

# NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

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## "HELEN FRANKENTHALER: PRINTS"

PREMIERES AT NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, APRIL 18 - SEPTEMBER 6, 1993

WASHINGTON, DC -- The prints of widely acclaimed American artist Helen Frankenthaler will be the focus of a survey exhibition at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, April 18 through September 6, 1993. Frankenthaler, credited with playing a pivotal role in the transition from abstract expressionism to color field painting, was also one of the vanguard of painters and sculptors who inspired a new enthusiasm for contemporary printmaking, print viewing, and print collecting in the early 1960s.

Seventy-six prints and related drawings that display the power and diversity of Frankenthaler's abstractions will comprise the National Gallery's first show by this major contemporary artist. Helen Frankenthaler: Prints will then travel to the San Diego Museum of Art, September 25 - November 28, 1993; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, January 5 - March 13, 1994; and the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati,

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April 8 - June 17, 1994.

"Helen Frankenthaler's radiant color, her sensuous touch, and her capacity to manipulate a rich variety of materials and print processes have been widely admired for more than three decades," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "We are delighted and honored to present a selected overview of her prints, celebrating her highly charged imagination and her virtuosity as a creator of beautiful pictorial space."

Frankenthaler's body of prints has doubled since her last print exhibition twelve years ago, according to Ruth E. Fine, curator of modern prints and drawings, National Gallery of Art, and curator of the upcoming show. "In selecting the works for this exhibition, I realized just how closely Frankenthaler's printmaking is related to her paintings on paper and large-scale canvases," said Fine. "She imbues her work with an ambiguity, a flamboyance, and a distinctly celebratory quality. This was so in her earliest canvases and it remains vividly apparent in her most recent prints."

The exhibition begins with Frankenthaler's very first print, First Stone (1961), a lithograph composed of calligraphic marks on an open field. It closes with her most recent print, a twenty-seven color woodcut on stenciled and pressed paper pulp. Entitled Freefall (1992), it is an expansive composition of densely layered forms. The works range from small delicate pieces to prints over eleven feet tall. The exhibition includes not only edition prints and one-of-a-kind impressions but also related drawings and proofs with hand-painted and hand-drawn additions from

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Frankenthaler's personal archive. These unique works give special insight into the distinctive nature of the artist's working process.

Frankenthaler's earliest explorations in printmaking involved lithography, a method that traditionally calls for drawing on limestone. This remained her primary print medium through 1968, when she began to make aquatints, etching copper plates with acid to create printed fields of luminous color. Her first woodcut dates from 1973, and her work in this medium contributed to a revival of interest in this process during the 1970s and 1980s. The exhibition will also include prints made by *pochoir*, a stencil method, and vivid monotypes, some of which feature richly worked sculptural surfaces.

Frankenthaler has worked in numerous printmaking studios, including Universal Limited Art Editions, Tyler Graphics Ltd., Crown Point Press, Mixographia, and Garner Tullis in the United States, and 2RC Edizioni d'arte, Rome, and Ediciones Poligrafa S.A., Barcelona, abroad.

Frankenthaler was born in New York City on December 12, 1928. Her education includes a B.A. from Bennington College, Vermont; graduate fine arts courses at Columbia University, New York; and painting classes with Vaclav Vytlacil at the Art Students League, New York. She also studied painting with Rufino Tamayo, Paul Feely, and Hans Hofmann.

Frankenthaler became known in the early 1950s for her innovative painting process in which she allowed pools of paint to soak into and stain her canvas; she is



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also credited with introducing the lyrical use of color into abstract expressionism. Both of these aspects of her work can be seen in Mountains and Sea (1952), a seminal painting that has been on extended loan from the artist to the National Gallery of Art, where it hangs with the twentieth-century collection in the East Building on the concourse level. The National Gallery's collection includes Wales, a canvas from 1966; three paintings on paper, one of which is an untitled work donated by the artist in honor of the Gallery's 50th anniversary; and sixteen prints. Her paintings, sculpture, drawings, and prints can be found in the collections of major museums throughout the world.

A 160-page, fully illustrated exhibition catalogue will be copublished by the National Gallery of Art and Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York. It will contain eighty illustrations, including colorplates of all 76 works in the exhibition; an introductory essay by Ruth E. Fine, which traces the development of Frankenthaler's oeuvre; a chronology of the artist's printmaking career; and a select bibliography.

Frankenthaler will be the featured speaker in the Gallery's "Conversations with Artists" program at 4:00 p.m. on May 16, 1993, in the National Gallery's East Building auditorium.

The National Gallery of Art and its programs are open to the public free of charge. The Gallery, located at Fourth Street and Constitution Avenue, N.W., is open Monday through Saturday, 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., and Sunday, 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. For more information, call (202) 737-4215.

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