

Frankenthaler

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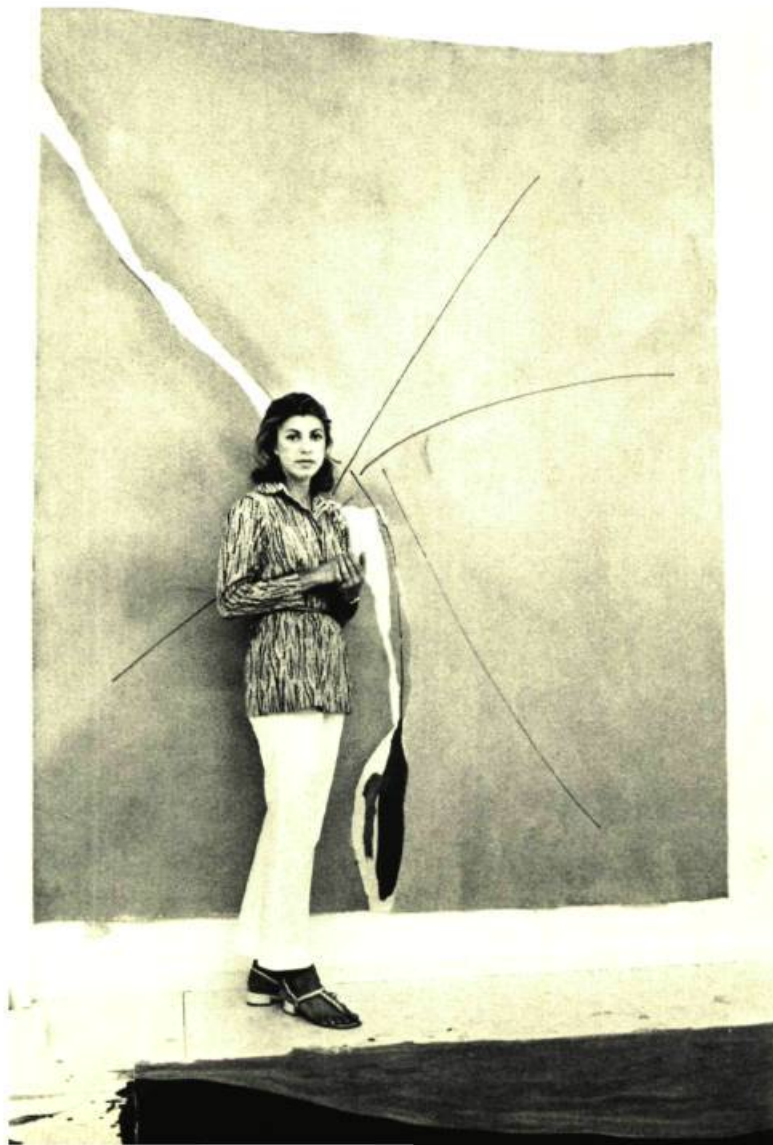
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par shirley raphael

Helen Frankenthaler came to Montreal in February for her one-man show at a Montreal Gallery and also to lecture at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. The lecture was titled "Talking With Helen Frankenthaler about Pictures."

frankenthaler



Her main ambition — which she succeeds in, in her memorable paintings — is to marry inner joy with outer discipline in a work of art.

Barbara Rose, the noted American art critic, considers Helen Frankenthaler one of the major figures in world art in the last two decades.

"Flood" done in 1967 is one of her best and most mature works. Miss Rose, in the April 1969 issue of "Artforum" stated, "For a number of reasons, Flood is an important work because it reaffirms Frankenthaler's mastery of scale... it is everything the art of the sixties has not been; it is free, spontaneous, extravagant, romantic, voluptuous, and full of air — light and pure, uninhibited 'joie de vivre'. There is a note of solemnity and grandeur that announces the mature style of a great painter who has come a long way and is opening another chapter with a style still full of refreshing vitality, but a vitality informed by experience."

The art of Helen Frankenthaler has this effect on a person... you come away feeling alive and with a glow of love for the whole world. It also has drawing power... when I was at the Chicago Art Institute I saw an earlier work of Frankenthaler's called "Santorini" and there was something so powerful and mysterious about it that I had to go back several times, and try and figure out why I was so drawn to it. Perhaps it was the night-dark colors, in any case the image is still fresh in my mind.

WARM PERSON

Since 1952 she has been known as one of the major artists of the generation following that of abstract expressionism. Her highly individual color sense and lyrical style have attracted deep critical interest; and her soak-stained method of painting was largely responsible for the development of contemporary color painting.

She is a tall, reed-slim woman of 42 who dresses elegantly and shakes your hand firmly and speaks in a quiet, thoughtful manner.

Being a woman artist hasn't hampered her at all. She has been taken seriously right from the beginning, when she met Jackson Pollock who was her single greatest influence. When I asked her about the other women artists protesting at the Whitney, and about the magazine Art News which devoted a whole issue to women in art, as well as Louise Nevelson and Georgia O'Keeffe who mentioned in articles that they had it tough being accepted seriously because they were women, she said that she didn't wish to become involved in discussing the issue, as it had never hampered her, and she never had any trouble because she was a woman. She preferred to ignore the whole matter. Her work rejects the sweet, charming and pretty. For a woman painter it isn't all that easy, so perhaps her feelings are echoed in her work.

SERIOUS

The artist comes across as a serious, thoughtful person. As much

as possible, and in every way, she likes to show the truth of what she is about, and the person she is comes into it.

"I am a painter ... and my pictures are echoes of one's general state, and they are like signposts as to where you are going. Hopefully, one has recurring childish moments until the grave. In real life you have to feel alive and not be like some people who are alive and feel dead."

"Today there is so much that is deadly and unpleasant. Any feeling of spontaneity or joy or life-giving should be shared. One can do this by either making something, or by showing something, or by saying something. The whole thing is to be in touch with feelings and esthetics and to leave room for something new."

VERY ACTIVE

She is a person who is active in many ways and does not follow a set routine. She works best when she is free-wheeling ... she can teach and lecture, then go on a painting binge, then stop and do something else. She is organized but doesn't follow a slavish 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. work day routine.

As she says, "It is still a struggle to create, one always has doubts when you try something new." She finds that she takes as many risks today as when she started out (in staining a painting, if it doesn't come out right, it can't be fixed and you have to throw it away.) There are times, even now, with all the acclaim she has had, when she feels unsure and insecure.

But, she likes to try new things. She designed a stage setting for an Erick Hawkins Ballet that opened March 9th at the Anta Theatre in New York. She likes the idea of

working on such a big scale, and talked about banners.

She has always worked big ... her largest work was done for the American Pavilion during Expo '67 in Montreal. The painting she did measured 16½ ft. by 33 ft. and although it was a challenge to do a work that huge, it did create problems. She could never see it in its entirety, but only in part, as it progressed. An old movie theatre had to be rented to work in, and a crew was hired to keep rolling and unrolling the canvas so she could work on it.

ON FAME

Miss Frankenthaler doesn't feel famous, even though she does see her paintings practically everywhere she goes.

When I asked her how she felt about having retrospectives at the Whitney in New York and at the Whitechapel in London at the age of 40, she said it gave her a feeling of surprise and encouragement.

She feels that an artist doesn't have to be a star. If so, he gets into the problems of ego and then he is creating in a non-productive way. Painting should be your identity. You can't separate love of people from it either.

"There are no set rules or programs which are right or wrong. Every involvement has some magic, every syndrome is difficult. Everyone's subconscious is always working; sometimes the subconscious is freer to operate."

The slides of her latest work, done at the end of 1970, show that she has added lines, either with crayon, felt, pen, pencil ... whatever she feels will work best.

traduction, p. 94



helen frankenthaler (1928 -)
yellow-south west, 1969.
acrylique sur toile; 96 po. sur 48
(243,9 x 123,85 cm.).

new-york, andré emmerich gallery.
(phot. geoffrey clements)