

HELEN FRANKENTHALER. PAINTERLY CONSTELLATIONS

23.04. – 30.10.2022

Kunsthalle Krems



Helen Frankenthaler, *Grotto Azura*, 1963 © 2022 Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, Inc. / Bildrecht Wien, Foto © Tim Pyle, Light Blue Studio

OPENING: Friday, 29.04.2022, 7 pm
PRESS EVENT: Thursday, 28.04.2022, 11 am
PRESS IMAGES: <https://celum.noeku.at/pinaccess/showpin.do?pinCode=HFMK22>

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„There are no rules... that is how art is born, that is how breakthroughs happen. Go against the rules or ignore the rules, that is what invention is about.“

Helen Frankenthaler

Kunsthalle Krems presents the painterly work of Helen Frankenthaler (1928–2011), one of the most important representatives of Abstract Expressionism and a leading artist of the twentieth century. Frankenthaler lived and worked at the epicenter of the New York School and created her groundbreaking “soak-stain” paintings” in the early 1950s. The show in Krems showcases over seventy works on paper and an exclusive selection of paintings. The works on display range from the late 1940s to the early 2000s and illuminate the various phases in Frankenthaler’s artistic career.

Helen Frankenthaler was born in New York City on December 12, 1928. By January 1949 she had already moved into her first New York City studio on East 21st and, in July 1949, she completed her art studies at Bennington College in Vermont under Paul Feeley. In her early works, Frankenthaler covered the paper with eruptive strokes, while adding painterly and colorful accents with her brush. The dryness of the drawing dominates the painterly wetness. In the spring of 1951, Frankenthaler was represented in the *9th St. Exhibition of Paintings and Sculpture*, the founding exhibition of New York Abstract Expressionism. She was the youngest of the seventy-two artists in the exhibition and one of likely only eleven women selected to showcase their works.

By late 1952, Frankenthaler began creating her revolutionary, large-format, soak-stain paintings. Liquid and transparency now dominated rather than the material substance of paint. Unprimed canvases, spread out on the floor during painting, soaked up the thin oil paint. Frankenthaler applied paint using a variety of implements: poured directly from paint cans, spreading the paint with brushes, sponges, and other tools. The painter often inserted herself physically into the visual field; the canvas functioned as a field of action. Pollock’s drip paintings had a decisive impact on this period. Frankenthaler had seen his exhibitions at the Betty Parsons Gallery in New York in 1950 and 1951, and at this time was friends with the action painter and his wife, Lee Krasner, also a notable Abstract Expressionist. Frankenthaler would often visit the artist couple in Springs, Long Island.

This was followed in the early 1960s by a clear reduction of the pictorial structure and a focus on Color Field painting. The individual signature is significantly diminished. The emphasis is on color per se and its visual impact. Frankenthaler explored the pictorial space, investigating the corners and edges of her canvases. Many of the works were created in Provincetown, Massachusetts, where she had purchased a house with her then husband Robert Motherwell and typically spent her summers. By carefully pouring a thin mixture of oil paint and turpentine (after 1963 mainly acrylic instead of oil) onto the canvas or paper, she controlled how the paint spread, which expanded into abstract zones and segments on the image ground, soaking into the support. Scrawled, rudimentary figurative elements and gestural markings are eliminated in favor of abstract color-fields. *Billboard Study*, 1966 is a work on paper representative of this approach.

In the 1970s, Frankenthaler continued her compositions of overlapping and merging color, with works such as *Fiesta*, 1973. In many works from this phase, however, the brushstrokes and markings merge into a sensuous and complex, painterly sea of color. In contrast to this, the works on paper and canvas of the 1980s are characterized by formal diversity and a variety of processes. For Frankenthaler, all rules were suspended at this time in favor of improvisation and unrestrained artistic action. Over the

course of the 1990s and around 2002, she produced a considerable number of large-format paintings on paper, characterized by intensity, complexity, and density. One of these includes the work *Beginnings*, 1994, featuring a floral composition and gestural traces.

The exhibition reveals that this rich body of painterly work on paper represents a substantial and independent corpus in Frankenthaler's oeuvre alongside the paintings on canvas. The artist saw painting on paper as a field of experimentation and the ideal medium for her spurts of stylistic development, which then informed her works on canvas.

Frankenthaler's work has rarely been shown extensively in the German-speaking world; it is scarcely represented in European museums and collections. Her works on paper were last celebrated in the US in 2003 at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Miami and in 1985 at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York. The exhibition at Kunsthalle Krems is the first monographic survey of the artist's work in Austria.

The Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, New York supports the exhibition as the main lender and collaborative partner of the project, supplemented by several private collections and institutions. The exhibition was organized in cooperation with Museum Folkwang, Essen (DE), which will present a nearly identical selection of works under the same title from December 2, 2022 to March 5, 2023.

Curator: Florian Steininger

WORKS OF THE EXHIBITION (SELECTION)



Helen Frankenthaler, *The Picnic*, 1951 © 2022 Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, Inc. / Bildrecht Wien



Helen Frankenthaler, *Fiesta*, 1973 © 2022 Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, Inc. / Bildrecht Wien
Foto © Tim Pyle, Light Blue Studio



Helen Frankenthaler, *New York Bamboo*, 1957 © 2022 Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, Inc. / Bildrecht Wien
Foto © Robert McKeever, courtesy Gagosian



Helen Frankenthaler, *Viewpoint*, 1974 © 2022 Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, Inc. / Bildrecht Wien



Helen Frankenthaler, *Santa Fe XIII*, 1990 © 2022 Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, Inc. / Bildrecht Wien



Helen Frankenthaler, *Southern Exposure*, 2002 © 2022 Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, Inc. / Bildrecht Wien



Helen Frankenthaler, *Beginnings*, 1994 © 2022 Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, Inc. / Bildrecht Wien, Foto © Roz Akin

EXHIBITION DETAILS

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PRESS IMAGES

<https://celum.noeku.at/pinaccess/showpin.do?pinCode=HFMK22>
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OPENING HOURS

Tue–Sun
10 am – 6 pm (March–October)
10 am – 5 pm (November–February)
Mo closed (except on public holidays)

Closed on 24.12., 31.12., 01.01.

ADMISSION

Adults € 10
Reduced € 9
Family ticket € 18

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