

*The Lyrical Moment: Modern and Contemporary Abstraction by Helen Frankenthaler and Heather
Gwen Martin*

University of South Florida Contemporary Art Museum

June 17-July 30, 2022

Teaching Resources

Helen Frankenthaler (1928-2011), whose career spanned six decades, has long been recognized as one of the great American artists of the 20th century. She was eminent among the second generation of postwar American abstract painters and is widely credited for playing a pivotal role in the transition from Abstract Expressionism to Color Field painting. Frankenthaler described her first encounter with Jackson Pollock's work in 1951 as "a beautiful trauma." As retold in Mary Gabriel's 2018 book *Ninth Street Women*, that meeting "set her on a path of bold technical innovation and creation that would inspire others as it inspired her."

Through her invention of the soak-stain technique, she expanded the possibilities of abstract painting, while at times referencing figuration and landscape in unique ways. She produced a body of work whose impact on contemporary art has been profound and continues to grow.

Frankenthaler experimented tirelessly throughout her long career. In addition to producing unique paintings on canvas and paper, she worked in a wide range of media, including ceramics, sculpture, tapestry, and especially printmaking. Hers was a significant voice in the mid-century "print renaissance" among American abstract painters. She continued to work and exhibit through the opening years of this century.



Helen Frankenthaler, *Untitled*, 1967.
Screenprint, 25-3/4 x 17-7/8 in.
Edition 86/100.

© Helen Frankenthaler Foundation,
Inc. / Artists Rights Society (ARS),
New York / Chiron Press, New York.
Photography by Will Lytch.

L.A.-based artist Heather Gwen Martin (1977-) has been creating paintings that walk a tightrope between improvisation and deliberation, dissolution, and structure. While a full-time student at the University of California San Diego—where she studied with Pattern and Decoration pioneer Kim McConnell—Martin worked as a colorist for DC comics, adding color onto scenes and characters using computer technology. The experience had an unintended but profound effect on her painting.

Today, Martin’s canvases resemble splash pages for certain copyrighted film or screen-based entertainments. Nonetheless her vividly colored abstractions remain one hundred percent handmade, containing no high-tech aides or digital fillers. Denuded of figures, captions and word balloons, her sprightly landscapes distill reflection and sensation into loops of sinuous line and flat areas of color. While some canvases superficially resemble the livelier aspects of swipe-and-like looking—rounded emoji-like shapes and abrupt transitions between bright areas of color—they impress sensorially, like the taste of underripe fruit or a sharp intake of cold breath.



Heather Gwen Martin, *Fever Dream*, 2021.
Oil on linen, 60 x 56 in. © Heather Gwen Martin.
Courtesy of L.A. Louver, Los Angeles and Miles McEnery,
New York. Photography by Jeff McLane.

Teaching Resources

Websites

The Lyrical Moment (USF Contemporary Art Museum)

http://ira.usf.edu/CAM/exhibitions/2022_06_The_Lyrical_Moment/The_Lyrical_Moment.html

Abstract Expressionism (Tate Museum)

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/a/abstract-expressionism>

Abstract Expressionism (Metropolitan Museum of Art)

https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/abex/hd_abex.htm

Abstract Expressionist Artists You Need to Know (Artworks)

<https://www.ideelart.com/magazine/abstract-expressionist-artists>

Heather Gwen Martin (Miles McEnery Gallery)

<https://www.milesmcenery.com/artists/heather-gwen-martin>

Helen Frankenthaler (WikiArt Visual Art Encyclopedia)

<https://www.wikiart.org/en/helen-frankenthaler>

Who was Helen Frankenthaler? (Art in America: Art News)

<https://www.artnews.com/feature/helen-frankenthaler-who-is-she-why-is-she-important-1234586555/>

Print Materials

Belasco, D. (2014). See us now: The feminist positions of Helen Frankenthaler and Grace Hartigan, 1957-1962. *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift* 83(2), 67-81.

Chave, A. C. (2016). Frankenthaler's fortunes: On class privilege and the artist's reception. *Women's Art Journal*, 37(1), 29-36.

Gabriel, M. (2019). *Ninth Street women: Lee Krasner, Elaine de Kooning, Grace Hartigan, Joan Mitchell, and Helen Frankenthaler: Five painters and the movement that changed modern art*. Back Bay Books.

Nemerov, A. (2021). *Fierce poise: Helen Frankenthaler and 1950s*. Penguin Press.

Rowley, A. (2007). *Helen Frankenthaler: Painting history, writing painting*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Sandler, I. (2016). *Women of abstract expressionism*. Yale University Press.

Wilkin, K. (2012). Helen Frankenthaler (1928-2011). *American Art* 26(3), 100-104.

Videos

"Know the Artist: Helen Frankenthaler" on YouTube

<https://youtu.be/dOkrCOslfcU>

"Desire Is the Theme of All Life: Helen Frankenthaler in 1950s New York with Alexander Nemerov" on YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vDFfAI4fell>

"Arts District: Women of Abstract Expressionism" on YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p7tlfBOjay0>

"From 1984: Abstract expressionist Helen Frankenthaler" on YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pBKNifpTSFk&feature=youtu.be>

"Helen Frankenthaler interview (1993)" on YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AxQw7SNO9yA>

"Portrait of the artist Helen Frankenthaler" on YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7efK8UTjlzY&feature=youtu.be>

"Getting to the truth of things with abstraction | Helen Frankenthaler | UNIQLO ARTSPEAKS" on YouTube

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rgvnESHZm_M

"Helen Frankenthaler: Line into Color, Color into Line" on YouTube

<https://youtu.be/h35AJ2cn72Y>

"Helen Frankenthaler and the Women of Abstract Expressionism" on YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6H-JICBOwjQ>

"Heather Gwen Martin: Fever Dream" on YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i5wvW-cVowc>

"In Conversation with Heather Gwen Martin" on YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xVGuljK51VI>

"The Science of Color with Heather Gwen Martin and Gershom" on YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DoE7t-q5nwM>

"Art District: Women of Abstract Expressionism" on YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p7tlfBOjay0>

"Fields of Colour: Helen Frankenthaler"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GtwDEgSlkbw>