



Helen Frankenthaler. *The Bay*, 1967, acrylic

1) Stokstad, Marilyn, and Michael W. Cothren. *Art History*, 5th ed. Boston: Pearson, 2014. p. 1079

Helen Frankenthaler (b. 1928) visited Pollock's studio in 1951 and began to create a more lyrical version of Action painting that had a significant impact on later artists. Like Pollock, she worked on the floor, but she poured paint onto unprimed canvas in thin washes so that it soaked into the fabric rather than sitting on its surface.

Frankenthaler described her process as starting with an aesthetic question or image, which evolved as the self-expressive act of painting took over – “I will sometimes start a picture feeling, What will happen if I work with three blues...? And very often midway through the picture I have to change the basis of the experience. Or I add and add to the canvas... When I say gesture, my gesture, I mean what my mark is. I think there is something now that I am still working out in paint; it is a struggle for me to both discard and retain what is gestural and personal.”

2) Kleiner, Fred S. *Gardner's Art Through the Ages*, 15th ed. Boston: Cengage, 2016. p. 960

Helen Frankenthaler...began her study of art at the Dalton School in New York City under Rufino Tamayo. She painted in New York for virtually her entire career, and in 1958 married fellow abstract painter Robert Motherwell. In 1965, the art critic Henry Geldzahler (1935-1994) interviewed Frankenthaler about her work as a color-field painter. In the following excerpt, Frankenthaler described the approach that she took to placing color on canvas in *The Bay* and similar abstract paintings she produced in the early 1960s, and compared her method with the way earlier modernist artists used color in their paintings:

When you first saw a Cubist or Impressionist picture there was a whole way of instructing the eye or the subconscious. Dabs of color had to stand for real things; it was an abstraction of a guitar or a hillside. The opposite is going on now. If you have bands of blue, green, and pink, the mind doesn't think sky, grass, and flesh. These are colors and the question is what are they doing with themselves and with each other. Sentiment and nuance are being squeezed out so that if something is not altogether flatly painted then there might be a hint of edge, chiaroscuro, shadow and if one wants just that pure thing these associations get in the way.

These works differ from those by Rothko and Newman in that Frankenthaler subordinated the emotional component, so integral to Abstract Expressionism, in favor of resolving formal problems.

3) Farisa Khalid, "Helen Frankenthaler, The Bay," in Smarthistory, August 9, 2015, accessed March 18, 2017, <https://smarthistory.org/frankenthaler-the-bay/>

Frankenthaler's approach here was to use a soak-stain method with diluted acrylic paint. Acrylics gave her more flexibility with viscosity and movement than oils, and allowed her more control as she poured that thinned paint onto the taut unprimed canvas so that it would get absorbed into the weave of the fabric. As a substitute for the action of the brush, Frankenthaler would lift the canvas and tilt it at various angles so that the paint would flow across the surface. She had to account for gravity and the ebb and flow of a liquid across a flat surface, so a fascinating aspect of Frankenthaler's method is the blend of the artist's control paired with the unpredictability of the forces of nature.

This kind of painting is often classified as Color Field painting, painting characterized by simplicity of line and a focus on color as the subject rather than as an add-on. The first generation of Abstract Expressionists, Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman were the first important Color Field painters, while Helen Frankenthaler is often classified as a second-generation member of the group.
