

Docent Dates

Lectures will be announced as available.
Coffee at 9:15
Meeting at 10:00

November 3

Bus Trip; no meeting

November 10

Book Group 2 PM
Shirley Waxman's

November 19

December 3

December 8

Holiday Party

January 21

January 26

Book Group 2 PM

February 4

February 18

March 4

March 18

April 15

May 6

May 20



Joseph Henry Sharp, USA, 1859-1953 Elk Foot, Pueblo of Taos, New Mexico, n.d. (ca. 1903-1912)
Oil on canvas, 15 1/8 x 20" Gift of William and Marion Dentzel INTERNAL USE ONLY

Dear Docents,

Michi Ho had the wonderful idea of featuring two short docent autobiographies each month in La Muse so that we could all learn more about each other. We hope you choose to participate. In an effort to keep the length manageable, we have created a series of short answer questions, which you can answer or choose to ignore. These biographies are not so much about academic preparation or credentials as they are about who you are now. Copies of the questions will be available at meetings.

Please email your responses and a fun and interesting photograph to Lori Mohr by the 25th of each month if you want to be included.

What would you like us to know about you?

What things, people, or creatures are most important to you?

If you weren't a docent, what other volunteering would suit you?



Molora Vadnais
President

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What is your most memorable travel or life experience (good or bad)?

What would you like to do that you haven't done? What one thing have you done that you would never want to do again?



From Our Vice President



Joan Dewhirst

ALL ABOARD !! Our bus leaves promptly at 8:30 AM on **MONDAY, NOVEMBER 3rd** for all passengers with reservations for the Docent Huntington Library Trip.

Prepare for a day filled with rich beauty of nature and delightful displays of art.

Bring your camera, wear comfortable shoes and above all.....REMEMBER TO CHANGE YOUR CLOCKS the day BEFORE our get-away to San Marino.

No holiday music yet, but bright baubles and fancy gift items in local stores are heralding the arrival of December celebrations. I'm delighted to announce that this year's Docent Holiday Party will be hosted by Council President Molora Vadnais. Her lovely

home will be a perfect place for this especially fun event.

Save the date --- Monday, December 8th. And THANK YOU.....Molora.

From Our Student Teams



Kathy Eastman,
Student Teams

Our Education Department brought the community together for Day of the Dead on Sunday Oct. 26th, celebrating, appreciating and creating art. Local families crowded the plaza, enjoying an afternoon filled with color, music and dancing. Gould, Campbell, and Sterling Morton. E. and W Galleries were open and soon filled with excited visitors who came to see the Altares created by the children. Loving tributes to abuelas, friends, and other family were surrounded by flowers and brightly colored paper cutouts.

The Police Activities League—PAL—our partner in community outreach, focused on children's Altares dedicated to pets in our lives. Alzheimer's Society members brought special flowers and created flower still lifes honoring friends and family. Tables of Altares were dedicated to Louise

Frankenthaler, Yoshitoshi, and Frederick Hammersley. Young artists used these artist's images to inspire their own creations.

In a gallery I watched a small laughing girl in her red and white dancing costume. Her face was painted as half skeleton and half child, like the older dancers. She pulled her parents along sharing her discoveries.

This is always a special celebration and a unique way we at the Museum bring art into the kids' lives.



From Our Adult Teams



Christine Holland, Adult Teams Co-Chair

Tour numbers remained steady in September, with docents touring 331 visitors on 49 tours with an average of 7 visitors. Of those tours, 5 were Special Request.

As I mentioned in the last docent meeting, we have an ongoing concern with missed docent tours. In September we had two docents who missed their tours, one in August, one in July, two in May, and one in March. We are such a professional group and all of us feel awful if we inadvertently fail to show up for a scheduled tour. Please avoid that awful feeling! Cross-check with the Touring Calendar that Rachael sends at the beginning of each month. Set up and use a calendaring system, with periodic checks of your schedule. There are many reminder strategies—use what is best for you. In addition to keeping a calendar and consulting it often, you can put post-it notes on the coffee-maker, put an alarm on your smart phone, ask a friend to call you the morning of the tour, etc. Please note language in the Docent Handbook that makes clear missed tours are a serious issue and may be considered by the Board as grounds for dismissal.

I will conclude with a continuing nod of thanks to all Docents for your helpful and good-natured attitude when faced with changes in Adult Tour Teams and scheduling. We have had to make several last-minute requests to cover some tours, and so many of you have been so helpful. What a wonderful group!



From Our Research Chair



Barbara Boyd

Research Needed!

Is anyone up for doing a paper on either of these pieces from the Contemporary to Modern show?

Near right:
Jorge Pardo's
Untitled (Sea Urchin)

Far right:
Frederick Hammersley
Growing Game



SBMA Book Group



Laura DePaoli

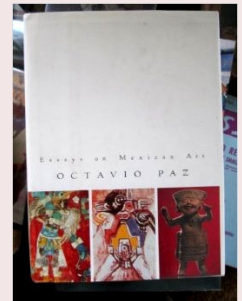
Our November book group meeting will be **Monday, November 10th at 2pm** at Shirley Waxman's home, 675 Cold Spring Road in Montecito. We are reading two short books on photography: *Camera Lucida* by Roland Barthes & *What Photography Is* by James Elkins. Stephanie Amon will be leading the discussion and it's sure to be a lively debate about the nature of photography. If you haven't been able to do the reading, but are still interested in the idea of the photograph please do attend. RSVP to Shirley at kswaxman@gmail.com or Laura at ldepaoli@verizon.net.

Looking ahead to next year, we will be meeting at 2 pm on Monday, January 26 to discuss *Essays on Mexican Art* by the great Mexican poet **Octavio Paz**. This is a wonderful, beautifully written book of fourteen essays. "The Nobel Laureate's poetry and defenses of his craft, his writings on politics and culture, his literary and historical explorations of his homeland (Mexico) and the world at large, all rank among the most important works of our time. Paz's new book will reveal to his English-speaking audience that he is also a first-rate art critic."

From *The Los Angeles Times* review, http://articles.latimes.com/1993-06-27/books/bk-7467_1_octavio-paz.

Laura DePaoli

ldepaoli@verizon.net



SBMA's Day of the Dead

Photos used with permission



Helen Frankenthaler: Innovative Genius In Pursuit of Discovery

By Ricki Morse



Introduction

Helen Frankenthaler is one of the most improbable and authentic painters of the 20th century. Unlike most of the struggling European and American artists venturing into Abstract Expressionism in New York City following World War II, she was reared as the privileged daughter of a New York State Supreme Court Judge. Sent to the best schools, she studied with major artists like Rufino Tamayo and Hans Hoffman while in high school at Dalton, just north of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. This environment encouraged her interest in art. She attended Bennington College, an exclusive, highly experimental, work-enriched education which exposed her to the likes of Erich Fromm. Upon graduation she enrolled in Columbia for graduate work in Art History but stopped going to class as studio work demanded her attention.

Rigorously schooled in Cubism and the European development of Modernism from high school through college, she had so thoroughly incorporated Modernism into her understanding of art that she immediately began to push boundaries, in her words “letting the painting take me where it needs to go.”

At Bennington, she had plunged into European Cubism and other early explorations of modernism like Surrealism, Italian Futurism and automatism, that off-shoot of psychoanalysis which held that the artist could free himself from his cognitive mind and draw lines and produce images reflecting the unconscious mind.

As she began to work in her own studio, her early works were Cubist, denying perspective in the picture by layering different views of the object upon one another in such a way as to reveal a different experience of the object. Very early in her career she found a unique way of expressing herself, in pouring paint directly onto an unprimed canvas. Her hallmark work, “Mountains and Sea,” (page 8) was produced when she was only 24.

By this time she had the attention of Clement Greenberg (1909-1994), the prevailing voice of authority in art criticism in New York, indeed in the art world. He introduced her to galleries, arranged exhibitions and most importantly introduced her to the major artists working at that time, primarily Jackson Pollock (1912-1956). Frankenthaler was deeply influenced by Pollock’s drip paintings, particularly that he put the canvas on the floor instead of an easel, and disrupted perspective by approaching the canvas from any side, not letting the edges determine the evolution of the picture. His work freed her from the easel and led to her saturated canvas, color field work which took Abstract Expressionism to its next revelation.

In the macho world of Abstract Expressionism led by Pollock and Willem de Kooning (1904-1997), Frankenthaler wasn’t a woman artist. She was an artist, period.



Frankenthaler at work in her studio at 83rd Street and Third Avenue, Manhattan, 1964, *New York Magazine*.



Helen Frankenthaler, American, 1928-2011 "Green Sway," 1975 Acrylic on canvas Collection of John and Zola Rex

Another boundary she broke was in cutting her own path with Greenberg. Their affair lasted five years, she in her twenties, he older by two decades.

When she was 30, in 1958, she married Robert Motherwell, thirteen years older, twice married and one of the most well established, educated and important Abstract Expressionists of the day. The heir of a wealthy San Francisco family, he studied at Stanford, Harvard and Columbia, where he earned a Ph.D. in philosophy. They became the golden couple of the Upper East Side in Manhattan, giving dinner parties for 100 and accepting White House invitations. When the Prince and Princess of Wales were entertained there, a man who had been dancing with Princess Diana was directed to Helen's table. She sailed into her studio the next morning jubilant. "I waited a lifetime for a dance like this," Barbara Rose reports she said. Asked with whom, she said she didn't know and offered his card to her assistant. The card read, John Travolta.

Her marriage to Motherwell ended without public comment in 1971. It was clear her life was little effected, as she had been aggressively pursuing her studio work throughout their marriage, while entertaining and enjoying life in Manhattan as she always had.



Stephen DuBrul

A note which is completely my conjecture: in 1977 she completed a compelling work with a dark background and elusive lights on the surface. E. A. Carmean asked about her painting entitled "M"; "M," says the artist, "both celebrates and tenderly cherishes a nostalgic feeling for a specific life. It's a mourning, and an homage, of sorts." (Carmean, p. 74). Perhaps the M is Motherwell.

She continued to work in various studios, particularly on the Connecticut coast in the summer, and to travel extensively in Europe. We can immerse ourselves in her experiences through her powerful, huge canvases which pull us directly into her experiential world. And in 1994, when she was 66, she married Stephen DuBrul, an investment banker originally from Michigan via Norte Dame, who had excelled in devoting his skills in the service of the U.S. government and various international causes. They lived in a gracious, traditional house on the Connecticut coast in Darien where she died in 2011. Stephen DuBrul died the next week.



I found on Amazon a book of woodblock prints (another area in which she was a major innovator) entitled "Valentine For Mr. Wonderful" 1996, and dedicated to her husband Stephen.

Visual Analysis of the Work

My first sense is of the green and its power to move the other elements in the picture. Next I am aware of the verticality of what seems to be landscape-like, in color and feeling. The verticality is emphasized not only by the canvas shape but more dramatically by the dark vertical lines on either side of the central mottled panel, as if we are pushed to the surface of the work, seeing the reflections of bouncing light. Next the splotches of warm brown, then the white of the raw canvas to the right and the white paint left of center add a glimmering light. The Spring green seems to exert pressure on the central neutral area, which upon examination is not so neutral but a very complexly worked surface containing yellow pools of light and the warm brown repeated. Now we notice the whimsical scarlet on the lower left, like a glance of something new.

We are aware of the demand of the surface on our attention, almost like we walked to the edge of a wood and squinted our eyes so that our only awareness was of the play of light and dark. As we stay with the presence of the surface, we are more and more aware of an intentional playfulness, of the artist trying different colors and moods and balance to achieve the finished image, which feels as if made in a single instant, an impression, but with the pervasive truth of an actual moment.

It is in this sense of two dimensionality, of everything happening on the surface of the canvas, that Frankenthaler moved Abstract Expressionism forward. We don't experience that spiritual depth glimpsed and felt behind Rothko's shimmering colors or Pollock's drips floating on an implied deeper realm. That she manages to create such magic in two dimensions is always the surprise and pleasure of her paintings.

Technique and Materials and Influences

In 1963 Frankenthaler switched from oil paints diluted with turpentine to water-based acrylic paints which had become available in the mid-1950s. These emulsions were fast-drying and provided a wash effect similar to that of watercolors, which enhanced the color field effects of her technique. After seeing Jackson Pollock's drip paintings and trading an easel for the floor, she had begun to pour oil paints diluted with turpentine directly onto raw canvas. These early paintings often included halos of turpentine around the poured shapes and also did not age well, as the turpentine rotted the canvas over time. ". . . the acrylics simply provide her with a few convenient distinctions: new colors, greater luminosity and durability, a more immediate contact with the canvas, and more resonance at the contours and edges. In her hands the paint can be solid, impenetrable ground, soft wash or blot, or a streak, like spilled and hardened wax on the surface, 'light in light.'" (Berkson, p. 43) The acrylics provided more transparency as she swept, brushed and sponged the diluted paint over the surface of the work. Then she added drawn elements, lines and accent colors in a manner echoing Gorky and Kandinsky and harkening back to the automatic drawing influence of Miró.

"Frankenthaler's accurate sense of the appropriate size for a picture as it is scaled to the observer ought to be noted here, since the areas we speak of are real in extent and not merely symbolic. Furthermore, in response to her history as an "action" painter after the manner of Jackson Pollock, one should recall that these pictures are 'physically' planned in the making and are not the product of sketches executed by the artist as workman. With the canvas thrown upon the floor, walked around and even into, when necessary, the arms, legs and bodily effort over at least sixty or seventy square feet of terrain preclude any mere projection of an *a priori* concept. The physical realities are constantly under consideration. The difference between this procedure and that of the painter who works from sketches or from a pre-scheduled order, is



Frankenthaler, "Mountains and Sea"

like the difference between the architect who works in close cooperation with the individual site and the one who begins and ends with the drafting table." (Goossen, p. 16) Frankenthaler describes her physical relationship to the subject matter of her work, "Mountains and Sea," 1952. Following a trip to Nova Scotia she poured thinned paint onto canvas on the floor, "and I know the landscapes were in my arms as I did it." (Carmean, p. 12)

Another innovation shared by many of these Post-Painterly Abstract Expressionists (Clement Greenberg favorite description of the second generation Abstract Expressionists) was the

use of sail canvas rather than the traditional European linen. It was available in large sizes, suiting their tendency to make very large paintings, and it was much less expensive. Galleryists were expanding spaces to accommodate the larger canvases being produced by Helen Frankenthaler, Morris Louis and Kenneth Noland, to name a few of the Color Field painters.

In the 1970s Frankenthaler began to apply tape to the raw canvas prior to the pour. "I used tape as drawing," she recalls. "I created variations ... where I bent the tape, allowing some seepage under it for softness of the edges. I knew how and where the tape and the tint might require softening." "Beginning to cover the remaining surface with washes of varying colors of tint, the artist removed some of the tapes while the canvas was wet, allowing the paint to seep into the previously masked areas. In other portions, some of the remaining tape was removed and adjusted in response to the developing work. As with the initial tapes, when these were removed they left raw canvas areas. These reserved passages were subsequently articulated with colors along their edges . . ." (Carmean, p.68) E. A. Carmean (Director of the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth) is referring here to another 1975 work called "Tulip Tint," but I think upon close examination you will find these process descriptions apply to our "Green Sway." (page 6)

Frankenthaler's Influence

The break-through painting, "Mountains and Sea," 1952, roughly 7 by 10 feet, was heralded by Clement Greenberg as having changed Morris Louis' entire direction, "his first sight of . . . an extraordinary painting done in 1952 by Helen Frankenthaler called "Mountains and Sea" led Louis to change his direction abruptly." (Carmean, p. 12) Frankenthaler loaned and then gave this painting to the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C.

The terms "color field painting" and "lyrical abstraction" became current in discussing both Frankenthaler's work and that of contemporaries Kenneth Noland and Morris Louis and later artists like Larry Poons. Robert Hughes notes that, "In the 1960s and early '70s, more museum time and space was devoted to color-field painting than to any other American movement or style."

In assessing Frankenthaler's power as a artist, he says, "The Pollock follower who picked up on this earliest was Helen Frankenthaler in 1952 with a precocious picture called "Mountains and Sea." An amalgam of Hans Hofmann (with whom she briefly studied), Kandinsky, and Gorky, this landscape set the tone of her later work by conspicuously dissociating "painterliness" from heavy, impasted paint. From then on she worked

with extremely dilute pigment, floated, washed and puddled on an absorbent ground. The results, like "Interior Landscape," 1964, had at their best a burning immediacy of color all of whose elements hit the eye purely and straight off, with one hedonistic jolt." (Hughes, p. 548)

Barbara Rose, whose "Frankenthaler," is one of the greatest critical reads of the Abstract Expressionist era, summarized the artist's life memorably. "In her life as in her art, Frankenthaler has said that she is interested primarily in growth and development. Throughout her career, she has been faithful to these principles. As one traces the course of her work, one sees a steady maturation and unwillingness to rest with any solution—no matter how successful. Coupled with this resistance to the facile is an iron-willed determination to face and confront the issues of the moment. Courage and staying power are rare in any age. In our own, Frankenthaler's combination of these qualities is an incalculable asset not only to American art but also to the future of painting in general. Her paintings are not merely beautiful. They are statements of great intensity and significance about what it is to stay alive, to face crisis and survive, to accept maturity with grace and even with joy." (Rose, p. 106)

The full, unedited version of this paper is posted on the docent website.

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The Last Page...getting to know you



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