ALMINE RECH

Helen Frankenthaler

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With over fifty works from six decades, the special exhibition Helen Frankenthaler at the Kunstmuseum Basel offers extensive insight into the expansive oeuvre of a preeminent figure of American abstraction. Frankenthaler's intensely colorful paintings, typically in large formats, light up the galleries and engage viewers. This comprehensive in-depth-survey is the largest exhibition of her work in Europe to date and her first institutional solo show in Switzerland.

A pioneering representative of Abstract Expressionism, Helen Frankenthaler (1928–2011) occupies a central position in postwar American art. Her soak-stain technique revolutionized abstract painting and catalyzed the development of Color Field painting in the U.S. from the mid-1950s onward. A particular focus of the exhibition at the Kunstmuseum Basel is on her probing engagement with historic art she admired, which inspired many works throughout her career. For the first time, Frankenthaler's paintings will be shown in conversation with artworks ranging from the fifteenth to the twentieth century, a juxtaposition that enriches our understanding of her abstract art.

At the young age of twenty-three, Frankenthaler changed the course of modern painting when she came up with her innovative soak-stain technique: applying diluted paint to unprimed canvases she laid out on the floor, she created luminous compositions of —often monumental in size. She manipulated the paint from all sides, using sponges, scrapers, household brushes, and other tools. As a result, the canvas absorbed the pigments, yielding distinctive effects: fabric and color became one. Although Frankenthaler left plenty of room in her process for chance, she retained a finely honed sense of balance and structure. Her works have captivated viewers for decades through her lyrical handling of color and bold compositional choices.

In 2024, the Kunstmuseum welcomed Frankenthaler's formidable painting *Riverhead* (1963) to its collection. A generous gift of the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, the work filled a significant gap in the museum's holdings of American art. The accession also prompted the museum to make plans for this major exhibition.