

Remembering Modern Art Icon Helen Frankenthaler '49 (1928-2011)

Dec 27, 2011

The entire Bennington community mourns the loss of Helen Frankenthaler '49, one of the most influential figures in contemporary American art and a former Bennington trustee, who died on December 27, at the age of 83.

Ms. Frankenthaler, who has had one of the longest, most productive and successful careers of any female artist, was a major contributor to the abstract expressionist and color field movements of the 1950s and 60s. Her pioneering technique, along with her use of landscape to inform her abstract work, forever changed the way artists conceived and used color in their work.

At Bennington, Ms. Frankenthaler studied with renowned painter Paul Feeley as well as other luminaries such as Peter Drucker, Kenneth Burke, and Eric Fromm. It was here that she developed a friendship with art critic Clement Greenberg—a frequent visitor to campus—who introduced her to other abstract painters including Jackson Pollock, Lee Krasner, and Willem de Kooning.

After graduating from Bennington, Ms. Frankenthaler entered the New York art scene and developed a technique known as "stain painting," which became the hallmark of her style and enabled her to create bold, color-filled canvases that seemed to float on air.

Over the course of her career, Ms. Frankenthaler had several one-woman exhibitions, including retrospectives at the Museum of Modern Art, the National Gallery of Art, and the Whitney Museum of American Art. Her works are included in virtually every major art museum collection in this country.

A 2001 National Medal of Arts recipient, Ms. Frankenthaler's other honors include a Philadelphia Academy Medal of Honor, induction into the Connecticut Women's Hall of Fame, and countless others. She served on the Bennington College Board of Trustees from 1967-1974, and from 1975-1982.