlieb selected her painting *Beach* (1950) for inclusion in the exhibition titled *Fifteen Unknowns Selected by Artists of the Kootz Gallery*. Her first solo exhibition was presented in 1951, at New York's Tibor de Nagy Gallery, and she was also included that

year in the landmark exhibition *9th Street: Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture*. Renowned art critic Clement Greenberg immediately recognized her originality. Her work went on to garner growing international attention. As early as 1959, she began to be a regular presence in major international exhibitions, and in 1960 she had her first museum retrospective, at The Jewish Museum, in New York City.

In 1952, Frankenthaler created *Mountains and Sea*, a seminal breakthrough painting of American abstraction. Pioneering the “stain” painting technique, she worked by pouring thinned paint directly onto raw, unprimed canvas laid on the studio floor, working from all sides to create floating fields of translucent color. *Mountains and Sea* was immediately influential for the artists who formed the Color Field school of painting, notable among them Morris Louis and Kenneth Noland. Thereafter, Frankenthaler remained a defining force in the development of American painting.

Throughout her long career, Frankenthaler experimented tirelessly, and, in addition to unique paintings on canvas and paper, she worked in a wide range of media, including ceramics, sculpture, tapestry, and especially printmaking. She was a significant voice in the mid-century “print renaissance” among American abstract painters, and in particular is renowned for her woodcuts. Her distinguished and prolific career has been the subject of numerous monographic museum exhibitions, including major retrospectives at The Jewish Museum in 1960; the Whitney Museum of American Art, and European tour, in 1969; The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, and tour, in 1985 (works on paper); The Museum of Modern Art, New York, and The Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, and tour, in 1989; the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., and tour, in 1993 (prints); the Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, and the Naples Museum of Art, Florida, and tour, in 2002 (woodcuts); and the Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami, and the Royal Scottish Academy, in 2003 (works on paper).

In addition to the many scholarly essays and articles on her work by renowned art historians, curators, and critics, Frankenthaler was the subject of three monographs: *Frankenthaler*, by Barbara Rose (1971); *Frankenthaler*, by John Elderfield (1989); and *Frankenthaler: A Catalogue Raisonné, Prints 1961–1994*, by Suzanne Boorsch and Pegram Harrison (1996).

Important works by the artist may be found in major museums worldwide, among them the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; the Art Institute of Chicago; the Los Angeles

County Museum of Art; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

Helen Frankenthaler was the recipient of twenty-six honorary doctorates and numerous honors and awards, among them: First Prize for Painting, *Première Biennale de Paris* (1959); the first woman elected Fellow at Calhoun College, Yale University (1968); Art and Humanities Award, Yale University (1976); New York City Mayor's Award of Honor for Arts and Culture (1986); Distinguished Artist Award for Lifetime Achievement, College Art Association (1994); Lifetime Achievement Award, 25th Anniversary, Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase College, State University of New York (1999); National Medal of the Arts (2001); Skowhegan Medal for Painting (2003); Gold Medal of Honor, Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts (2005); and the inaugural Nelson A. Rockefeller Award in Art from Purchase College, State University of New York, School of Arts (2007). Most recently, she was appointed as an Honorary Academician of the Royal Academy of Arts in London (2011). From 1985 to 1992, she served on the National Council on the Arts of the National Endowment for the Arts. Her many memberships included the American Academy of Arts and Letters (1974–2011), where she served as Vice-Chancellor in 1991.

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Photo: Helen Frankenthaler in her New York studio at 83rd Street and Third Avenue, 1964, with *Interior Landscape*, 1964 (collection of San Francisco Museum of Modern Art), behind her on wall (detail). Photograph by Alexander Liberman. Alexander Liberman Photography Archive, Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, California. (2000.R.19). Copyright © J. Paul Getty Trust.