

10 Contemporary Women Artists Channeling Helen Frankenthaler's Abstract Expressionism

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Widely celebrated as one of the most influential American artists of the 20th century, Helen Frankenthaler left an indelible mark on the world of Abstract Expressionism through her innovative spirit and penchant for risk-taking. "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," the artist once said.

At just 23 years old, Frankenthaler captured the art world's attention with her groundbreaking soak-stain technique. This method, which built on Jackson Pollock's drip painting approach, involved thinning oil or acrylic paint to a watercolor-like consistency and pouring it directly onto the canvas. In these works, Frankenthaler pushed the limits of Color Field painting, creating rich compositions that, even after her decades-long career and death in 2011, continue to resonate within the contemporary art world.



Helen Frankenthaler
Western Dream, 1957
Helen Frankenthaler Foundation

This fall, two major European exhibitions will spotlight the artist's legacy. "Helen Frankenthaler: Painting Without Rules" will open at the Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi in Florence on September 27th and run through January 26, 2025. "Helen Frankenthaler: Painting on Paper, 1990–2002" will be on show at Gagosian in Rome from September 20th through November 23rd.

Frankenthaler's impact extended beyond artistic innovation. She also forged a path for female artists in an industry continuously struggling with gender inequality. "Helen Frankenthaler was one of only a handful of female artists of her generation who achieved and then sustained, over the course of a whole career, a significant national and international reputation," said Elizabeth Smith, executive director of the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation.

Yunhee Min

B. 1962, Seoul. Lives and works in Los Angeles.



Portrait of Yunhee Min, 2022. Courtesy of the artist and Miles McEnery Gallery, New York.

The influence of Color Field painters like Helen Frankenthaler and Morris Louis is evident in Yunhee Min's work, where color is a driving force. The Los Angeles-based artist can often take days to find the right tones and consistencies to employ in her abstract works.

Once she arrives at the desired colors, Min selects a palette to begin. She then works horizontally, applying paint through techniques such as pouring, rolling, and swirling. Using tools like paint brushes and squeegees, she works on a variety of surfaces, including canvases, glass panels, and fluorescent light tubes. The result is a series of richly textured abstract works that showcase her mastery of color.

Represented by Miles McEnery Gallery, Min holds a BFA from the ArtCenter College of Design and an MA in design studies from Harvard University. Her work has been widely exhibited in the United States and particularly her home state of California. Most notably, she had a solo show at the Hammer Museum in 2019, and she was a recipient of the Guggenheim Fellowship in 2022.