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# Constructing Helen Frankenthaler: Redefining a 'Woman' Artist Since 1960

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CONSTRUCTING HELEN FRANKENTHALER:  
REDEFINING A 'WOMAN' ARTIST SINCE 1960

by

Alexandra Page Alberda

A THESIS

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CONSTRUCTING HELEN FRANKENTHALER:  
REDEFINING A 'WOMAN' ARTIST SINCE 1960

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University of Nebraska, 2015

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This thesis addresses how academics, curators, and art writers in the popular press reviewed Helen Frankenthaler during her major retrospectives of 1960 (The Jewish Museum), 1969 (The Whitney Museum of American Art), and 1989 (The Museum of Modern Art). Included is an examination of how she has been written about after her death in 2012, with analysis of the changes in the language used to critique the artist and her work as influenced by the advent of feminist theory, social history, and gender theory. I examine recent exhibitions on Frankenthaler at the Gagosian Gallery, New York City, and the Albright-Knox Art Gallery held between 2013-2015. Frankenthaler's art and its reception provides a case study of a woman artist whose career was established before the feminist movement in the 1970s, and continues to be relevant in the contemporary art world.

Analysis of how gendered language is applied to Frankenthaler in the popular press and in catalogue essays reveals a shift in art historical writing after feminist theory began to challenge the biases inherent in patriarchal norms and/or universals. These shifts in language reflect a more self-conscious art historical discourse that is able to reevaluate its own canon in order to be more inclusive of all artists.

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## Introduction: Restrictive Language

Helen Frankenthaler entered the art world at a time when men dominated artistic discourse and institutional practices. Frankenthaler, who moved to New York City in 1950, encountered an art scene largely controlled by white male artists, dealers, curators, patrons, and critics. The preferred style of painting was Abstract Expressionism and the major artist was Jackson Pollock. The voice of Clement Greenberg, a formalist art critic, was influential on the art world and on art history. Women struggled in this male-centric art world to find relevance beyond being an artist's wife or critic's girlfriend. Even women gallery owners, such as Peggy Guggenheim, primarily supported and showed male artists. Frankenthaler, however, found a way to work within this patriarchal system and ultimately discovered support and success in the New York art scene.

Frankenthaler is best known for her 1952 painting *Mountains and Sea* (fig. 1), which is often noted for its influence on the development of Color Field painting by Kenneth Noland and Morris Louis. In the canonical story of the movement's origins, Greenberg is responsible for bringing Noland and Louis to Frankenthaler's New York City studio in 1953 to show them the painting (in her absence). Louis later claimed that *Mountains and Sea* "was the bridge between Pollock and what was possible" in painting.<sup>1</sup> It comes as no surprise that this 1950s anecdote situates Frankenthaler as a passive character in the story, since she is both not present and not included in the next step in painting; she is merely the bridge between two (male) styles of painting.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in Karen Wilkin, "Helen Frankenthaler (1928-2011)," *American Art* 26.3 (Fall 2012), 104, as Quoted in James McC. Truitt, "Art—Arid D.C. Harbors Touted 'New' Painters," *Washington Post*, December 21, 1961.

<sup>2</sup> Karen Wilkin, art historian, in her article "Helen Frankenthaler (1928-2011)" describes this as being both "accurate and inadequate," 101.



The male-dominated art world of the 1950s was short-lived; by the late 1960s its exclusions and biases were being questioned by women artists and writers. Feminist art history emerged in the early 1970s and turned attention to the role of language in stereotyping women artists. ‘Woman’ is a construction within a given culture and so is ‘Artist.’ The expectation in the 1950s was that ‘artist’ referred to a man, and so women were always noted as ‘women artists.’ ‘Man’ and ‘woman’ are gendered terms and gender is a system for constructing the "social existence of men and women" and "hierarchical oppositions in representation in texts, images, buildings, and discourses about art."<sup>3</sup> Gender thus incorporates both social and ideological gestures that are performed daily by individuals adhering to their culturally formed perception of identity. Feminist and gender theory recognizes the repercussions of limiting women to a second-class category, which marks femininity as inferior. By studying the language used by art historians, curators, and critics we can uncover the hidden ideologies that categorize and restrict the subjects and objects of art history, as well as the shifting treatment of women artists like Frankenthaler. And by revealing the assumptions behind language we will be able to better answer the driving force behind Linda Nochlin’s famous 1971 question, “Why have there been no great women artists?”<sup>4</sup>

I chose Frankenthaler as a case study to examine changes in both academic and popular language since the advent of social, feminist, and gender theory for a number of reasons. First, she was highly influential in the development of Color Field painting,

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<sup>3</sup> Albert Boime, “Interview by Barbara Anderman,” *Rutgers Art Review*, 15, interviewed in 1995 (published 1997), 77. Accessed on 7 December 2014. <http://www.albertboime.com/Articles/98.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Linda Nochlin, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” in *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988). Originally the essay was published in *ARTnews* as the cover story for the January 1971 issue.

particularly for her contemporaries Kenneth Noland and Morris Louis. Second, her major retrospectives happened before, during, and after the initial appearance of feminist art in the late 1960s and the advancement of social and gender-based theories in art history. And third, she denied an interest in feminism even though she was a beneficiary of the movement.

In my research I looked closely at the language associated with writing on and/or for each of Frankenthaler's major exhibitions: The Jewish Museum (1960), The Whitney Museum of American Art (1969), the MoMA (1989), Gagosian Gallery (2013; 2014), and the Albright-Knox Art Gallery (2014-2015). In Chapter One I discuss the earlier exhibitions at the Jewish Museum, the Whitney, and MoMA, which took place during Frankenthaler's life. I assess the exhibition catalogues and popular press articles that responded to the exhibitions. Similarly, in Chapter Two I examine Frankenthaler's posthumous exhibitions at the Gagosian and Albright-Knox, specifically analyzing the exhibition catalogues, interviews, museum talks, and popular press publications associated with these exhibitions. The catalogue essays cited in the second chapter differ in their intended audiences, because the curators of the later exhibitions were very conscious of the fact that they were presenting the artist to a generation of viewers who may never have had the opportunity to view her work in a major exhibition.

My analysis shows evidence of progress towards equality, as the descriptive language reserved for women artists' work disappears; identifying the artist's gender as a woman is no longer required (although it does still appear). I first provide a brief introduction to the theories that informed art history around the time of Frankenthaler's first major exhibition in 1960 at the Jewish Museum, in order to contextualize her

reception. I propose that the advent of social art history and gender theory changed how art historians used language to describe Frankenthaler and her practice. Frankenthaler presented herself as not interested in theory, only in studio production. I nevertheless illustrate how new approaches in art history affected Frankenthaler's major exhibitions.<sup>5</sup>

Deconstructing restrictive language is one way to expose how women continue to be suppressed. Traditional art historians and writers used language and subjects to oppress women and other groups, while gender theorists have worked to reveal how this was done. In this thesis I map the language used by mid-century art historians and writers, as well as writing by more recent progressive theorists, in order to examine how Frankenthaler has been constructed as a certain type of 'woman artist.'

Including women in art history has been a central task for feminist art historians and artists for the last fifty years. The battleground is the traditionally male-dominated field of art historical writing, curating, and instruction, which has largely omitted or marginalized work by artists not white and male. Feminists in the 1960s and 1970s were concerned with the lack of women artists included in the canon. Griselda Pollock, a visual theorist, calls for rewriting art history in order to reexamine artistic production untethered from an artist's gender; specifically, she counters the ways in which women are put in "a secondary position" to male artists.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Social art history emerged in the 1970s, shortly after the start of the second wave of feminism it was developed in by writers such as T.J. Clark, Albert Boime, and Griselda Pollock, who looked to theories of Karl Marx. Marx was concerned with the material or economic conditions of production in modern society, including cultural objects like art. He, and followers like Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, stressed that even in the realm of art, economic and political power determined what individuals would do. It is important to trace the influence of Marxism in order to understand the directions social art history took.

<sup>6</sup> Griselda Pollock, "Women, Art and Art History: Gender and Feminist Analyses," *Oxford Bibliographies Online Art History*. Accessed on 7 December 2014.

The controversy surrounding women artists' inclusion in art historical discourse, still has relevance. When restructuring art history to contain new artists, its biases are exposed. Feminist scholars continue to call for the inclusion of more women artists. By looking at Frankenthaler's career and the published language surrounding her major exhibitions, I examine the efforts of art historians to change their discourse. My archival research and this examination of language in catalogue essays and popular press articles leads me to assert that language in art historical writing has changed in direct correlation to the advent of feminist politics and theory. I argue that feminist reevaluations of art history in the late twentieth century have changed art historical writing and helped democratize our discourse, if not yet the contemporary art world.

## CHAPTER ONE: THE RETROSPECTIVES

### *Jewish Museum Retrospective, 1960*

Helen Frankenthaler was an American painter who started her artistic career in the late 1940s and early 1950s. She came from a wealthy family, which helped her pursue her BA fine arts at Bennington College, a women's college with a competitive visual arts department.<sup>7</sup> She completed her degree in 1949, and in 1950 moved to New York City. Frankenthaler officially entered the art scene in 1951 with her first exhibition at the Tibor de Nagy Gallery. Before her first major retrospective in 1969 at The Jewish Museum, Frankenthaler had two small solo exhibitions at the Tibor de Nagy and André Emmerich galleries in New York City.<sup>8</sup> Her painting *Mountains and Sea*, 1952 (fig. 1), has been credited with influencing the Color Field movement that Morris Louis and Kenneth Noland championed.<sup>9</sup>

Frankenthaler had a five-year romantic relationship with art critic Clement Greenberg, from 1950-1955, and was married to artist Robert Motherwell from 1958-1971.<sup>10</sup> These relationships played a major role in early perceptions of the artist, which were not all positive. Frankenthaler continued to paint and delved into printmaking up to her death in 2011. Throughout her career she stayed committed to the exploration of space and ambiguous, shifting compositions.<sup>11</sup> Frankenthaler continues to be widely

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<sup>7</sup> Bennington College became co-ed in 1969.

<sup>8</sup> John Elderfield. "The Pleasure of Not Knowing" in *Painted on 21st Street: Helen Frankenthaler from 1950 to 1959*, ed. David Frankel (New York: Gagosian Gallery, 2013), 157.

<sup>9</sup> Elderfield, "The Pleasure of Not Knowing," 9.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 10 & 30.

<sup>11</sup> Douglas Dreishpoon, *Giving Up One's Mark: Helen Frankenthaler in the 1960s and 1970s*, (Buffalo: Albright-Knox Art Gallery, 2014), 12.

exhibited and the subject of much critical discourse, which has been sustained since her first major solo exhibition in 1960.

Frankenthaler's first major solo museum show occurred in 1960 at The Jewish Museum in New York City, and was simply titled *An Exhibition of Oil Paintings by Frankenthaler*. It contained early celebrated works, such as *Mountains and Sea*, which was marked as purchased for \$7000.<sup>12</sup> Poet and artist Frank O'Hara, then Assistant Curator of Painting at the Museum of Modern Art, wrote a very brief piece for the catalogue. O'Hara discussed how Frankenthaler's work always took a risk by developing "away from the deliberate construction of a picture" and relying more on letting the picture happen.<sup>13</sup> O'Hara believed that she successfully balanced the two, avoiding a "mess."<sup>14</sup> In one form or another MoMA would come to be involved in all of Frankenthaler's major retrospectives during her life.<sup>15</sup>

Files at the Jewish Museum are limited for the 1960 retrospective, since it was early for both the artist and the museum. Scattered throughout the several press releases and exhibition reviews kept in the museum archives are examples of normative and restrictive gender-biased language. The museum's press release was the sole publicity produced for the exhibition where descriptions were not determined by the gender of the artist. The press release came from Beatrice A. Ellenoff's office in The Jewish Theological Seminary of America and was released on January 8, 1960. It states that *An Exhibition of Oil Painting by Frankenthaler* is the artist's "most comprehensive" to date

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<sup>12</sup> Handwritten note from Jewish Museum employee found in the Archives listing the works for sale and their prices.

<sup>13</sup> Frank O'Hara, *Helen Frankenthaler: Paintings*, (New York: The Jewish Museum, 1960), 5 & 6.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> MoMA's International Council collaborated with the Whitney for the 1969 exhibition, and MoMA coordinated the 1989 exhibition of Frankenthaler's work.

and calls Frankenthaler “one of the important young painters of the New York School.” It also highlights her recent first prize for her painting *Jacob’s Ladder* (1957), purchased by MoMA for \$4000, at the Musée d’Art Moderne’s First International Biennial Art Show in 1959.<sup>16</sup> Beyond these details the press release lists her mentors and which collections hold her work, standard informative language for press releases. The wording, though highlighting her as young, does not play up her gender, perhaps because the release came from the office of a professional woman working at the Jewish Museum.<sup>17</sup>

Visual records for the Jewish Museum exhibition are limited to an installation shot and a publication of ten slides by the Portable Gallery Press. This press created two slide publications for Frankenthaler that only exist in the Jewish Museum Archives. One set is of the 1960 exhibition; the other highlights her works between 1960 and 1964. The ten works included are *Ed Winston’s Tropical Gardens*, 1951; *Open Wall*, 1953; *Trojan Gates*, 1955; *Eden*, 1956; *Jacob’s Ladder*, 1957; *Towards a New Climate*, nd; *Before the Caves*, 1958; *Las Mayas*, 1958; *Mother Goose Melody*, 1959; and, *Red Square*, 1959.<sup>18</sup> Many of these works were included in later retrospectives and posthumous exhibitions.

The 1960 exhibition coincided with the very early years of second-wave feminism, which would come to influence the writing of art history and criticism and the promotion of women artists. Frankenthaler, like Georgia O’Keeffe and Lee Krasner, was

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<sup>16</sup> The Biennial was an art show for artists under 35 years of age, and Frankenthaler was the first American to receive this award.

<sup>17</sup> “Press Release,” 8 Jan., 1960. Early Museum Exhibition Files, Frankenthaler, Helen: Oils, 1960. The Jewish Museum Archives, New York.

<sup>18</sup> “Frankenthaler Volume 1: Jewish Museum 1960,” Early Museum Photo Archives, Frankenthaler, Helen: Oils, 1960. The Jewish Museum Archives, New York: Portable Gallery Press, 1960. The Helen Frankenthaler Foundation now holds the rights to *Ed Winston’s Tropical Gardens*, *Open Wall*, and *Eden*. *Trojan Gates* and *Jacob’s Ladder* are at MoMA, *Before the Caves* at Berkeley Art Museum, *Mother Goose Melody* at the Virginia Museum of Fine Art, and *Red Square* was gifted to Bennington College.

more interested in promoting her work and individual reception as an artist (and avoiding the label of a woman artist) than in exposing the sexism of the art world. This strategy was successful. By the early 1960s, Frankenthaler's work was already included in twenty-nine private collections and several galleries and museums, including the Newark Museum, the Whitney Museum of American Art, MoMA, the Brooklyn Museum, the Albright Art Gallery, and the Carnegie Institute.<sup>19</sup> Her support from institutions and private collectors at mid-century hints at a democratic way of collecting that did not bar certain 'exceptional' women from entering institutional collections.

O'Hara's catalogue for The Jewish Museum is written in formal language. His reference to the artist as "Miss Frankenthaler" seems more an attempt to establish her youth than a deliberate refusal to acknowledge her marriage to Motherwell.<sup>20</sup> Especially since "Ms." is the general term used at this time to describe young married women and "Miss" is the term for unmarried women.<sup>21</sup> O'Hara aimed to brand Frankenthaler as young, citing her age as a direct acknowledgement of her early success. However, biases in language appear in terms such as "one-man show" used to describe her solo exhibitions.<sup>22</sup> This phrase is found in the prose of the foreword and as the header to her exhibitions list, yet the term "solo-exhibition" is used in the chronology.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps this is evidence of two writers and two different ideas about how these exhibitions should be identified. Or, perhaps, a single writer such as O'Hara viewed "one-man" as the proper term for titling and "solo-exhibition" as a synonym to break-up repetition. The hierarchy

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<sup>19</sup> O'Hara, *Helen Frankenthaler: Paintings*, 17.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

<sup>21</sup> Ann Weatherall, *Gender Language and Discourse: Women and Psychology*, (East Sussex: Routledge, 2002): 21-22.

<sup>22</sup> O'Hara, *Helen Frankenthaler: Paintings*, 16.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 12.



of where it was appropriate to put each term points to “solo-exhibition” as secondary in reference to the “one-man.”

What this terminology shows is that “solo-exhibition” was not a gender-neutral term invented by feminists, but rather that “one-man show” was accepted as an umbrella term for men and women. However, it is important to note that during the rise of the feminist movement women artists started to have “one-woman shows.”<sup>24</sup> The change in terminology is also evident in the many Frankenthaler CVs in the archives of the Albright-Knox. In a 1961 CV her solo-exhibitions are listed as “One-Man Shows.”<sup>25</sup> Feminist art historians challenged this particular titling starting in the 1960s. In “The Feminist Critique of Art History,” Thalia Gouma-Peterson and Patricia Matthews discuss the rise of feminism in the early 1960s. Gouma-Peterson and Matthews assert that, “New York artists sought economic parity and equal representation in exhibitions, through a critique of institutional sexism,” which is where reevaluations of linguistic terminology, such as “one-man,” stemmed.<sup>26</sup>

The term “solo-exhibition,” in hindsight, may seem the more appropriate title as “one-man show” reaffirms the binary difference between Man and Woman. “Solo-exhibitions” is now the normative term. But why did it take so long for a term that was already being used to become the norm? Is this an issue of “old habits die hard,” or is it a part of conscious decision making to maintain sexist categorization? In order to examine

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<sup>25</sup>As of 1978, the André Emmerich Gallery Inc.'s CV of Frankenthaler switched to listing her solo-exhibitions as “One-Woman Exhibitions.” Helen Frankenthaler artist file at the Albright-Knox Archives, NY. The language was consistent in the CVs of other artists at this time, for example in Robert Motherwell's CV from Marlborough Graphics in 1974, which lists “One-Man Exhibitions.”

<sup>26</sup>Thalia Gouma-Peterson and Patricia Matthews, “The Feminist Critique of Art History,” *The Art Bulletin* 69.3 (September 1987), 329.

this question further, I turn to an analysis of how language has developed in art world writing by looking at press features on Frankenthaler from the mid-twentieth century.

The Jewish Museum catalogue essay by O'Hara identifies Frankenthaler's gender within the first paragraph. This was not unexpected at the time and such citations still appear today. He romanticizes her by stating "she is a dashing and irresistible artist" with beautiful works.<sup>27</sup> Yet, in the same breath he gives her equal rank with her contemporaries as a contributor to new art. Even within the art historically oriented catalogue entry including a woman's body seems irresistible, especially if she is young. The end of O'Hara's essay is devoted to the emotional quality of Frankenthaler's work, which is another stereotypical characteristic assigned to women's work. What is most biased about critical language in 1960 is that "artist" alone is assumed to be male, so in order to distinguish the artist as a female she needs to be referred to as a "woman artist." And as a result the male artist is regarded as the norm, the universal, against which women are measured. Binary categorization positions one term as superior as to the other and here the male is preferential. I am not arguing that writers at mid-century were woman-haters; rather, I believe the point is to see the biases of language evident in their writings.

O'Hara's section of the catalogue essay describing the psychic experience of Frankenthaler's art focuses on the paintings' emotional qualities. The descriptive language in this section includes "daring," "risk," "erotic," "sentimental pre-occupations," and "beautiful, or graceful, or sullen and perfunctory."<sup>28</sup> When describing

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<sup>27</sup> O'Hara, "Helen Frankenthaler," 5.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 6-7.

how these emotions are present in her works he adds that her erotic aspects are sweet or ironic while her “sentimental side” and likeability “would be found silly in the higher-seriousness areas of the city, like having a fondness for Jean Harlow movies or *The Boyfriend*.”<sup>29</sup> But for O’Hara her most emotional and “very attractive” works are the tragic paintings like *Madridscape*, 1959 (fig. 2).<sup>30</sup> While such wording attentive to “feeling” was reserved mostly for discussion of women’s art, O’Hara’s intentions seem to be to promote Frankenthaler’s ability to convey emotion.

Women artists promoted in the art world at mid-century experienced a double-edged sword. Celebration of a woman’s artwork was often tied to words describing a vivaciously ideal feminine body. However, the imaged body of the woman in the mid-twentieth century was becoming unstable and less controlled due to social changes brought on by the end of World War II.<sup>31</sup> Lisa Saltzman, in her article “Reconsidering the Stain: On Gender and the Body in Helen Frankenthaler’s Painting,” suggests that gendered language was used by critics as an attempt to contain this “unstable” body as projected onto the canvases of women artists.<sup>32</sup> She writes, “It would seem that the only way to conceptualize and control these slippages between categories of gender was to somehow redeem them by incorporating them back into traditional narratives of artistic mastery.”<sup>33</sup> Saltzman asserts that Frankenthaler’s mark-making, when compared to the Old Masters, who were assumed to be males in the 1950s, “undermined the binary logic

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Lisa Saltzman, “Reconsidering the Stain: On Gender and the Body in Helen Frankenthaler’s Painting,” in *Reclaiming Female Agency: Feminist Art History After Postmodernism*, edited by Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 373.

<sup>32</sup> Saltzman’s article was presented in 1992 at CAA and published in 2005.

<sup>33</sup> Saltzman, “Reconsidering the Stain,” 378.

that had previously afforded clearer demarcations between masculinity and femininity.”<sup>34</sup>

However, in 1960 O’Hara was working with language that few understood as restrictive or gendered.

O’Hara inherited a linguistic system and institutional expectations. He was writing in order to justify the work of a woman artist, and employed the restrictive gendered terms he thought needed to do so. Writers in the popular press were also beholden to these terms, yet in some places they very purposely used subjective language as a way to maintain gender hierarchies.<sup>35</sup>

### ***Popular Press for the 1960 Retrospective***

Before the Jewish Museum retrospective Frankenthaler was the subject of two important popular articles, both from 1957. The first was in *Time Magazine*, titled “The Younger Generation,” and was written in response to the various shows of the ‘second generation’ abstract expressionists at the Whitney, MoMA, and Jewish Museum. Frankenthaler was picked out from the chaotic and only sometimes successful “horde of painters” aligned with the movement.<sup>36</sup> She is described as having rank with the first generation and “one of the few painters to follow in their wake” who still manages to create her own voice through her “intensely lyric, free-flow paintings.”<sup>37</sup> However, she was not here recognized for the physicality of her process.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, “The Culture of Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,” in *German Essays on Film*, trans. by John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1944): 169-170.

<sup>36</sup> “The Younger Generation,” *Time Magazine*, March 11, 1957.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

The more famous article on Frankenthaler's early years is from *Life Magazine*, titled "Women in Ascendance: Young Group Reflects Lively Virtues of U.S. Painting." In this article Frankenthaler, Grace Hartigan, Joan Mitchell, Jane Wilson, and Nell Blaine are featured as artists who "have won acclaim not as notable women artists but as notable artists who happen to be women."<sup>38</sup> Only amounting to a few short paragraphs, this writing hints at a burgeoning equality in the art world with the ascent of feminist art history.

The *Life* article also acknowledges the recent shift in the art world to take women more seriously. Previously women had to be "daring" to take up a serious pursuit of painting. The unattributed writer states it is not until this younger generation active at mid-century that the number of women artists increased in the art world.<sup>39</sup> Though the author ignores some revered artists, like Lee Krasner, the article did serve as a catalyst for a growing concern in art history about the lack of recognition of women.

A writer with the initials C.B. wrote another early review of Frankenthaler's work in the *New York Herald Tribune* on January 31, 1960. C.B. maintained the earlier impression of Frankenthaler's work as linked solely to abstract expressionism and Greenbergian formalism.<sup>40</sup> In the two short columns that make up the article the writer reviews her work as good abstract expressionist painting. No specific details are given about individual paintings or the artist. The review merely categorizes her works as

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<sup>38</sup> "Women Artists in Ascendance," 75.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 75.

<sup>40</sup> C.B., "Frankenthaler, at the Jewish Museum," *New York Herald Tribune*, January 31, 1960. Jewish Museum Archives.

abstract expressionist and states where they can be viewed. The blurb is more of a required mention of exhibitions, than a fully conceptualized review.

In the May 2, 1960, issue of *Time Magazine* Frankenthaler's youth and presence in the art world is examined. The author briefly summarizes the artist's style, along with Hartigan's and Mitchell's, and although all the artists are in their thirties they are labeled in the title as "The Vocal Girls." Frankenthaler is positioned in relation to the other two artists as "the most daring in her work." But the use of "girls" and "second-generation" keeps all three confined to a secondary place below that of the first-generation New York School artists.<sup>41</sup>

Writing on Frankenthaler still often mislabels her as an abstract expressionist because only her works in that style are considered part of the canon of art history. Early writers on Frankenthaler compared her to abstract expressionism, too. It was not until the 1960s and later that she developed her mature style. Frankenthaler's work changed throughout her life, and today it is not easy to categorize her as abstract expressionist, although her work was certainly influenced by the movement. By the time of her next retrospective in 1969, the subtle shifts in her style would start to be recognized.

### ***The Whitney/MoMA Retrospective, 1969***

Frankenthaler's paintings were exhibited at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1969, only nine years after the retrospective at the Jewish Museum. Concurrently, the International Council of the Museum of Modern Art proposed an international exhibit of the artist's work. In an effort to combine resources and avoid competition for artworks,

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<sup>41</sup> "The Vocal Girls," *Time Magazine* 72, no. 18, May 2, 1960.

the Whitney and MoMA collaborated. Frankenthaler played a large part in the curatorial decisions of the exhibit, which contained forty-six paintings, including selecting guest curator Eugene C. Goossen. After the Whitney the show traveled to London, Hanover, and Berlin.<sup>42</sup>

Goossen's 1969 catalogue essay corrected the misunderstood anecdote about *Mountains and Sea* that had established Frankenthaler's work as merely a bridge for others, like Noland and Louis, from abstract expressionism to Color Field painting. Though this anecdote secured her place in mid-century art history, it misconstrued the innovative quality of her work and diminished the other ways she influenced the art world.<sup>43</sup> It instead handcuffs her to the birth of a new movement of which she was not even an active member. In contrast, Goossen claimed Frankenthaler was making her own future. He only briefly touched on Frankenthaler's influences in favor of formal exploration of her exhibited works. He described some of her works as "action" painting, but seems glad she returned to the soak-stain technique at which she was so successful.<sup>44</sup>

Goossen's language betrays excitement at the variety of moods he sees in her works. Yet he only attached the emotional qualities to the artworks and did not ascribe them to the artist, as O'Hara did in the 1960 catalogue. *Eden* (1957) conveys "light-heartedness," *Jacob's Ladder* (1957) is "semi-serious," *Winter Hunt* (1957) is "sombre," and Frankenthaler is the "artist," not the 'woman artist,' who creates these works.<sup>45</sup> For

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<sup>42</sup> Exhibition dates and locations: Whitney, NYC, USA, Feb 20-Apr 6, 1969; Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, England, May 6-June 22, 1969; Orangerie Herrenhausen, Hannover, Germany, Aug 20-Sept 20, 1969; Kongreshalle, Berlin, Oct. 1- 22, 1969.

<sup>43</sup> Eugene C. Goossen, "Helen Frankenthaler" in *Helen Frankenthaler* (New York: The Whitney Museum of American Art, 1969), 8.

<sup>44</sup> Goossen, "Helen Frankenthaler," 10.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

unknown reasons Goossen refrained from explaining the art through the artist. Goossen is also not concerned with connecting her romantic relationships or gender to them.

Ultimately, by analyzing her works of the mid-1960s he provided a more accurate understanding of Frankenthaler's career as continuing to develop after *Mountains and Sea* rather than culminating with its creation.

Frankenthaler's style borrowed elements from many movements, which makes it difficult to categorize. Attempts by art historians to label her a Color Field painter or colorist, which stem from Greenberg's categorization of her work as "post-painterly," negates her actual goals. Goossen wrote that:

...her goal then, and since, has been the definition of space through a parity of color, line and area; the limpidity or opacity of her color is purposefully guided toward that end, and not toward eye-dazzling resonances in which each sensuous effect is trying to outdistance the last.<sup>46</sup>

Goossen stressed Frankenthaler's concern with atmosphere, space, and ambiguity in her work.<sup>47</sup> He also worked to present Frankenthaler as more than just a colorist, as would later feminist scholars.

Goossen positioned Frankenthaler as in-between the various art historical labels attached to her work. According to Goossen, she painted with no specific rules or theories and from "no specifically "modernist" canon."<sup>48</sup> He did not speculate on the development of her style, but rather focused on its current influence and implications. Elizabeth Smith, art historian and executive director of the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, views

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 17-18.



Goossen's insights as prophetic.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, his essay seems ahead of its time in the treatment of the artist and fresh in its accessibility, because he addressed the work at hand so closely. But some elements of the traditional way of creating a catalogue linger. For example, "One-Man Show" is still the header for solo exhibitions.<sup>50</sup>

In the twenty years before Frankenthaler's next major retrospective in 1989, many challenges to the status quo shifted concerns in art historical discourse. Even after the two 1960s retrospectives Frankenthaler continued to be a figure defined and categorized by either her earlier works, like *Mountains and Sea*, or her later works, like *Blue Head-On* (1965), when she shifted to acrylics. But as the restrictions built into language were revealed by feminist artists and writers who reevaluated art historical writing and the canon, the emphasis changed. Though Frankenthaler remained distant from the feminist movement, her work was often the subject of feminist art history and critical evaluation in the popular press.

### ***Popular Press for the 1969 Retrospective***

Frankenthaler's Whitney exhibition was a success, but the reviews of her work are filled with gendered language and mixed agendas. Some writers portray the female body of the artist, while others reflect on her prominence in the art world. Only a couple comment on her actual work.

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<sup>49</sup> Elizabeth A.T. Smith, "Redefining a Practice: Helen Frankenthaler and Painting in the Early 1960s," in *Helen Frankenthaler: Composing with Color: Paintings 1962-1963*, ed. Julie Hagen (New York: Gagosian Gallery, 2014), 28.

<sup>50</sup> Goossen, "Helen Frankenthaler," 63.

Two reviews covered the retrospective's opening. A short article in *Women's Wear Daily* describes the fashions at the opening. Frankenthaler wore a "pale ecru *peau de soie* shirtdress" she designed herself and had made at Ashley & Able on Third Avenue.<sup>51</sup> Given the nature of the magazine, such comments are expected. But other publications were also concerned with her appearance. Gabrielle Smith, in a *New York Magazine* article titled "Helen Has a Show," opened with a description of the artist's attire and her body: after dancing the artist "emerged moist and rosy, Sgt. Pepper jacket shed to reveal a classic black shirt, her eyes sparkling with sheer excitement."<sup>52</sup> The description of the 40<sup>th</sup> birthday party and the sexually charged body of the artist seems surprising given the analysis that follows, which draws attention to aspects of her paintings, such as their active quality, that had largely been overlooked. Perhaps, like the *Women's Wear* author, writers catered to readers who were interested in the "wild" lives of artists, a trend that continues to this day.

Frankenthaler is described as the "Heiress to a New Tradition" in the title of a 1969 *Time Magazine* article. This article is a battleground for her relevance in the art world; she is simultaneously given sole credit for her work and accused of being a follower of the men in her life. For example, a caption under a photograph of the artist and her then husband artist Robert Motherwell reads: "THE MOTHERWELLS AT HOME Ambition to marry joy and discipline." Under the picture of the happy couple the pun on 'marry' becomes ambiguous. Elsewhere the author subtly hints that Frankenthaler produced more feverishly when involved in relationships with Greenberg and

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<sup>51</sup> "Frankenthaler at the Whitney," *Women's Wear Daily*, February 21, 1969. Whitney Museum of American Art Archives.

<sup>52</sup> Gabrielle Smith, "Helen Has A Show," *New York Magazine* (February 17, 1969), 46.

Motherwell. But the caption itself refers to the final line in the unknown writer's article, which states, "Her Ambition--and she succeeds in it with a memorable frequency--is to marry inner joy and outer discipline in a work of art."<sup>53</sup> However, for a reader just looking at the pictures, the caption suggests that it is her relationships that have led to her greatest compositions.

The reception of her 1969 retrospective in other popular print publications exposes similarly conflicting ideas. Some praise the work while others bring her femininity into analysis of her style. Emily Genauer, in an article for the *New York Post*, labeled Frankenthaler's large works as the embodiment of a legitimate "feminine sensibility" that is ultimately muted by its size.<sup>54</sup> Genauer wrote, "What we get are feminine whispers and dainty rustlings heard over a loud-speaker."<sup>55</sup> Though Genauer did not like the size of Frankenthaler's canvases, she approved of how the artist captured femininity in her paintings. However, femininity was not always seen so positively.

Christopher Andreae, in his article "Art: the fresh, feminine Frankenthaler touch" for the *Christian Science Monitor*, turned a very critical eye on her work. Not only did he assert that Frankenthaler brought a "feminine touch to abstract expressionism," he called *Mountains and Sea* a frail work and found it surprising that it influenced Louis.<sup>56</sup> Also, Andreae seems to either not be aware of or to ignore Goossen's catalogue. By saying she added a "feminine touch to abstract expressionism" Andreae's language reinforced abstract expressionism as masculine and ignored the structural "male" elements in her

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<sup>53</sup> "Heiress to a New Tradition," *Time Magazine*, March 28, 1969.

<sup>54</sup> Genauer would go on to win the Pulitzer Prize for Criticism in 1974.

<sup>55</sup> Emily Genauer, "Art and the Artist," *New York Post*, March 1, 1969. Whitney Museum of American Art Archives, New York.

<sup>56</sup> Christopher Andreae, "Art: the fresh, feminine Frankenthaler touch," *Christian Science Monitor*, February 28, 1969. Whitney Museum of American Art Archives, New York.

compositions that Goossen identified.<sup>57</sup> As a result, Frankenthaler seems to only contribute to abstract expressionism or be worth mention because of her gender.

The 1969 retrospective traveled internationally to London, Hanover, and Berlin, and the MoMA collected and translated popular press responses from abroad for their archives. From the articles in the archival files it is clear her reception overseas was successful and positive. After viewing the exhibition in London, Peter Stone wrote in the *Jewish Chronicle* about the “absolutely ravishing Colourist” whose work was shown five years earlier in London.<sup>58</sup> It should be noted that Stone describes Frankenthaler’s work as having more of a relationship with watercolor techniques. It is an interesting take, not only because watercolor was traditionally marked as a woman’s art, but because his perspective offers an international interpretation of her influences that looks beyond the New York art scene. Rather than tying her to the major figures in New York School painting and Greenberg’s lineage of artists, Stone engages with the similarities between her style and material from elsewhere in art history.

Alice Rewald, an American art historian, wrote in the *Gazette de Lausanne* that Frankenthaler is “a cold and conventional woman, reserved and abstract.”<sup>59</sup> She also noted her reception by American critics, probably because being an American she also put emphasis on the New York art scene. Rewald praised Frankenthaler as one of the best of her generation, a talent that came from “the spirit of freedom that reigned in the studios at the time she began her career and the forcefulness with which she has made it

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Peter Stone, “Colourist of Ravishing Beauty,” *Jewish Chronicle*, London, May 23, 1969. International Council and International Program Records, I.A.1768. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

<sup>59</sup> Alice Rewald, “Helen Frankenthaler at the Whitney Museum,” *Gazette de Lausanne*, Switzerland, March 29, 1969. International Council and International Program Records, I.A.1768. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

serve her own purposes."<sup>60</sup> This idea of “forcefulness” is also found in Peter Luft’s 1969 *Die Welt Berlin* article. He wrote, “Even in her early work, the claws of the lioness can be discerned.”<sup>61</sup> Though he used a sexed term, “lioness,” to describe Frankenthaler, Luft seems only to be commenting on her prowess in the art world.

The differences, however subtle, in the choice of language between the American critics and those abroad expose the gender bias of the New York art scene in the mid-twentieth century. The American critics and popular press writers were the most conservative in their use of language, which is linked to their insistence on limiting Frankenthaler to the category of woman artist. Both *Women’s Wear Daily* and Smith were concerned with her clothing; Smith additionally started her article by re-creating a party where Frankenthaler is the main attraction. The writer for “Heiress of a New Tradition” mixed an analysis of Frankenthaler’s romantic relationships, her productivity, and her work in a way that makes it seem these fields are all related. American critics Genauer and Andreae also looked at her actual paintings, but explained them as the feminine side of abstract painting. Her “feminization” is caused by the ways in which New York abstract painting and its (male) artists were being constructed. Rewald, who married a German art historian who settled in the United States, was the only one writing for a European audience who attached Frankenthaler to the New York art world, but described her as being a strong figure in it. Rewald commented on how she made the New York art scene work for her, which hints at a type of social practice in a male dominant art world that generally worked against her.

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<sup>60</sup> Rewald, “Helen Frankenthaler,” IC/IP, I.A.1768. MoMA Archives, New York.

<sup>61</sup> Peter Luft, “Elegant Giant Canvases” *Die Welt Berlin*, August 26, 1969. International Council and International Program Records, I.A.1768. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

Writers from abroad were less concerned with identifying Frankenthaler within the aforementioned cultural scene. Stone and Luft both commented on the power of her work. Stone was primarily concerned with her technique; Luft applauded her powerful presence within the larger international art world. In sum, international writers were more concerned with the powerful presence of her work within the art world, while American writers were more concerned with how to fit the artist into the male-dominated New York art scene.

### ***MoMA Retrospective, 1989***

Between 1969 and 1989, artists and art historians began to expose how restrictive language repressed certain groups of artists. Linda Nochlin's famous article "Why Have There Been No Great Woman Artists?," published by *Art News* in 1971, demonstrated how art history privileged artists because of their race, gender, and location. What earlier writers assumed as the norm, or universal, was now revealed as politically motivated and constructed. Femininity and its tie to a female artist's mark-making continued to be contested in art historical writing not only for Frankenthaler, but for all women artists.

Robert Hughes' assessment of femininity in art in *Time Magazine*'s "Myths and Sensibility," from 1972, began by asserting a universal derived from formalism. "The first dialogue of art is always with other art. Hence the desire of most women who make art to be known as artists first and only incidentally as women."<sup>62</sup> Hughes highlighted how binary concepts, which manifest in language, affect how we view a work of art. He pointed out that Frankenthaler's work was subject to gendered language restrictions,

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<sup>62</sup> Robert Hughes, "Myths of Sensibility," *Time Magazine*, March 20, 1972, np.

particularly when compared to other artists, like Willem de Kooning, whose maleness was measured against and as superior to her femaleness. Hughes showed that a myth of feminine sensibility was constructed at midcentury in opposition to the “attributes of the macho masterpiece,” and cited Nochlin’s words, published a year before in *Art News*, as an example of how art history generally had been constructed along these lines.<sup>63</sup>

By 1989 not only had critical perception of Frankenthaler’s work given her greater foothold in the art world, but her art making had developed. By 1978 Frankenthaler was labeled “A Queen in Today’s Art” by Harriet Shapiro in *People Magazine*, a more established term than “girl” used in earlier labels of the artist.<sup>64</sup> Critical perception began to focus primarily on her work described with words from both feminine and masculine lexicons. Frankenthaler, over time, was less tied to her romantic relationships and more to her art.

MoMA’s 1989 exhibition established her enduring relevance. This retrospective was finally in the total control of MoMA, who had previously collaborated with other museums and organizations on her shows. Director at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, E. A. Carmean, Jr., worked for five years with Frankenthaler to curate the MoMA exhibition, which contained forty works by the artist ranging chronologically from *Mountains and Sea* of 1952, to *Casanova* of 1988 (fig. 3).<sup>65</sup> For Carmean the works represented the multifaceted nature of her work throughout her career. Carmean wrote, “Frankenthaler’s broad themes of landscapes and figuration as well as that of pure

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Harriet Shapiro, “A Queen of Today’s Art, Helen Frankenthaler Paints Vast Landscapes in a Lonely Room,” *People Magazine*, July 10, 1978, np.

<sup>65</sup> E.A. Carmean, Jr., *Helen Frankenthaler: A Paintings Retrospective* (New York: Harry N. Abrams with MoMA, 1989), 5. The 1989 MoMA retrospective ran from June 5–August 20, 1989.

abstraction weave in and out.”<sup>66</sup> The paintings, both the landscapes and abstractions, represent concerns with atmospheric and physical spaces.

Carmean’s dedication to Frankenthaler’s paintings is reflected in the design of the exhibition catalogue. After a short introduction to her work he chronologically arranged and analyzed each of the forty paintings. He treated each entry as if it were an abbreviated essay. Frankenthaler’s voice is more accessible in this catalogue, since the essays are dependent on her input and comments. Carmean’s structure allowed Frankenthaler to create her own voice for her art, which in turn let her place her paintings into specific art historical contexts.

Carmean wrote, “Each work is the subject of its own catalogue entry rather than being treated as a representative player in a broader historical treatise,” because Frankenthaler’s work does not speak to a specific theme or series.<sup>67</sup> Carmean discussed the individual paintings to an extent not done in any other major exhibition catalogue. He emphasized Frankenthaler’s artistic influence, personal inspiration, and the material quality of the works. However, he did briefly consider ongoing issues of the perception of the artist by discussing the mixed critical analysis of her paintings. He suggested the confused perceptions were a result of Frankenthaler’s difference from her contemporaries, as she did not explore her subjects in series. Rather, as Goossen observed in 1961, Frankenthaler approached each painting individually.<sup>68</sup> Carmean’s tight focus removed Frankenthaler from her relationship to the work of other artists, like Louis,

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<sup>66</sup> The 1989 MoMA retrospective ran from June 5-August 20, 1989.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.



which allowed each work its own separate history and origin. This approach permitted the artist a degree of ambiguity and exploration in her practice rather than highlighting a few artworks as typical or exceptional.

Carmean's writings are evidence of an attention to language and subject, as well as formal analysis. The "one-man" term disappears in the catalogue in favor of the term "solo-exhibition." Frankenthaler's art is also treated with gender-neutral descriptive language. The ridged and action-filled paintings are described as such, and the lyrical and soft works still retain their original descriptions, not because they are tied to the former way of writing about women's work, but because Frankenthaler specifically acknowledged this theme. What is missing in Carmean's writing, however, is an acknowledgement of Frankenthaler's personal influences. This may have been a result of her avoiding the subject in her discussions with Carmean, or a belief that a man might not be preferable to articulate women's issues.

### ***Popular Press for the 1989 Retrospective***

While Carmean championed Frankenthaler's work the popular press expressed conflicting responses. Public opinion during this stage of Frankenthaler's career was favorable. However, in articles like Kay Larson's "Hindsight can be a Cruel Leveler," for *New York Magazine*, her work is described as lacking relevance. Larson believed that Frankenthaler's best piece in the 1989 exhibition was *Mountains and Sea* and her recent dependence on color alone had led to work that is as "polite and tasteful as any motel-

wall print.”<sup>69</sup> By 1989, when mention of color appears in some reviews, it evokes not a modernist experiment, but decoration and kitsch. However, Larson’s account overlooks Frankenthaler’s dependence on drawing; color was a result of her exploration of the potential of drawing in paint. Larson’s article does indicate that a fraction of the art world saw Frankenthaler’s art as losing its forcefulness.<sup>70</sup> Artists like Frankenthaler, who continued to create works tied to modernist painting, were increasingly viewed as too traditional. The post-modern art scene of the late 1980s was breaking from categorizations and hierarchies, and was unwilling to accept art that seemed to still continue modernist traditions.

Susan Reed and Jess Cagle, in their 1989 *People Magazine* article, noted that there were others who had dismissed Frankenthaler’s work. Reed and Cagle labeled the artist as the “grande dame of American painting,” believing that Frankenthaler’s work had secured a place in art history.<sup>71</sup> But, the writers explained that Peter Schjeldahl had characterized the artist’s demeanor as “maximum pretension,” which, in a 1989 article, he attributed to older women artists given status without “real vitality, such as Georgia O’Keeffe and Louise Nevelson.”<sup>72</sup> Known for his sharp words, Schjeldahl dismissed the work of these acclaimed female artists, singling out gendered characteristics. In the case of Frankenthaler, and subsequently Noland and Louis, he identified Greenberg as the real innovator of stain painting.<sup>73</sup> Greenberg had no control over Frankenthaler’s creation, because the artist created *Mountains and Sea* when the critic was not in her studio.

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<sup>69</sup> Kay Larson, “Hindsight Can Be a Cruel Leveler,” *New York Magazine* 22.26 (June 26, 1989), 58.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 58.

<sup>71</sup> Susan Reed and Jess Cagle, “With Her Greatest Works on Display, Helen Frankenthaler Paints a Quirky Portrait of the Artist,” *People Magazine* (December 4, 1989).

<sup>72</sup> Peter Schjeldahl, *The 7 Days Art Columns, 1988-1990*, (New York: Figures Press, 1990), p.130.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

However, her relationship with Greenberg may have accelerated his and other artists' acknowledgement of a new way of painting. Reed and Cagle also cited an essay in *The New Yorker*, whose critic dismissed the no fun, "high-priestess" as creating "boardroom art."<sup>74</sup> Their boldest claims are about Frankenthaler's personality, not her art, as when they wrote, "It is in the privacy of her studio that Frankenthaler reveals the lyrical and poetic sides of a personality that so often eludes her critics."<sup>75</sup>

In "Helen Frankenthaler: Artful Survivor," written for *The New York Times Magazine*, Deborah Solomon claimed Frankenthaler's relevance in the art world is secure. After the deaths of O'Keeffe and Nevelson, Solomon placed Frankenthaler as the most prominent female artist then working in America.<sup>76</sup> Solomon described Frankenthaler as a survivor of her earlier abstract expressionism in a world that has given way to the post-modern.<sup>77</sup> She wrote, "At a time when abstraction is regarded in certain quarters as a dated style, the exhibition promises to raise fundamental questions not only about Frankenthaler's career but about abstract painting as a whole."<sup>78</sup> There is anxiety in Solomon's writing over the future of Frankenthaler's work and the art world, which had "given way to the frivolous ironies of post-modernism."<sup>79</sup> However, Solomon was pleased that despite the changes in the art world Frankenthaler's own work had not given way to these changes.

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<sup>74</sup> Reed and Cagle, "With Her Greatest Works," np.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Deborah Solomon, "Helen Frankenthaler: Artful Survivor," *The New York Times Magazine* (May 14, 1989), 33.

<sup>77</sup> Solomon, "Artful Survivor," 68.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 62.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 68.

The question of being outdated is also examined by Cathleen McGuigan in *Newsweek*. She noted Frankenthaler's earlier penchant for beauty during the 1950s action painting scene, which continued to be an issue for some critics in the late 1980s.<sup>80</sup> Frankenthaler now battled for a place in a much different, post-modern art world. McGuigan concurred with Frankenthaler's adherence to tradition: "A classic modernist, Frankenthaler is not trendy with the downtown crowd, but history, she knows, will sort out art from fashion."<sup>81</sup> Frankenthaler did not admire newer styles and artists, opting to maintain her mature artistic voice.

The 1989 retrospective secured Frankenthaler's place in the art historical canon of modernism, reflected in the art market by her continued representation in galleries. Of her 1989 retrospective Robert Hughes wrote, "it would be a pity, all the same, if the present decade's recoil from the inflated historical claims made for color-field painting stopped one from enjoying the show."<sup>82</sup> The backlash against Greenbergian formalism and politics should not demote Frankenthaler from her place. However, Carmean, reflecting Frankenthaler's preferences in his 1989 catalogue essay, returned to formalist analysis. This combination of post-modern critique and formalist analysis has become very important to scholarship and curatorial representation of Frankenthaler.

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<sup>80</sup> Cathleen McGuigan, "In Pursuit of Beauty," *Newsweek* (June 12, 1989), 62. Albright-Knox Art Gallery Archives.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, 63.

<sup>82</sup> Robert Hughes, "A Love of Spontaneous Gesture," *Time Magazine* (June 12, 1989), 75. Albright-Knox Art Gallery Archives.

## *Conclusion*

What is common throughout the texts surrounding the 1960, 1969, and 1989 exhibitions are continued attempts to place Frankenthaler into the context of the New York art scene and to examine the story of how the creation of *Mountains and Sea* led to Color Field painting. In their catalogue essays O'Hara, Goossen, and Carmean each attempted to create a perception of the artist and her role within the larger frame of art history. But, their collaboration with the artist came at the cost of some critical independence on these subjects. However, the shifts that occurred from new theories and concerns about language are apparent in how they wrote about Frankenthaler and her work. O'Hara's language demonstrates how restrictive gendered language was just the norm, a standard way of writing. In Goossen's descriptions, language is not used to create a view of the "woman" artist Frankenthaler, but rather an analysis of the artwork. O'Hara primarily aimed to position Frankenthaler in a 1950s New York art scene that questioned the inclusion of women. Goossen, however, moved to more formalist concerns. By Carmean's 1989 show Frankenthaler's relevance in art history was secure, so he closely described the work as individual masterpieces rather than focusing on the career of the artist. He let each work establish its own lexicon in relation to its composition. None of these critics directly address Frankenthaler as a woman artist working in a time when feminist theory was developing. Though some of the popular writing ascribes to her a feminine sensibility and touches on her place as a woman in a man's art world, the exhibition essays do not delve into this matter. Perhaps, in her lifetime, Frankenthaler, who did not want to be associated with the feminist movement, was able to keep it out of

her major exhibitions. However, later scholars have not been reluctant to look at her career through the lens of feminist and gender theory.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE NEW EXHIBITIONS

### *Gagosian Gallery, 2013 & 2014*

Frankenthaler's major posthumous exhibitions focused on her works from the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, paintings already canonized in art history. The curators of the posthumous exhibitions were informed by both past writing on Frankenthaler's painting and new perspectives. However, these major exhibitions did not include Frankenthaler's production since the last retrospective in 1989. Instead, they raise the question of whether or not a retrospective of Frankenthaler's entire career is possible. The newly formalized (in 2013) Helen Frankenthaler Foundation may also intervene in the continuing effort by curators and academics to define the artist and her work.

Since Frankenthaler's breakthrough in the 1950s she has been continuously represented by galleries and exhibited in museums. Even after her death exhibitions continue to be organized. However, none have been as extensive as the shows organized by the Gagosian Gallery in New York City and the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, New York. These exhibitions not only push to elevate Frankenthaler in the art market, but commit to presenting her work to a younger generation of art viewers and researchers. The posthumous exhibitions follow the model of Frankenthaler's other retrospectives, trying to cohesively organize art from over a sixty-year span, but ultimately manage only thirty years of her work. The 2013-15 exhibitions are also intended to converse with one another. The 2013 show at Gagosian covered her paintings from the 1950s, while the 2014 show at Gagosian covered the 1960s, when she was transitioning between oil and acrylic. The third show at the Albright-Knox from 2014-2015 included painting from this transition period, as well as printmaking from the 1960s and 1970s.

John Elderfield, formerly chief curator at MoMA, served as director and/or curator for the Gagosian and Douglas Dreishpoon acted as curator for the Albright-Knox. Both worked closely with the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation. The first exhibition took place in 2013, two years after the artist's death. These shows stemmed from a desire to redefine Frankenthaler for a younger generation, and were fully supported by the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation.

The catalogues, interviews, and events centered on the posthumous exhibitions and provided a more practice-centered understanding of the artist, rather than a gendered one. Elizabeth A. T. Smith, an art historian and executive director of the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, expressed a desire for new scholarship in her forward for the catalogue for the Albright-Knox exhibition, which was titled *Giving Up One's Mark: Helen Frankenthaler in the 1960s and 1970s*.<sup>83</sup> Smith cites audio sources in the Foundation's archives where the artist dropped her guard, unlike in her public interviews.<sup>84</sup> These unpublished audiotapes and transcripts of talks Frankenthaler gave at various colleges could lead to new avenues for understanding Frankenthaler's response to criticism.<sup>85</sup> In the talks Frankenthaler discusses topics, such as her gender, that she never discussed in the published interviews. Dreishpoon, Albright-Knox Chief Curator Emeritus, attributes this to her willingness to be frank when discussing art with students.<sup>86</sup> Though Smith hints at more unpublished sources, it is already evident that the

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<sup>83</sup> *Giving Up One's Mark* exhibited at the Albright-Knox from November 9, 2014- February 15, 2015.

<sup>84</sup> Elizabeth A.T. Smith, foreword to *Giving Up One's Mark: Helen Frankenthaler in the 1960s and 1970s*, by Douglas Dreishpoon (Buffalo: Albright-Knox Art Gallery, 2014), x.

<sup>85</sup> University sessions cited for the Albright-Knox catalogue essay are: Hunter College, NY, April 28, 1965; Yale University, CT, January 20, 1970; Skidmore College, NY, July 30, 1973; Harvard University, MA, November 15, 1976; and Bard College, NY, October 27, 1977.

<sup>86</sup> Dreishpoon, "It's a Matter," 3.



scholarly writing associated with these exhibitions has brought a fresh relevance to Frankenthaler's work.

In this second chapter I continue to examine how language has changed in both academic and popular press writing on Frankenthaler. The exhibition catalogues are again my main sources, and as one of the younger scholars influenced by them, I insert my voice as a participant in the discussion. Until viewing the 2014-2015 Albright-Knox show, I had not seen more than one Frankenthaler painting at a time. In this chapter I accordingly distinguish between understanding an artist's work through reproductions and writing and encountering a major exhibition in person. The second chapter, in comparison to the first, contains an enriched understanding of Frankenthaler's work, which is a direct result of viewing the Albright-Knox exhibition.

The catalogue essays on these exhibitions not only reveal a consciousness of art history, but also the demands of scholars for writing that democratically represents artists. The language used for the treatment of the artwork in these writings achieves what many feminists and gender theorists fought for, a sense of equality. The writers approached Frankenthaler and her work based on interviews by the artist and what is present in her compositions, not by the confined mid-century understanding of how to view women's work. Defining her individuality in the practice of art is the objective of the writers, so she may be better placed into art history.

### ***Painted on 21st Street, 2013***

John Elderfield curated the spring 2013 show *Painted on 21st Street: Helen Frankenthaler from 1950 to 1959* at the Gagosian. The exhibition covered the period for

which Frankenthaler is best known. Elderfield is highly regarded for his scholarly attention to the early works and influences on Frankenthaler. This view of what is important stems from a different background than Smith's and Dreishpoon's; Elderfield, friend of the artist and writer of a major monograph on her in 1989, wanted to expand Frankenthaler's canonized 1950s work to include more of her oeuvre.

Elderfield's essay for the gallery-produced catalogue is less accessible to the everyday art viewer as it is scholarly in its language, content, and approach. His intended audience is one that is both art historically informed and has a particular interest in the mid-century art world. Elderfield analyzed the formal characteristics of her work from the 1950s, then addressed how Frankenthaler has figured in art history primarily in relationship to her male counterparts, specifically Morris Louis.<sup>87</sup> His concern is with how this misconstrued her work, and thus aimed to clarify that older accounts of her were constructed through masculinist viewpoints.

Elderfield quarreled with the traditional view of Frankenthaler as an abstractionist by claiming her work was figurative. He focused on specific works with figures to disprove the idea that she was purely abstract in the 1950s.<sup>88</sup> He did not deny that Frankenthaler's work became abstract in the 1960s; instead he rebutted the idea that her early work was pure abstraction by pointing to her figurative approach to drawing. He cited the writing of T. S. Eliot and René Decartes, as well as visual influences such as

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<sup>87</sup> Elderfield, "The Pleasure of Not Knowing," 9.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 19.

Goya, Rubens, Titian, and Ribera.<sup>89</sup> He is less concerned with her paint and technique, and more on where her inspirations came from.

At times Elderfield's prose recalls gendered writing. When referring to Grace Hartigan and Joan Mitchell he labels them as Frankenthaler's "women friends."<sup>90</sup> Yet, on the next page he does not point out that Eugene Goossen is a "man" friend.<sup>91</sup> These choices seem tied to the voice he developed early in his career. He is similarly cautious about feminist readings of Frankenthaler's work. Elderfield refers to Lisa Saltzman's exposure of sexism within art historical practice,<sup>92</sup> but he does not see Frankenthaler as a feminist artist and as support cites her spoken denial of any association with feminism. He observes that any femininity in Frankenthaler's work is only one element, like a signature, not the whole goal or subject of the work.<sup>93</sup> In his analysis, Elderfield turned instead to art historian Anne M. Wagner, who linked femininity in Frankenthaler's work to the "topography" of the artist's marking.<sup>94</sup>

Scholars have debated how Frankenthaler's physical marks on the canvas may mark her as a woman, like a trace that can never be contained, in the 1950s pictures. To the extent that the viewer, influenced by social contexts and constructions, determines what traces of the artist signify, the meanings of such marks may change Frankenthaler's deliberate ambiguity and further cloud any assertions of femininity. Frankenthaler's ambiguous subject matter opens up many different possibilities for interpretation. Yet the

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 15, 19, 23.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 25-26.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

ambiguous element of Frankenthaler's work does not exclude a feminist interpretation nor, it should be noted, a traditional formalist reading.

Frankenthaler always said that she did not have a feminist agenda. In many interviews where she is asked to talk about herself as a woman artist she refuses to engage.<sup>95</sup> She claimed her exploration was not into the body and mind of a woman, but of an individual. It is this individualism that makes Frankenthaler an interesting case-study for my examination of the changes in language that occurred during and after the advent of feminist theory. By refusing to be a part of the second-wave of feminism, Frankenthaler made the reactions to her and her work better barometer example of the development of gender equality in art historical writing, since she was not actively demanding a change in how her work be written about, like Judy Chicago and Miriam Shapiro.

Though written within the last few years, Elderfield's catalogue essay recalls a different time in its language. Elderfield's voice is that of a lecturer, combining formal analysis of her well-known compositions with some acknowledgement of new interpretations. Smith and Dreishpoon instead turned toward the lesser known works of later decades in their essays for the second Gagosian show and Albright-Knox exhibition.

### ***Composing with Color, 2014***

John Elderfield also curated the second Frankenthaler exhibition at the Gagosian, in collaboration with the Elizabeth T. Smith and the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation.

*Composing with Color: Paintings 1962-1963* focused on the work that followed her 1960

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<sup>95</sup> Solomon, "Artful Survivor," 33.

retrospective at the Jewish Museum and questioned what paintings, besides *Mountains and Sea*, might be characterized as her mature style. Smith wrote the catalogue essay, titled “Redefining a Practice: Helen Frankenthaler and Painting in the Early 1960s.” Smith’s title and essay called for a redefinition of the artist’s style away from her canonized 1950s work. She aimed to highlight Frankenthaler’s transitional period in the early 1960s instead. Smith chronologically discussed the paintings Frankenthaler created in 1962 and 1963, while also commenting on later works.

The eleven works in the exhibition exemplify Frankenthaler's experiments with medium, color, and form. Between 1962 and 1963, Frankenthaler went back-and-forth with oils and acrylic paint, eventually shifting to acrylics in the later 1960s. With acrylics came bolder, brighter colors. Her changes to form and line are perhaps the most visually exciting aspect of these works, as she moved away from a Greenbergian formalism that called for an absence of “interaction between line and color and in its use of allusion.”<sup>96</sup> In a letter to Hartigan, Frankenthaler expressed a need to grow beyond her earlier work in order to keep producing.<sup>97</sup> According to Smith, Frankenthaler’s work consistently led to new techniques to create space, and it is apparent in the works from 1962-1963 that she had artistic objectives unlike those of other color stainers.

What movement to include Frankenthaler in is a question of frequent debate. She does not easily align with any movement; rather, her work reflects the influence of many artists, movements, and artistic concerns. Smith recounted that when asked if she was

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<sup>96</sup> Elizabeth A.T. Smith, “Redefining a Practice: Helen Frankenthaler and Painting in the Early 1960s” in *Helen Frankenthaler: Composing with Color: Paintings 1962-1963*, ed. Julie Hagen (New York: Gagosian Gallery, 2014), 12.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

conscious of her image as a “color painter,” Frankenthaler replied: “Only when the world put those labels on it...I did not have a vision or a notion about color per se being the thing that would make me or my pictures work or operate.”<sup>98</sup> From this statement it is apparent that Frankenthaler’s concern in creating pictures was to explore a problem within the medium itself. Frankenthaler’s lack of concern with labels applies to both her person and her works. Unlike some of her more political contemporaries, such as Carolee Schneemann, Frankenthaler had a more individual agenda for her 1960s work, which was grounded in the formal, not the social.

Smith’s language treated Frankenthaler with the respect and individuality she so desired. Smith was not concerned with exclusively applying gendered associations or readings to Frankenthaler’s work, but rather with the evolution of abstraction and the development of her style. She often referred to Frankenthaler’s work as an expansion of an aesthetic vocabulary. Smith was not afraid to label Frankenthaler’s work as both “sweet” and “tough” in the case of *Pink Lady*, 1963 (fig. 4).<sup>99</sup> This is different from earlier writing that let gender determine the adjectives used to describe the artwork.<sup>100</sup> This style of writing turns back to an art object-centered practice.<sup>101</sup> Like Elderfield’s essay, Smith’s analysis moves fluidly between formal analysis of composition and acknowledgement of the artist’s influences. In comparison to the earlier retrospective catalogue essays, specifically O’Hara’s, Smith attached descriptive language to the paintings, as for example when “spiky, flame-like tapered forms” is used to describe

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 24-25.

<sup>100</sup> Hughes, “Myths and Sensibility,” np.

<sup>101</sup> Smith, “Redefining,” 11-12.

*Milkwood Arcade*, 1963 (fig. 5) and *Interior Landscape*, 1964 (fig. 6).<sup>102</sup> But these adjectives do not describe the artist; Smith also used such terms in a publicity interview.

For the *Gagosian's* September – October 2014 quarterly announcement, Lauren Mahony interviewed Smith about the *Composing with Color* exhibition. Mahony and Smith's discussion focused on Frankenthaler, not in the context of the social conflicts of the early 1960s, but rather her change of medium and content. Smith, in both the interview and catalogue essay, is concerned with how Frankenthaler projected herself, rather than on grounding her in the social reality of the 1960s art world.

Frankenthaler was concerned with how her gender was viewed. She was committed to rejecting a gendered label, as were Hartigan, Krasner, and Mitchell. They did not want to be treated as "women artists," but as "artists." Frankenthaler saw herself as an individual trying to continuously discover herself. From this goal she developed her color and staining techniques. Smith ended the interview with a quote from Frankenthaler: "It isn't that I want to experiment with style. I often want to experiment with the different ways I know myself."<sup>103</sup>

Smith described the 1962 and 1963 experimental work as exuding a "refusal to be categorized."<sup>104</sup> Even the style she is most often aligned with, Color Field, cannot be reliably found in this work. This ambiguity of style is important to Frankenthaler's personal views and is the essence of her art. Smith points to this in her description of Frankenthaler's experiments during the early 1960s.

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>103</sup> Elizabeth A.T. Smith, interview by Lauren Mahony, *Gagosian*, Quarterly Publication, September-October, 2014, 40.

<sup>104</sup> Smith, interview, 40.

Smith exposed the premature categorization of Frankenthaler that exists in earlier writings and worked to take out the restrictive language for a new discussion of the artist. The difficulty in categorizing the work of Frankenthaler is important because it alters her association with modernist painting, to which she was tied by earlier writing about her as an abstract expressionist or Color Field artist. While she may not belong in the post-modern canon, her concerns with ambiguity, formal aesthetics, and multiplicity of meaning sit between the modern and post-modern. New writing, such as Smith's, shows Frankenthaler's relevance beyond the so-called death of painting in the 1980s. This opens the way for a reanalysis of Frankenthaler within the narrative of art history.

Today, Frankenthaler's work from the 1960s has a different significance than when it was created. Though her 1952 painting *Mountains and Sea* is traditionally cited as her major (and sometimes only) contribution to art history, it was not until the 1960s that Frankenthaler fully developed her soak-stain technique and moved to acrylics. This important formal shift is addressed by Dreishpoon in his catalogue essay for the Albright-Knox exhibition. Both Smith and Dreishpoon call for a reexamination of Frankenthaler and her contributions. Yes, they say, *Mountains and Sea* was the bridge between Pollock and Noland, but we should not fix Frankenthaler solely to that work and time.

### ***Giving Up One's Mark, 2014-2015***

Preceding the essay by Dreishpoon in the Albright-Knox catalogue are two forewords, one by Smith and the other by Janne Sirén, Peggy Pierce Elfvin Director at the Albright-Knox, as well as a preface by the curator. Each sets out what this exhibition means for the future of art historical analysis of Frankenthaler. The scholars are all aware



of what reevaluations of canonized artists means for the practice of art history. Smith states that since the death of the artist a reevaluation of her place within art history has begun, using as evidence the recent shows at the Gagosian and Albright-Knox.<sup>105</sup> The Helen Frankenthaler Foundation gave Dreishpoon access to “previously untapped audiovisual materials,” most of which are lectures given to students.<sup>106</sup> As previously mentioned, Smith sees these resources as having potential for new scholarship that will influence how Frankenthaler’s “unexplored” moments may shape new understandings of the artist.<sup>107</sup> The enthusiasm of the Foundation to open up their archives to researchers is encouraging. New scholars will have the opportunity to write in a different voice than their predecessors, since art historical concerns have shifted over the past half century. A reevaluation of Frankenthaler and her influences also has the potential to invigorate thinking about other artists. For Sirén, looking back at Frankenthaler reintroduces an artist like Paul Feeley, who was the younger artist’s “less famous” instructor.<sup>108</sup> Turning attention to a figure like Feeley “compels us to investigate existing art-historical biases.”<sup>109</sup>

*Giving Up One’s Mark* showcased a period of Frankenthaler’s work that is less frequently exhibited. In his preface, Dreishpoon conveyed his excitement at the chance to analyze a lesser-known time in Frankenthaler’s career by drawing on unpublished resources. He stated that the goal of the exhibition is to rewrite her “historical reputation

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<sup>105</sup> Elizabeth A.T. Smith, foreword to *Giving Up One’s Mark: Helen Frankenthaler in the 1960s and 1970s*, ed. Douglas Dreishpoon (Buffalo: Albright-Knox Art Gallery, 2014), ix.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, x.

<sup>107</sup> Smith, foreword, *Giving Up One’s Mark*, x.

<sup>108</sup> Janne Sirén, director’s foreword to *Giving Up One’s Mark: Helen Frankenthaler in the 1960s and 1970s*, ed. Douglas Dreishpoon (Buffalo: Albright-Knox Art Gallery, 2014), xi.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, xii.

as the progenitor of Color Field painting, prescribed from the outset by Clement Greenberg's formalist agenda, [which] continues to pigeon-hole how we consider her work."<sup>110</sup> Dreishpoon's essay favors a more dynamic analysis as demanded by the 1960s and 1970s work.

The title of Dreishpoon's essay, "It's a Matter of How You Resolve Your Doubts," illustrates his investment in changing the Greenbergian view of Frankenthaler.<sup>111</sup> He focused on her process of exploration in the 1960s and her mature work as exemplified by paintings such as *Hint from Bassano*, 1973 (fig. 7) and *The Human Edge*, 1967 (fig. 8). While her contemporaries were worrying over the question of the relevance of painting, Frankenthaler asserted in 1977 that the "act of painting still mattered."<sup>112</sup> And though she found success in printmaking, she never abandoned her practice as a painter. For her, these two approaches informed one another.

Frankenthaler's shift to acrylic from oil-based paint in the early 1960s was the beginning of her mature painting. Her annoyance with the physical aura that spread past her oil forms due to the turpentine added to oils is one possible explanation for the shift, but many reasons could have led to her change in materials.<sup>113</sup> Water-based acrylics reacted better for her since they did not result in the turpentine aura. Frankenthaler was thus able to draw her shapes with more precision. What remained key for the artist was drawing as a way of approaching painting. Rather than drawing with line or patterns she

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<sup>110</sup> Douglas Dreishpoon, preface to *Giving Up One's Mark: Helen Frankenthaler in the 1960s and 1970s*, Douglas Dreishpoon (Buffalo: Albright-Knox Art Gallery, 2014), xv.

<sup>111</sup> Douglas Dreishpoon, "It's a Matter of How You Resolve Your Doubts," in *Giving Up One's Mark: Helen Frankenthaler in the 1960s and 1970s*, ed. Pam Hatley (Buffalo: Albright-Knox Art Gallery, 2014), 4.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 7.

found it “should come from what the shapes of colors are.”<sup>114</sup> For her, the poured shapes were just as much drawing as when she used a paintbrush to make a line. Yet the poured shapes achieved her goal of a painting that has the look of it ‘just happening.’

The works from the 1960s and 1970s are distinct from those of the previous decade in their large, sometimes overlapping, sometimes just barely touching, colored forms. In an interview with Henry Geldzahler from 1965, Frankenthaler referred to this new development as “giving up one’s mark.”<sup>115</sup> For Dreishpoon the statement also has personal significance, since one’s mark is often thought to be equal to one’s identity and, if given up, merit might be lost. But it can also be seen as an equalizer; not the mark of the “woman artist,” but rather the mark of an “artist.” However, he believes that Frankenthaler’s ambition propelled her through any “critical opinion and testosterone-inflected biases [that] sometimes questioned her progress.”<sup>116</sup> Frankenthaler was not to be bullied, which is evident in her consistent work throughout her life. She remained a constant presence in the New York art scene as it transitioned from mid-century post-war concerns to explorations of “lower” media like printmaking.<sup>117</sup> Frankenthaler explored the stain technique in her print compositions too, which also complicates Greenberg’s mid-century idea of medium specificity.

In a section titled “An Amorphous Inner-world Perspective,” Dreishpoon visited the oft-contentious topic of Frankenthaler’s gender with attention to the history of labeling women artists. He compared her to O’Keeffe, as both were well aware of how

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, footnote 6.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

their gender could be used against them. Dreishpoon cited Frankenthaler's social nature and supportive network of loyal friends as the reason she stayed in New York despite its machismo.<sup>118</sup>

Dreishpoon agreed with Elderfield that Anne M. Wagner is, the best scholar to have tackled Frankenthaler's "femaleness."<sup>119</sup> Dreishpoon additionally cited Lucy Lippard's work on Eros and art.<sup>120</sup> Lippard's discussion of certain features of Eva Hesse's style led him to a comparison with Frankenthaler. Though Lippard did not address Frankenthaler directly, Dreishpoon believes that "Lippard's humane analysis of abstract work that infused a Minimalist ethos with erotic and humorous undertones, while circumventing a Greenbergian formalist cul-de-sac, offers another point of access to what Frankenthaler did."<sup>121</sup> Dreishpoon put Frankenthaler and Hesse in direct dialogue with each other, particularly Hesse's *No title*, 1969 (fig. 9) and Frankenthaler's *The Human Edge*, 1976 (fig. 8), which share a similar banner-like aesthetic. Though he notes Frankenthaler is a painter and Hesse is a sculptor, he still sees their works as operating in a common conversation about minimalism and body language.

Dreishpoon applied Lippard's method to Frankenthaler's 1970s paintings, works that often have a charged surface. He defined these large paintings as "eccentric" and "sexy" and others as "tough" and "unresolved."<sup>122</sup> Words like "sexy" that have been used carefully ever since feminists raised awareness of gender biases in art historical writing,

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid. Dreishpoon refers to Lippard's essays "Eccentric Abstraction" (1966) and "Eros Presumptive" (1967). Though Lippard did not look at Frankenthaler's work in these essays Dreishpoon analyzes a connection between the artist's work and the art historian's writings.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, 16, 11.

are here re-stamped on Frankenthaler's work. What he did not return to, however, is the earlier treatment that tied the work and the artist together with similar descriptive language.

When Dreishpoon wrote that works such as *Off White Square*, 1973 (fig. 10), or *Pistachio*, 1971 (fig. 11), have hints of birth canals and Eros and humor, such descriptions seem fresh and liberating, since the earlier retrospective essays did not address these possible interpretations.<sup>123</sup> In comparison to O'Hara's language, which is riddled with patriarchal binaries, Dreishpoon kept to formal qualities. For Frankenthaler, conveying eccentric emotions relates to the human condition, rather than to the specificity of the female body.<sup>124</sup>

Dreishpoon is determined that this exhibition open up possibilities for new scholarship on Frankenthaler. He ends his essay thus:

Having faced so many changes in the art world, she could still endorse painting's potential to mirror one's life through deliberate acts of expression. Perhaps it is time to see Frankenthaler as the supreme colorist she was and to grant that her abstract, improvised images, even after 1960, could still harbor content enriched by subconscious impulses.<sup>125</sup>

No longer should Frankenthaler be subject to the terms and agendas of Greenbergian ideals or defined solely by her work of the 1950s. We should also no longer shy away from an exploration beyond the materiality of the stained canvas surface. We should give attention to markers of the subconscious –and descriptive language should relate to what is found in the composition and not only in the artist.

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

### *Interview with the Curator*

In December 2014, I interviewed Dreishpoon. He was concise about Frankenthaler and curating. His stated hope for his exhibition is that it would lead to a redefinition of her work.<sup>126</sup> I asked why he picked Frankenthaler to exhibit at this specific time, to which he replied that most of his curatorial ideas have had a foothold in the Albright-Knox collection.<sup>127</sup> He was also influenced by the lack of attention to Frankenthaler's work from the 1960s and 1970s. The Guggenheim, he stated, did a wonderful exhibition of her work from the 1950s. Dreishpoon instead turned attention to the work of the 1960s and 1970s, feeling it needed to be looked at with contemporary eyes.<sup>128</sup>

Dreishpoon's particular interest in this time period is in Frankenthaler's shift in medium and technique, which was a starting point for the organization of the exhibition. The acrylic medium led to new ways for her to pour and thin her paint. Dreishpoon was also interested in breaking from a formalist, Greenbergian treatment of her work in favor of examining its content. He asked: What do her forms mean? This is why, for the catalogue essay, he cited Lippard, whose interpretation of other women artists he felt shed light on Frankenthaler.<sup>129</sup>

When writing about Frankenthaler and her work, there has to be sensitivity to gender, given the critical history. Dreishpoon is acutely aware of language in his own writing. Dreishpoon stated that Goossen's catalogue essays approached Frankenthaler's

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<sup>126</sup> Douglas Dreishpoon (Chief Curator Emeritus, Albright-Knox Art Gallery) telephone interview, December 9, 2014.

<sup>127</sup> Two works specifically, which are a part of the Frankenthaler exhibition, influenced his decision to arrange the exhibition, *Hint from Bassano*, 1973, and *Moveable Blue*, 1973.

<sup>128</sup> Dreishpoon interview.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

work in an interesting way; each artwork received equal attention. Dreishpoon also analyzed images of her. Photographs by Ernst Haas of the artist in 1969 'working' in her studio (fig. 12-16) come off as stereotypically gendered, but for Dreishpoon this is not a negative because they highlight why Frankenthaler did what he asserts no man would have done: kneel on the floor. One mark of gender bias for Dreishpoon is the image of Frankenthaler painting on her knees. He believes that “before this it would have never occurred to a man to paint on his knees,” or at the very least a man would not be photographed in such a gendered pose.<sup>130</sup> Frankenthaler’s process was portrayed as distinctly different from her male contemporaries, who stood over their canvases or continued to work on the traditional easel.

Frankenthaler’s work, with its “tough” and “unsettled” images, contradicts the mid-century idea of what women could convey in painting.<sup>131</sup> Some of Frankenthaler’s works are beautifully balanced, while others are unresolved, a quality that can be described as chaotic. Dreishpoon also organized an exhibition at the Albright-Knox to coincide with the Frankenthaler show, featuring work by her teacher Paul Feeley. Feeley’s painting has some of the same qualities that in Frankenthaler’s art were labeled feminine, yet he was a marine, one of the first to land in Nagasaki. Accordingly, mid-century writers did not use feminine language to describe his work. Dreishpoon believes that such exhibitions together reflect Frankenthaler’s concern for her art not being

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

approached through the lens of gender.<sup>132</sup> He ultimately determined it was of utmost importance to convey Frankenthaler's physicality in creating her works.

### ***Encountering the Exhibition***

Before walking into the five gallery rooms that hold the exhibition, and an additional one playing the film *Portrait of an Artist: Frankenthaler- Toward a New Climate* (Adato, 1977), the viewer is confronted with tall, temple-like, marble columns and large kraters. Between the decorative architectural elements is the title of the exhibition displayed in white on a dark gray wall. To the right is a Haas photograph of the artist in her studio from 1969, and to the left is a quote by Frankenthaler: "Painting is a matter of making some kind of beautiful order out of human feeling and experience."<sup>133</sup> Through this arrangement Dreishpoon immediately brings the viewer's attention to the artist's intentions for those in the audience encountering the artist's work for the first time, the arrangement established both the artist's practice and voice. Also, with Frankenthaler's quote as the first text the viewer saw, he or she would be led to look for the "beautiful order" in her work.

The first gallery, the Mark E. Hamister Gallery, contained the wall text for the exhibition and four paintings and three prints. The curator's statement inside the galleries explained the significance of the exhibition. Attention was given to Frankenthaler's transition in materials, form, and color, and her artistic influences, such as Pollock. This first room contained a work from the Albright-Knox collection, *Round Trip*, 1957 (fig.

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Exhibition quote originally found in Oral history interview with Helen Frankenthaler, 1968, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Website.



18), an earlier oil-on-canvas gifted to the museum by James I. Merrill in 1958. The curator used this painting as an example of her work prior to the 1960s. *Round Trip* is distinctly 1950s Frankenthaler, as the painting looks “drawn” and displays the lingering influence of Pollock.

The other works that were in this room were on loan from the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, which worked closely with Dreishpoon and his team. The paintings and prints are modest in size in comparison to the well-known larger works by the artist, though the acrylic-on-canvas works, such as *Square Field*, 1966 (fig. 19) and *Grid*, 1969 (fig. 20), imitate elements of the much larger works. Her oil-on-paper works *Untitled*, 1961-62 (fig. 21), *Grotto Azura*, 1963 (fig. 22), and *Black Sun Drawing with Red*, 1960 (fig. 23) showcased Frankenthaler’s 1960s exploration of the same ideas in printmaking, which she would continue to develop throughout her career. However, *Untitled*, 1968 (fig. 24), an acrylic on sized, primed linen from the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, appeared out of place. Of all the works in the exhibition this composition is the least dimensional and energetic. It does not have the depth or the movement normally associated with a Frankenthaler. This could be due to its dwarfed size, but its priming means it reads differently because the paint is left to sit on top of the canvas and not interact with the materiality of the painting’s surface. Even her prints have more life than this work. But it still displays the many experiments she made during these decades.

A gallery of smaller works included four small paintings that are very lively and imitate the depth and color variation of her larger works. Also included were five prints; two belong to the Albright-Knox. These are *Variation II on “Mauve Corner,”* 1969 (fig. 25), a lithograph made from four stones on off-white Chatman British handmade paper

and purchased by the Charles W. Goodyear Fund in 1970, and *Silent Curtain*, 1967-69 (fig. 26), a lithograph made from two stones on Buff Archer paper and purchased by the Albright-Knox at the same time as *Variation II*.<sup>134</sup> Of all the works in the exhibition, *Silent Curtain* is the most minimal in color with only a tan background with a white swoop on top. But this does not disappoint the eye; the suggestion of depth is immense and intriguing in this work. The stroke of white fades throughout its length and the tan, with its uneven edges, is slightly off kilter higher on the left side. The imperfections and illusions of depth speak to Frankenthaler's desire to visually incorporate the surface of the paper into the overall composition.

The lithograph *Door*, 1976-79 (fig. 27), on blue J. Whatman 1927 English handmade paper, was listed as belonging to a private collection; all other works in this smaller gallery were from the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation. The four included paintings are all acrylic. *Untitled*, 1971 (fig. 28) also includes marker, which results in a drawn line reminiscent of her 1950s work. The other paintings, *Untitled*, 1976 (fig. 29), *Cascade*, 1966 (fig. 30), and *Untitled*, 1979 (fig. 31), contain visual attributes of her post-1950s work. *Untitled* (1979) is striking in its very dark overall composition with no unprimed canvas showing through. Yet depth is still achieved between the places where the paint soaks into the canvas and where it has built up above the surface.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> The Albright-Knox started collecting Frankenthaler relatively early in her career. Their first was the painting *Round Trip*, which entered their collection in 1958. The painting *Tutti-Frutti* (1966) was purchased in 1976 and another print *Cedar Hill* (1983) in 1984. Her works entered the Albright-Knox purchased through various funds. *Tutti-Frutti* was not included in the Albright-Knox Frankenthaler exhibition because it was on loan during this time.

<sup>135</sup> Frankenthaler would go on to create dark works similar to this painting, which appeared in an exhibition titled *Frankenthaler: The Darker Palette*, curated by Karen Wilkin at the Art Museum of Princeton University, April 16-June 7, 1998.

The last two works in the small gallery are acrylic-on-paper: *Almost August Series I*, 1978 (fig. 32) and *4 is more*, 1972 (fig. 33), which also incorporates crayon. *Almost August Series I* is the liveliest of her works on paper. The rigid and open paper in the right top third is quite extraordinary in its contrast to the surrounding shimmery paint. The exploration of glittered paint, though somewhat appealing, thankfully did not consume her work. The incorporation of the new medium is exciting, but by creating a consistent reflection over the composition the depth of the work's atmosphere is challenged. The shared shimmery effect pulls the layers closer together. It is the small dabs of non-glittered paint that convey some depth by sitting on top of the shimmery surface. The effect is lost when viewing the image as a photographic reproduction, but is apparent when encountering the work in person.

The last three galleries of the exhibition were arranged as west, middle, and east. The west room held four large paintings with a wall devoted to each commanding work; two on a wall would have been too overwhelming. The earliest painting is an oil-on-canvas from 1961 titled *Orange Breaking Through* (fig. 34). This work, in the collection of Audrey and David Mirvish, Toronto, is related to her 1950s work. It has fewer pools and splashes of paint and more places where the artist went in with a brush after the first pour to create variation in the middle. There is also considerably more canvas space in this work with auras of oil paint spreading beyond the forms. This can be said of another oil-painting in the room, *Cool Summer*, 1962 (fig. 35), from the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation. The saturation of paint into canvas is iconic of her oil paintings; there are only small traces of this result with her solvent-based acrylic works. As a result, the oil paintings retain more of the artist's touch than the acrylic ones.

The other two works displayed in the west room were both acrylic paintings that clearly illustrate this distinction. One of her best known works, *The Human Edge*, 1967 (fig. 8), from the Collection of the Everson Museum of Art, exhibits the control and precision that acrylics gave the artist. The other work, *Riverhead*, 1963 (fig. 36), from the Foundation, showcases the fluidity of acrylic paint and its ability to form interesting stains. Acrylic seems more manageable and creates harder lines. In some places two colors compete by overlapping while in others they contour each other. *Riverhead*, for Frankenthaler scholars like Elderfield and Clifford Ross, is a surprising work from the early 1960s. Smith counts it as a hint of what is to come.<sup>136</sup> The crisp edges of *The Human Edge* seem in conversation with the work of Louis, while the bits and particles found in *Riverhead* nod in the direction of Pollock.

The middle gallery contained five paintings, four of which are very large, and one print. The print, a lively acrylic-on-paper titled *Fiesta*, 1973 (fig. 37), and the smaller painting, *Untitled*, 1973 (fig. 38), are from her Foundation. Of the smaller paintings this one best imitates the techniques and variety of her larger works. It shares the depth and complicated mixing of multiple colors similar to the larger works, which is often absent in smaller pictures with fewer colors and layers. *Sesame*, 1970 (fig. 39), also in the collection of the Foundation, is almost monochromatic in its golden yellow with a visually interesting strip of bare canvas running jaggedly through the middle. Yet, 1950s-esque lines dart to the corners. *Signal*, 1969 (fig. 40), from the Mirvish Collection, is an

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<sup>136</sup> This debate took place in *The Conversation* event at the Albright-Knox on November 9, 2014. They called upon a member of the audience, Maureen St. Onge, who was a Frankenthaler assistant for many years. She confirmed the date of 1963 and said the reason it is not recognized is because shortly after its creation it was rolled up until the 1980s when it was given a title. It was specifically unrolled for Elderfield's viewing when researching his 1989 monograph.

acrylic, possibly an earlier solvent-based one, that has just the slightest saturation of chemicals surrounding the stained forms.

But the most striking works were the two large panoramic acrylic paintings hung on either side of a window. Both from 1973, *Hint from Bassano* (fig. 7), from the Mirvish Collection, and *Moveable Blue* (fig. 17), from the John Berggruen Gallery, San Francisco, the paintings capture Frankenthaler's talent for working on a grand scale and taking equivalent risks. *Moveable Blue* contains some of the most interesting aspects of her 1970s explorations, especially in the contours of color forms. Play between hard and seeping edges results in beautiful expansions of depth and color variation. Paint has to dry to make this happen, which speaks to Frankenthaler's attention to the lapse of time between acrylic layers.

The east gallery had four large acrylic paintings on each wall, a similar layout to the west room. *Unwind*, 1972 (fig. 41), an acrylic-on-canvas belonging to the Mirvish Collection, *New Paths*, 1973 (fig. 42), *Duchess*, 1978 (fig. 43), and *Ocean Drive West #1*, 1974 (fig. 44), are all acrylic-on-canvas from the collection of the Foundation. This room showed the compositional kinship between *New Paths* and *The Human Edge* (fig. 8). Both play with bare canvas and there is an interaction between lines and the application of poured color. Two large expanses of dark brownish-black color bookend the top and bottom, with brighter colors creating depth within the exposed canvas of the middle. *Duchess* and *Ocean Drive West #1*, like *Sesame*, are works where Frankenthaler explored single-color variation with only a few swipes and spots of color. The expansive bright blues in *Ocean Drive West #1* exhibit purposeful technique and beauty.

Works like *The Human Edge*, *Hint from Bassano*, and *Ocean Drive West #1* could each easily hold the viewer's attention for several hours. Frankenthaler, through her exploration of drawing with forms, depth, and color, created an atmosphere that engulfs the whole body and psyche of the viewer. Her suggestions of landscapes draw the body into psychological locations where Nature is synonymous with sentiments, feelings, and movements. Frankenthaler accordingly is not relevant only to art history. Artists today will still be affected by the continued power of her work.

The short film, *Frankenthaler: Toward a New Climate* (1977) directed by Perry Miller Adato, was made for an episode of "The Originals: Women in Art" for public television's WNET. Adato claimed her inspiration for filming women artists came from an encounter with art historian Linda Nochlin.<sup>137</sup> The film shows private moments of the artist discussing her life, interacting with friends, and creating the painting *Thirteen*, 1977 (fig. 45). Since the artist preferred to paint in private the screening allowed viewers to see the artist in an unexpected way.

In conversation with the exhibition was a small show of paintings by Frankenthaler's contemporaries, pulled from the Albright-Knox collection. Two smaller rooms contained works by artists who either had a personal connection to the artist and/or were contemporaries using similar styles or content. Robert Motherwell, Paul Jenkins, Claude Viallat, Simon Hantaï, Friedel Dzubas, Jack Bush, Herbert Ferber, and Kenneth Noland were each represented by a single work. The room closest to the Frankenthaler exhibition held five works that were organic in their compositions and multilayered in their color, whereas the second room held work by three artists who experimented with

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<sup>137</sup> Douglas Dreishpoon, "It's a Matter," 25, footnote 23.

more flattened expanses of colors and stiff, hard edges. The exhibition text stated that all (including Frankenthaler) were inspired by Pollock and a desire to find innovative bodily techniques for making abstract painting.<sup>138</sup>

Viewing the most recent exhibition of Frankenthaler, reading the catalogue, and interviewing the curator, indicates great potential for future scholarship. Frankenthaler was an active artist until her death in 2011. This leaves another thirty-five years of work not touched on by the recent exhibitions and twenty-five years since Frankenthaler's last major exhibition at MoMA in 1989. New scholarship will find new ground in the work of the 1990s and 2000s.

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<sup>138</sup> From the exhibition text. The works include are as follows: Jack Bush, *Coloured Funnel*, 1965; Herbert Ferber, *Hot Orange*, 1974; Kenneth Noland, *Yellow Half*, 1963; Friedel Dzubas, *Alleman*, 1973; Robert Motherwell, *The August Sea #6*, 1972; Paul Jenkins, *Phenomena Hessick Question*, 1964; Claude Viallat, *Red Imprint on Blue Background*, 1972-73; and Simon Hantaï, *Untitled (C.F.3.4.34)*, 1976.

## CONCLUSION

The shifts in critical language found in the catalogues and popular press for the major Frankenthaler exhibitions expose the fluidity of language, as well as how it captures the state of gender biases. Jacques Derrida in his 1967 *Of Grammatology* argues that writing, or rather the act of writing, is always a trace of a past form of language.<sup>139</sup> Living language is constantly being informed by changing social practices, while writing exhibits the consciousness of language at its time of production. By looking at how Frankenthaler was treated in her 1960, 1969, and 1989 exhibition catalogues and in the press, we are able to examine art historical interests through language frozen within particular social contexts. The same is true for the 2013 and 2014 exhibition catalogues and the concerns manifest in more recent criticism.

Recent scholarship on gender construction, identity, and Frankenthaler raises many of these points and is concerned with how her gender led to misconceptions of her work. Clifford Ross, nephew of the artist and Chairman of the Board of Directors for the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, warns that analyzing Frankenthaler's works based on gender alone is problematic.<sup>140</sup> However, other scholars, like Ann Gibson, Bett Schumacher, and Sybil E. Gohari, recently used the gendered treatment of

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<sup>139</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998). Derrida is not creating an opposition between spoken and written language, but rather exposing how we understand the two manifestations of language, which he explains in *Jacques Derrida. "Excuse me, but I never said exactly so: Yet Another Derridean Interview."* in: *On The Beach*. Autumn 1983. (English).

<sup>140</sup> Douglas Dreishpoon, John Elderfield, Elizabeth A.T. Smith, and Clifford Ross. "Helen Frankenthaler in the 1960s and 1970s: A Conversation." Museum lecture, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, November 9, 2014. This event brought four Frankenthaler advocates together to discuss Frankenthaler, her works, and the potential for future scholarship.



Frankenthaler's work to create different theoretical positions than those of Elderfield, Smith, and Dreishpoon.

Ann Gibson, in her article "Lee Krasner and Women's Innovations in American Abstract Painting," calls for a reassessment of Krasner, Mitchell, Elaine de Kooning, and Frankenthaler as members of abstract expressionism. Yet Gibson dismisses the majority of Frankenthaler's work, Frankenthaler was not an underrepresented artist in museums, collections, and galleries.<sup>141</sup> Although Frankenthaler did not aid in the task of rewriting abstract expressionism, as perhaps Krasner did, Gibson is aware of the restricted or binary language used for all women artists. Her solution aligns with the feminist idea of supplementing the canon of art history with lesser-known women artists with writing that is not gendered.

The gendered displacement of women artists from the canon is a major theme that Bett Schumacher, director at the Richard Reynolds Gallery, examines. For Schumacher, the key to understanding Frankenthaler is her ambiguity. In her essay, Schumacher corrects Griselda Pollock's interpretation of Frankenthaler. Pollock claimed that the photographs by Ernst Haas, which seem to mimic those of Jackson Pollock by Hans Namuth, "conjures up the "feminine" body of the "other."<sup>142</sup> Pollock justified this reading by analyzing Frankenthaler's process as depicted in the photographs as subdued and less physical. Schumacher saw this as a failure on Pollock's part to understand the artist's actual process.

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<sup>141</sup> Ann Gibson, "Lee Krasner and Women's Innovations in American Abstract Painting," *Woman's Art Journal* 28, no. 2 (2007): 16-18.

<sup>142</sup> Bett Schumacher, "The Woman Problem: Gender Displacement in the Art of Helen Frankenthaler," *Woman's Art Journal* 31, no. 2 (2010): 14.

Schumacher believes that Pollock's assessment does not acknowledge Frankenthaler's physicality. For Schumacher, Pollock failed to see the athleticism Frankenthaler needed in order to hover over her paintings, as seen in Haas's photographs, which convey the "forcefulness of Frankenthaler's presence to her canvases."<sup>143</sup> Pollock saw the other "feminine" body of the artist, her canvases, competing with the body of the "creative woman," the body of the artist. Pollock's emphasis on the gendered body of the artist echoes the reception of the artist in the 1950s and 1960s, where she is both gendered and praised.<sup>144</sup> In the end, Schumacher surmised that though Frankenthaler aimed to erase her gender as a determining factor of her work, she did explore it subtly in her works, and perhaps without knowing, found a gender-neutral artistic voice.<sup>145</sup>

Art historian Sybil E. Gohari sees critical treatment of Frankenthaler throughout her career as conveying shifting art historical priorities. Though Frankenthaler was often gendered by her critics, Gohari asserted that this "has evolved as society and the art world recycled the concept of gender through shifting ideas about feminism and new criticism, and the fact that gender-based concerns permeated the readings of Frankenthaler shows the extent to which identity became an essential component in twentieth-century art criticism."<sup>146</sup> Her conclusion is that art writers have hidden agendas behind why they delve into identity formation, which explains why Frankenthaler is still tied to the idea of the woman artist. To counter this, the most recent exhibitions attempt to connect Frankenthaler to a wider range of social concerns.

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<sup>143</sup> Schumacher, "The Woman Problem," 14.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, 19-20.

<sup>146</sup> Sybil E. Gohari, "Gendered Reception: There and Back Again: An Analysis of the Critical Reception of Helen Frankenthaler," *Woman's Art Journal* 35, no. 1 (2014), 38.

Though my concern in this thesis is with the gendered language associated with Frankenthaler, I believe that future scholarship should attach her work to a larger social practice. I touch on this by historically mapping gender concerns since the mid-twentieth century. The politics that bridge both social art history and gender theory give scholars a chance to examine anew an artist like Frankenthaler, who during her life denied an active engagement in either. Greenberg's formalism worked to abolish social context. Instead, current theory invites us to look at the political structures surrounding that formalism.

Art historians have been rewriting the canon to include and contextualize omitted or marginalized artists. A primary concern of my research is to understand the historical biases of this discrimination. Artists and their work should be connected to the larger political and social concerns of the time of their production, and the language that is used to discuss the artist and their work should be analyzed accordingly. A consciousness of the language and agendas of the writers should be acknowledged. The art historian writing about living artists must question the previous standard of male-dominated art history of the mid-twentieth century. Through the examination of the language surrounding Frankenthaler and other contemporary artists, democratization within the discourse of art history is attainable.

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Figure 1. Helen Frankenthaler, *Mountains and Sea*, 1952. National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.



Figure 2. Helen Frankenthaler, *Madridscape*, 1959. Baltimore Museum of Art.



Figure 3. Helen Frankenthaler, *Casanova*, 1988. Private Collection.



Figure 4. Helen Frankenthaler, *Pink Lady*, 1963. Helen Frankenthaler Foundation.



Figure 5. Helen Frankenthaler, *Milkwood Arcade*, 1963. Helen Frankenthaler Foundation.



Figure 6. Helen Frankenthaler, *Interior Landscape*, 1964. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

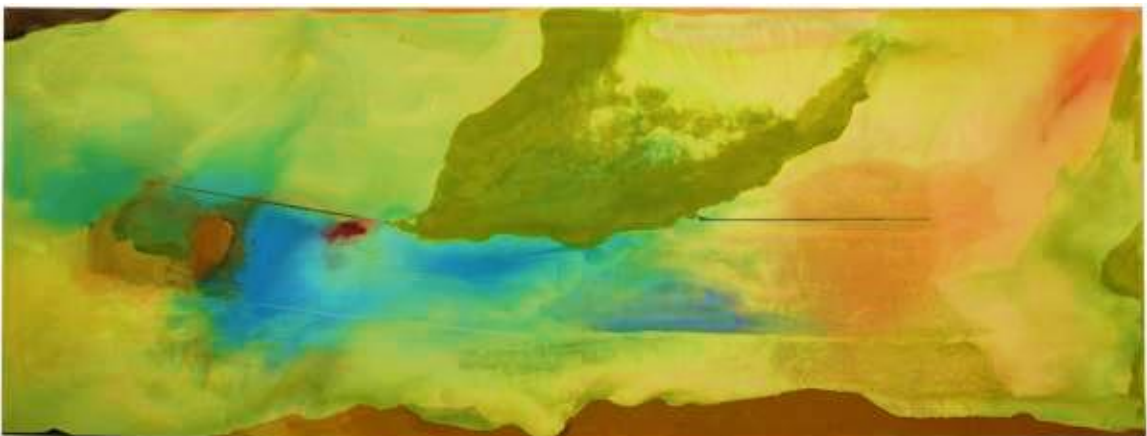


Figure 7. Helen Frankenthaler, *Hint from Bassano*, 1973. Audrey and David Mirvish, Toronto.





Figure 8. Helen Frankenthaler, *The Human Edge*, 1973. Everson Museum of Art. Museum purchase to honor Max W. Sullivan, Director, on the occasion of the opening of the new building, PC 68.23.



Figure 9. Eva Hesse, *No Title*, 1969. National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.; Gift of Collectors Committee, 1996.



Figure 10. Helen Frankenthaler, *Off White Square*, 1973. Private Collection.



Figure 11. Helen Frankenthaler, *Pistachio*, 1971. Chazen Museum of Art, Madison, Wisconsin.









Figures 12-16. Ernst Haas, images of the Frankenthaler in her studio, East Eighty-third Street and Third Avenue, New York, 1969. Hulton Archive, Getty Images.



Figure 17. Helen Frankenthaler, *Moveable Blue*, 1973. John Berggruen Gallery, San Francisco.



Figure 18. Helen Frankenthaler, *Round Trip*, 1957. Albright-Knox Art Gallery; Gift of James I. Merrill, 1958.



Figure 19. Helen Frankenthaler, *Square Field*, 1966. Helen Frankenthaler Foundation.



Figure 20. Helen Frankenthaler, *Grid*, 1969. Helen Frankenthaler Foundation.





Figure 21. Helen Frankenthaler, *Untitled*, 1961-1962. Helen Frankenthaler Foundation.



Figure 22. Helen Frankenthaler, *Grotto Azura*, 1963. Helen Frankenthaler Foundation.

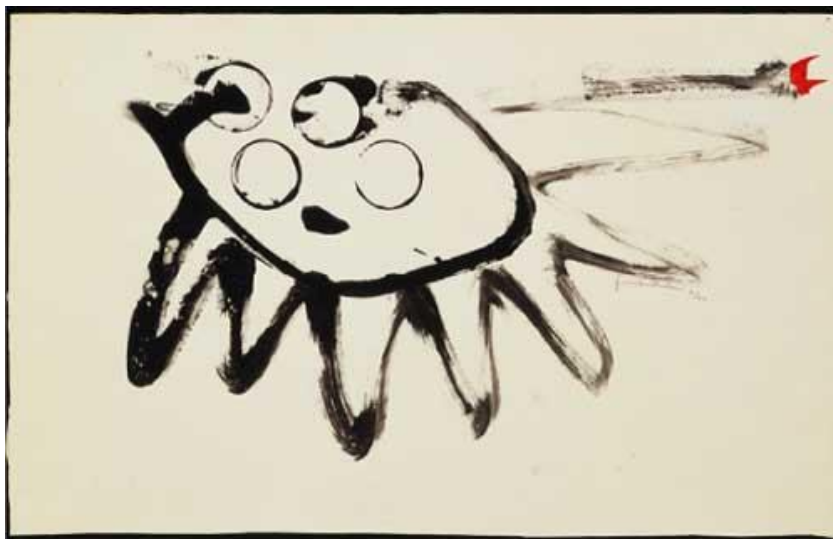


Figure 23. Helen Frankenthaler, *Black Sun Drawing with Red*, 1960. Helen Frankenthaler Foundation.

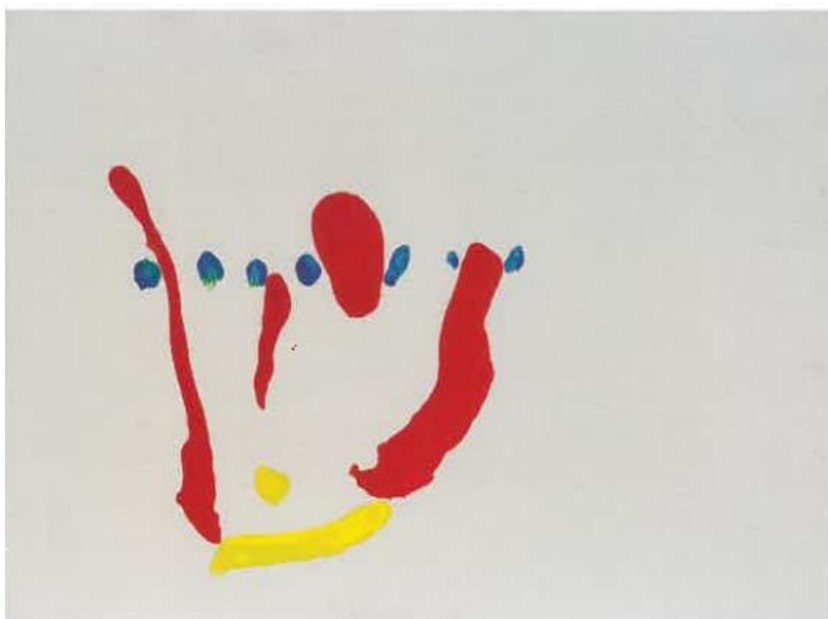


Figure 24. Helen Frankenthaler, *Untitled*, 1968. Helen Frankenthaler Foundation.



Figure 25. Helen Frankenthaler, *Variation II on "Mauve Corner,"* 1969. Albright-Knox Art Gallery; Charles W. Goodyear Fund, 1970.



Figure 26. Helen Frankenthaler, *Silent Curtain*, 1967-1969. Albright-Knox Art Gallery; Charles W. Goodyear Fund, 1970.





Figure 27. Helen Frankenthaler, *Door*, 1976-1979. Private Collection.



Figure 28. Helen Frankenthaler, *Untitled*, 1971. Helen Frankenthaler Foundation.



Figure 29. Helen Frankenthaler, *Untitled*, 1976. Helen Frankenthaler Foundation.



Figure 30. Helen Frankenthaler, *Cascade*, 1966. Helen Frankenthaler Foundation.



Figure 31. Helen Frankenthaler, *Untitled*, 1979. Helen Frankenthaler Foundation.



Figure 32. Helen Frankenthaler, *Almost August Series I*, 1978. Helen Frankenthaler Foundation.



Figure 33. Helen Frankenthaler, *4 is more*, 1972. Helen Frankenthaler Foundation.



Figure 34. Helen Frankenthaler, *Orange Breaking Through*, 1961. Audrey and David Mirvish, Toronto.



Figure 35. Helen Frankenthaler, *Cool Summer*, 1962. Helen Frankenthaler Foundation.





Figure 36. Helen Frankenthaler, *Riverhead*, 1963. Helen Frankenthaler Foundation.



Figure 37. Helen Frankenthaler, *Fiesta*, 1973. Helen Frankenthaler Foundation.



Figure 38. Helen Frankenthaler, *Untitled*, 1973. Helen Frankenthaler Foundation.



Figure 39. Helen Frankenthaler, *Sesame*, 1970. Helen Frankenthaler Foundation.





Figure 40. Helen Frankenthaler, *Signal*, 1969. Audrey and David Mirvish, Toronto.



Figure 41. Helen Frankenthaler, *Unwind*, 1972. Audrey and David Mirvish, Toronto.

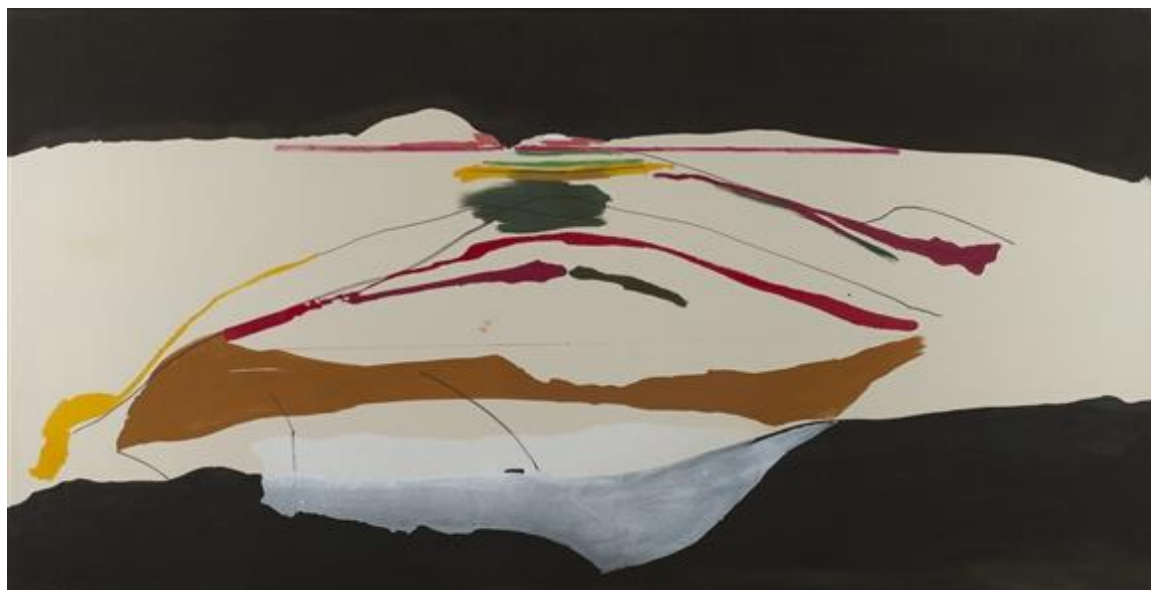


Figure 42. Helen Frankenthaler, *New Paths*, 1973. Helen Frankenthaler Foundation.



Figure 43. Helen Frankenthaler, *Duchess*, 1978. Helen Frankenthaler Foundation.

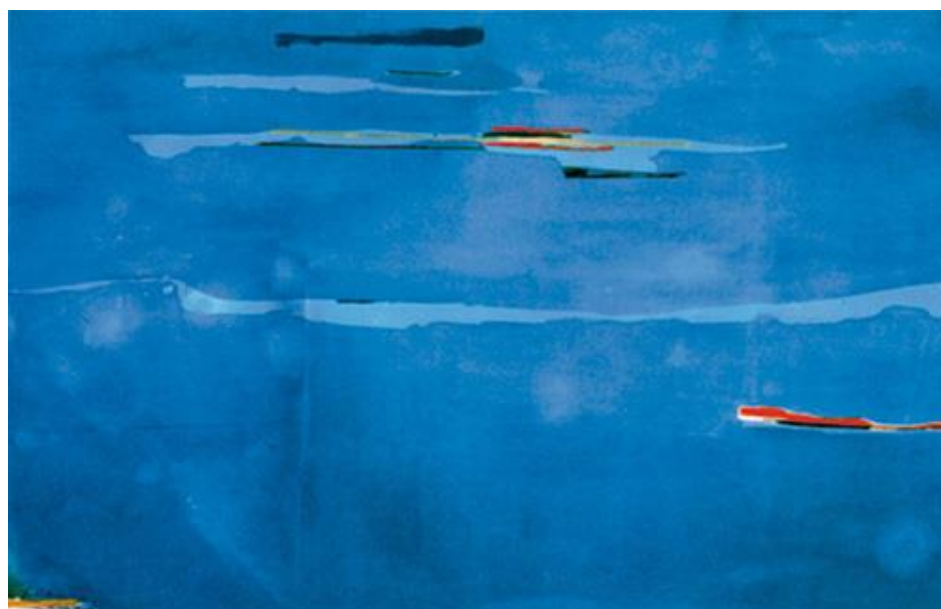


Figure 44. Helen Frankenthaler, *Ocean Drive West #1*, 1974. Helen Frankenthaler Foundation.



Figure 45. Helen Frankenthaler, *Thirteen*, 1977. Helen Frankenthaler Foundation.