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FRANKENTHALER MASTERPIECE ENTERS NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART PAINTINGS COLLECTION



Helen Frankenthaler

Nature Abhors a Vacuum, 1973

Acrylic on canvas, 103 x 112 inches

Patrons' Permanent Fund and Gift of Audrey and David Mirvish, Toronto, Canada

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Washington, DC -- *Nature Abhors a Vacuum* (1973), a masterpiece by renowned contemporary artist Helen Frankenthaler, was recently acquired by the National Gallery of Art. Composed of elegantly shaped fields of brilliant color that flow into, around, over, and through each other, it represents the first time Frankenthaler masked areas of canvas with strips of wood or tape to create a distinctive, hard-edged open space that is different in character from open areas in her earlier paintings. *Nature Abhors a Vacuum* has been praised by many critics for its exuberant power.

"Nature Abhors a Vacuum reveals the sensuousness of Frankenthaler's painterly style

at its grandest,” said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. “It is an important addition to the Gallery’s collection of post-World War II American art.” The large work, which measures 8 feet 7 1/2 inches wide by 9 feet 4 1/2 inches tall, will be on view on February 15, 2005. The acquisition was made possible by the Gallery’s Patrons’ Permanent Fund and Audrey and David Mirvish of Toronto, Canada.

Nature Abhors a Vacuum is marked by a combination of transparent, translucent, and opaque fields layered in places with homogeneous or contrasting strokes, a glowing array of warm and cool colors, and a rich tapestry of marks, all of which are heightened by the authority of Frankenthaler’s gesture. Dependent on the power of her wrist for short movements and of her arm for those that span the canvas, Frankenthaler’s expansive application of paint is one of the salient aspects of her art.

Helen Frankenthaler has been a powerful artistic force throughout the second half of the 20th century, exploring pictorial space in a broad variety of media, including painting on canvas and paper, printmaking, sculpture, ceramics, and tapestry design. She was born on December 12, 1928, on New York’s Upper East Side. Her education includes a B.A. from Bennington College in Vermont where she studied with Paul Feely; graduate fine arts courses at Columbia University, New York; and painting classes with Vaclav Vytlacil at the Art Students League, New York.

Frankenthaler received immediate acclaim for her youthful masterwork, *Mountains and Sea* (1952), which has been in the National Gallery of Art on long-term loan from the artist since 1975 and is currently on view in the Gallery’s East Building concourse galleries. Frankenthaler went on to develop a highly personal painterly manner within the abstract expressionist movement. The artist explored a variety of linear components in her oil paintings of the 1950s, but in the 1960s she shifted her focus, embracing acrylic paints to explore open, flat fields of color, evident in *Nature Abhors a Vacuum*.

Shortly before painting *Nature Abhors a Vacuum*, Frankenthaler completed a body of welded sculpture while visiting sculptor Anthony Caro in England. During this period she contemplated the creation of large public commissions. Both of these experiences influenced her concern for the inherent nature of paint as a medium and led her to embrace working on ever-larger scales, as evident in *Nature Abhors a Vacuum*.

Frankenthaler's paintings, sculpture, drawings, and prints can be found in the collections of major museums throughout the world. The National Gallery of Art's collection contains *Wales*, a canvas from 1966; three paintings on paper, one of which is an untitled work donated by the artist in honor of the Gallery's 50th anniversary; *Gateway IX* (1988), a unique bronze screen that is part painting, part sculpture, and part print; and 19 prints. A pigmented paper piece entitled *Freefall* (1992), made in preparation for the color woodcut of the same title made the following year, was donated by Frankenthaler at the time of her 1993 exhibition, **Helen Frankenthaler: Prints**, a survey of her prints from 1961 through 1992. Organized and presented by the National Gallery of Art, it traveled from Washington, D.C., to San Francisco, Boston, and Cincinnati.

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General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets along Constitution Avenue NW and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will be closing gradually beginning in July 2013 and will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit www.nga.gov/renovation (<http://www.nga.gov/renovation>) .

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's website at www.nga.gov. Follow the Gallery on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt and on Twitter at twitter.com/ngadc.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

For additional press information please call or send inquiries to:

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