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TOURING *FLUID EXPRESSIONS*:  
*The Prints of Helen Frankenthaler*  
Feb 2 – June 2, 2019

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This touring packet emphasizes experiential inquiry-based learning by asking questions to help visitors think about the exhibition. Expertise on every work is not necessary.

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WITH VISITORS

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**INFORM:** In this exhibition you will see the artwork of Helen Frankenthaler (1928 – 2011). While they are deceptively painterly, all the works in this exhibition are prints.

- In printmaking an artist creates an original design on/in a plate (metal, wood, stone, fabric) that can be used to transfer or “print” the design onto a substrate (paper/fabric), often in multiple iterations.
- Intended or unintended variations in the printing process mean that no two iterations (or editions) would be exactly alike. (You might point out a pencil mark on one of the prints that indicates the edition)

**SHOW:** Plate samples (allow visitors to touch the samples)

- Intaglio (Etching, Aquatint, Sugarlift) – the plate is metal
- Woodcut – the plate is wood
- Lithograph – stone (usually limestone) was the original plate material. (*lithos* is Greek for stone) (**show photo of complete lithostone**) Now aluminum metal plates can also be used with a similar chemical process.
- Silkscreen – a mesh or fabric (like silk) is the plate.

**INFORM:**

- As an abstract expressionist, who valued the expressive immediacy of painting (especially in her signature style of “soak staining”) the slow and methodical process of printmaking did not at first appeal to Frankenthaler.
- Through experimentation Frankenthaler was able to modify these printing processes to meet her aesthetic criteria.
- Helen Frankenthaler said: “**A really good picture looks as if it’s happened at once. It’s an immediate image.**”
  - **ASK:** *What connections can you make between this quote by Frankenthaler and the print we are looking at?*
  - **FOLLOW UP:** *This print is a \_\_\_\_\_ (lithograph, woodcut, screen print, etching - the pieces listed below are the most straightforward examples) **What visual clues of this printing process do you see?** (Even students of printmaking find this challenging. It is particularly challenging with Frankenthaler because her methods were so experimental)*
    - ETCHING “Sure Violet” - plate mark
    - SCREEN PRINT “Spoleto”- flat (solid) color, hard edges,
    - LITHOGRAPHY “Bronze Stone” - edge of the print size/shape (this is unusual in lithography because it can damage the stone)
    - WOODCUT “Japanese Maple” – woodgrain (this is true woodgrain, “Madame Butterfly” is paper Frankenthaler made to look like woodgrain)

**INFORM:**

- These prints combine Frankenthaler’s experimental and expressive style in the pursuit of “beautiful” artwork.
- Helen Frankenthaler said: **“What concerns me when I work, is not whether the picture is a landscape, or whether it’s pastoral, or whether somebody will see a sunset in it. What concerns me is – did I make a beautiful picture?”** We might consider ‘beauty’ to be a subjective goal.
  - **DIRECT:** Think about something that you would describe as beautiful. **ASK:** Which artwork in this exhibition most connects to your idea of beauty?
  - If you would like – share with another visitor what you see in the artwork that makes it beautiful to you.

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## SUPPLEMENTAL INFO

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- **OTHER PROCESSES VISITORS MAY SEE ON LABELS:**
  - Drypoint – **(SAMPLE)** tool is used to incise directly into the plate
  - Ground – **(SAMPLE)** acid resistant material that protects the plate from the etching process. Ground is removed in different ways to expose the plate to acid.
  - Sugarlift – **(SAMPLE)** applied to plate before the ground, when plate is treated the ground lifts away where the sugarlift was applied – allowing those areas to be etched by the acid
  - Aquatint – **(SAMPLE)** Aquatint is a granular resin that is applied to the plate before etching, gives texture to large etched areas, and allows them to hold ink evenly for printing. The plate can be exposed longer to hold more ink and create darker tones.
  - For further explanation of Printmaking techniques, see large-print gallery guide

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## EXHIBITION TEXT

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With splatters of pigment and luminous layers of ink, the vibrant prints of Helen Frankenthaler (1928-2011) often trick the eye with their painterly fluidity. Her woodcuts recall translucent washes of watercolor while her silkscreens evoke free-flowing brushstrokes of oil painting. For over five decades, Frankenthaler infused her prints with this lyrical spirit, broadening the possibilities of what a print could look like.

Best known as an abstract expressionist painter, Frankenthaler pioneered the “soak-stain” technique, a gestural method of pouring thinned paint onto an unprimed canvas to create lustrous color fields. Although her paintings received more attention, she was an equally inventive printmaker who took risks in a medium not frequently explored by abstract expressionists. Her adaptation of her “soak-stain” aesthetic for the print medium offers a stunning look at how printmaking—notorious for being a slow, methodical process—can exude a sense of spontaneity and immediacy.

These works feature the impressive range of techniques that Frankenthaler innovated from the late 1960s to the early 2000s, including etchings, lithographs, silkscreens, and woodcuts. While her prints evolved expressively throughout her career, from early flat color fields to later iridescent washes and abstractions, they share an affinity for pulsating color and fluid forms.

*This exhibition is drawn from the Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation, who also made possible the associated publication.*

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## ABOUT THE ARTIST

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Helen Frankenthaler (1928-2011), whose career spanned six decades, has long been recognized as one of the great American artists of the twentieth century. She was eminent among the second generation of postwar American abstract painters and is widely credited for playing a pivotal role in the transition from Abstract Expressionism to Color Field painting. Through her invention of the soak-stain technique, she expanded the possibilities of abstract painting, while at times referencing figuration and landscape in unique ways. She produced a body of work whose impact on contemporary art has been profound and continues to grow.

Frankenthaler, daughter of New York State Supreme Court Justice Alfred Frankenthaler and his wife, Martha (Lowenstein) Frankenthaler, was born on December 12, 1928, and raised in New York City. She attended the Dalton School, where she received her earliest art instruction from Rufino Tamayo. In 1949 she graduated from Bennington College, where she was a student of Paul Feeley, following which she studied briefly with Hans Hofmann.

Frankenthaler's professional exhibition career began in 1950, when Adolph Gottlieb selected her painting *Beach* (1950) for inclusion in the exhibition titled *Fifteen Unknowns: Selected by Artists of the Kootz Gallery*. Her first solo exhibition was presented in 1951, at New York's Tibor de Nagy Gallery, and she was also included that year in the landmark exhibition *9th St. Exhibition of Paintings and Sculpture*. Renowned art critic Clement Greenberg recognized her originality, and as early as 1959 she began to be a regular presence in major international exhibitions. She had her first museum retrospective in 1960, at The Jewish Museum in New York City.

In 1952 Frankenthaler created *Mountains and Sea*, a seminal, breakthrough painting of American abstraction. Pioneering the "stain" painting technique, she poured thinned paint directly onto raw, unprimed canvas laid on the studio floor, working from all sides to create floating fields of translucent color. *Mountains and Sea* was immediately influential for the artists who formed the Color Field school of painting, notable among them Morris Louis and Kenneth Noland. Thereafter, Frankenthaler remained a defining force in the development of American painting.

Throughout her long career, Frankenthaler experimented tirelessly, and, in addition to unique paintings on canvas and paper, she worked in a wide range of media, including ceramics, sculpture, tapestry, and especially printmaking. Hers was a significant voice in the mid-century "print renaissance" among American abstract painters, and she is particularly renowned for her woodcuts. She continued working productively through the opening years of this century.

<http://www.frankenthalerfoundation.org/helen/biography>

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## RELATED EVENTS

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### **Bemis Classes**

**Jean Gumper**

**MP1 Color Reduction Woodcut**

**\*This class has filled. Registration is closed.\***

Friday, Saturday-Sunday @ 6-9 p.m, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

Feb 15 – 17, 2019

**Homare Ikeda, Mamiko Ikeda**  
**MP2 Calligraphy into Monotype**

**\*This class has filled. Registration is closed\***

Ages 16-Adult

Saturday-Sunday @ 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

Apr 6 – 7, 2019 (\$125/\$140)

**YAM5C Young Art Makers: Printmaking (Ages 5 – 12)**

Explore various methods of printmaking to include monoprints and monotypes.

Wednesday @ 5-6 p.m.

May 1 – 29, 2019 (\$70/\$80)

**YAM5B Young Art Makers: Printmaking (Ages 5 – 12)**

Explore your creative side and discover various methods of printmaking.

Thursday @ 5-6 p.m.

May 2 – 30, 2019 (\$70/\$80)