

GAGOSIAN



Extended through September 18, 2021

IMAGINING LANDSCAPES

Paintings by Helen Frankenthaler, 1952–1976

June 17–August 27, 2021
20 Grosvenor Hill, London

Helen Frankenthaler, *Fable*, 1961, oil and charcoal on unsized, unprimed canvas, 94 1/2 × 99 inches (240 × 251.5 cm) © 2021 Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, Inc./Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

May 18, 2021

I had the landscape in my arms when I painted it. I had the landscapes in my mind and shoulder and wrist.

—Helen Frankenthaler

Gagosian is pleased to present *Imagining Landscapes: Paintings by Helen Frankenthaler, 1952–1976*, an exhibition of thirteen paintings from the collection of the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, several of which have never been exhibited before.

The references to landscape that are inherent in these paintings shift between subtle and explicit, as critic E. C. Goossen observed in 1958. All are characterized by an extraordinary variety of line and color. The earliest of them—painted in 1952, before Frankenthaler’s breakthrough development of soak-stain painting later that year with *Mountains and Sea*—is the work of an already mature artist: an invented panorama with suggestions of palm fronds and mountain peaks. The next belongs to a small group of canvases with drawn forms that Frankenthaler painted on her honeymoon with

Robert Motherwell in the southwest of France. And four canvases from 1961—*Fable*, *Beach Scene*, *Square Figure*, and *After Rubens*—show her simplifying her drawing and making it more calligraphic, even as she continued to create figural as well as landscape references.

In three canvases from 1963, a major change is evident in Frankenthaler's approach. Juxtaposed areas of lush stained color replace the lines of the earlier paintings, their irregular borders evoking the boundaries of natural forms. The titles of these works—*Narcissus*, *Yolk*, *Sea Goddess*—invite interpretation of their sometimes aqueous, sometimes cloudy forms in the manner that Leonardo da Vinci advised painters to look at stained walls and see in them images of the natural world. Even as Pop art was recuperating explicit depiction, and Color Field painting purist abstraction, Frankenthaler maintained in her own way an art of allusion—the richness of ambiguous reference—and cultivated a complexity akin to the volatility of the physical universe.

In the imposingly large *Cape Orange* of 1964, Frankenthaler advances this approach with flatter, more opaque color to a bolder effect, suggesting a topographical map. And the pair of canvases from 1971, *Orange Hem* and *Red Travels*, simplify the effect further, evoking details of landscape seen from above—perhaps, the movement of water around an obstruction and a view into a cleft or onto a stretch of coastline, respectively. In both cases, the rectangle of the canvas substitutes for a framed view. The final work in the exhibition, *Sphinx* (1976), reintroduces earlier features to the format, reprising the bipartite structure of *Narcissus* (1963), with memories of the fluid, centralized composition of *Mountains and Sea*.

A catalogue featuring a new essay by art historian Robert Slifkin along with three historical texts will be published to accompany the exhibition. In conjunction with *Imagining Landscapes*, the Davies Street gallery will present a sculpture from a series Frankenthaler made in Anthony Caro's London studio in the summer of 1972 and a selection of Frankenthaler works on paper. In addition, a room of paintings by Frankenthaler is installed at Tate Modern, London, until November 2021. *Helen Frankenthaler: Radical Beauty*, the first major UK exhibition of the artist's woodcut prints, will open at Dulwich Picture Gallery, London, on September 15, 2021.

Helen Frankenthaler (1928–2011) is represented in major public and private collections worldwide. Her career has been the subject of three major monographs and numerous institutional exhibitions, including the Jewish Museum, New York (1960); Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1969, traveled to Whitechapel Gallery, London; Orangerie Herrenhausen, Hannover, Germany; and Kongresshalle, Berlin); *A Paintings Retrospective*, Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, TX (1989–90, traveled to Museum of Modern Art, New York; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; and Detroit Institute of Arts); *Prints*, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC (1993, traveled to San Diego Museum of Fine Arts; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati; and Machida City Museum of Graphic Arts, Japan); *Paintings on Paper (1949–2002)*, Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami, FL (2004, traveled to Edinburgh Royal Scottish Academy, Scotland); *Against the Grain: The Woodcuts of Helen Frankenthaler*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra (2005); *Giving Up One's Mark: Helen Frankenthaler in the 1960s and 1970s*, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY (2014–15); *Pittura/Panorama: Paintings by Helen Frankenthaler, 1952–1992*, Museo di Palazzo Grimani, Venice (2019); *Helen Frankenthaler Prints: Seven Types of Ambiguity*, Princeton University Art Museum, NJ (2019); and *Abstract Climates: Helen Frankenthaler in Provincetown*, Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, NY (2019, originated at Provincetown Art Association and Museum, MA, in 2018).

#HelenFrankenthaler

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