

Helen Frankenthaler Let 'er Rip

This episode focuses on Helen Frankenthaler (1928–2011). Joining host Helen Molesworth are artist Rodney McMillian and art historian Alexander Nemerov. Frankenthaler made large abstract paintings by pouring thinned paint directly onto the horizontal canvas. In interviews from 1969 and 1971, she discusses the inspiration for this radical innovation as well as other early influences.

Additional Resources

- ◆ Helen Frankenthaler Foundation (<http://www.frankenthalerfoundation.org/>)
- ◆ Cindy Nemser Papers Finding Aid (<http://archives2.getty.edu:8082/xtf/view?docId=ead/2013.M.21/2013.M.21.xml>)
- ◆ Barbara Rose Papers Finding Aid (<http://archives2.getty.edu:8082/xtf/view?docId=ead/930100/930100.xml>)

Transcript

Episode transcripts are provided to make this podcast accessible to a wider audience. Please note that interviews featured in this episode have been edited for concision and clarity.

Original interviews: Barbara Rose interview with Helen Frankenthaler, July 8, 1968, box 10, C49–51, Barbara Rose papers, 930100, Getty Research Institute; Cindy Nemser interview with Helen Frankenthaler, September, 1971, box 20, C5b, Cindy Nemser papers, 2013.M.21, Getty Research Institute.

HELEN FRANKENTHALER: You know, you made that and it's great, you bastard; now I'm going to run home, make one, and bring it and show you; don't you love it?

HELEN MOLESWORTH: This is Recording Artists, a podcast from the Getty dedicated to exploring art and artists through the archives of the Getty Research Institute. I'm your host Helen Molesworth.

In this season we focus on audio interviews with six women artists whose lives span the twentieth century. These recordings were made by the New York-based art critic

Cindy Nemser and art historian Barbara Rose. Most of these interviews come from the 1960s and '70s, in the midst of the civil rights movement and the feminist revolution. Hearing these artists in their own words talk about their work and about their experiences as women making art is a revelation.

This episode focuses on Helen Frankenthaler. Barbara Rose's recordings with her were made in July 1968. Cindy Nemser's in September 1971. Helen Frankenthaler was in her early 40s.

I've invited LA-based artist Rodney McMillian and Stanford University art historian Alexander Nemerov to speak with me about these interviews. I chose Rodney because he pours paint, which is a technique developed by Frankenthaler. And Alex Nemerov is currently writing a book on Frankenthaler's early career.

Helen Frankenthaler was a major artist in the second generation of abstract expressionist painters. Born in 1928 in New York City, she passed away in 2011 at the age of 83. Known for her large-scaled, colorful paintings, she invented the technique of pouring thinned paint directly onto the canvas. In effect she was staining rather than properly painting. She developed this method in the aftermath of a series of encounters with Jackson Pollock's drip paintings. In 1952, at only twenty-three years old, she made her now iconic and magisterial painting *Mountains and Sea*. It's an exuberant picture that alludes to landscape while remaining resolutely abstract. Even though Frankenthaler invented the staining technique, she was often not credited for this profound formal breakthrough in the grammar of painting.

I asked Alex Nemerov to tell me why he is drawn to Helen Frankenthaler's work.

ALEXANDER NEMEROV: Her greatest paintings speak to what is almost an impossible thing for an artist of any time, which is to somehow get life on the quick, life on the wing, into the works of art, so that the works of art don't feel like a pale petrification of lived experience, but you feel that you actually are in the presence, in the thick of life as it is lived and as it is transmuted into aesthetic form by this wondrously talented and sensitive and difficult artist.

MOLESWORTH: Like many women of the period, Frankenthaler tended to side-step issues pertaining directly to feminism, or what it might mean to be a woman in a male-dominated art world. She was part of a generation that believed in the purity of art. She saw it as separate from the concerns and limitations of daily life. She possessed a strong sense of herself as an equal to her male peers, which was evident in her romantic unions with two of New York's most powerful cultural figures: the critic Clement Greenberg and the painter Robert Motherwell.

By all accounts, Frankenthaler was both intellectually precocious and artistically inclined from a young age. We hear this when she tells art historian Barbara Rose about her earliest artistic attempt at the tender age of five or six, in a playground behind the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

FRANKENTHALER: We lived at 74th Street and Park, and the Met's at 82nd and Fifth. I'd start with one piece of chalk behind the Met. They had a statue of Adonis with a fig leaf. And I would start from him, and without standing up, stooping all the way, with the nurse walking at half pace, draw one line until we got to our canopy and doorman. Across the street, around the corner. I mean, when I think of lines, if I pursue it and go way back, that's always the first line in my memory.

MOLESWORTH: I love this extraordinary story of determination and playfulness

combined. The image of her stooping and drawing as a child presages Frankenthaler's intense physical movement in and around her later canvases. I asked Alex what he thought about this story.

NEMEROV: This connection, literally, between art and life, to going from the museum to her home. In that sense, too, I think it's a great predictor of the way she thought of those two things in connection.

MOLESWORTH: If Alex Nemerov saw the connection between art and life, artist Rodney McMillian picked up on the privilege that would help to secure Frankenthaler's confidence:

RODNEY MCMILLIAN: I think a great way to contextualize how I think about that moment of hers is that she makes a point to state that she was dragging it behind her nanny or someone who was employed at her home, who was her caretaker. And so she's not only mapping out her space and in a sense, kind of claiming space, but in a context in which she knows that she's well taken care of, and that it's acceptable, and that that is her right. And so that speaks to me about one knowing one's place in the world and what's possible.

MOLESWORTH: This sense of "what's possible" for Frankenthaler followed her throughout her childhood. She was born into an affluent, white, Jewish, Upper East Side home. Her mother was an intelligent and beautiful woman who had worked until she married, and then turned her attentions to running a socially ambitious household in support of her husband and three daughters. Frankenthaler's father was a prominent judge, with a strong work ethic and an abiding belief in Helen, his youngest daughter. He once apparently said to her mother, "Watch that girl; she's special."

Frankenthaler attended the Dalton School, an elite Manhattan prep school. There, as fifteen-year-old, she was lucky enough to have the Mexican artist Ruffino Tamayo as an art instructor. Even in her assessment of Tamayo as a teacher you can begin to glean Frankenthaler's formidable intelligence and confidence. Here she is again with Barbara Rose:

FRANKENTHALER: When I was at my best, I used his medium, literally. I mean, a third, and a third, and a third. A third turpentine, a third linseed oil, a third varnish. Used his color palette. The Mexican blues and reds, black, cadmium oranges and reds. And he was encouraging. But I didn't need much encouragement. He was no star teacher. But very good for me at that moment.

MOLESWORTH: After Dalton she was accepted to Bennington, a small, prestigious, liberal arts college in Vermont known for its dedication to literature and art and its decidedly bohemian milieu. Her teachers included prominent artists and intellectuals, among them Paul Feeley, whose large canvases of beautifully colored abstract shapes had a direct impact on Frankenthaler's later work. Even as a student she had a remarkable sense of herself as already participating in art and the life of the mind.

FRANKENTHALER: One of the delights in studying with Paul was that he gave so much and inspired so much, and also learned from his students. If he pushed an idea about a picture, you weren't aware of what he wanted you to think or say or how the seminar should be developed. And sometimes he didn't know himself. But then say Sonia or I would say something about a Mondrian, and he would do a complete double take in the middle of it. I mean, he would turn and go like this and— go, yeah, "Ah." You know? And for the first time in his life, a thought crossed. So that there was

a real dialectic. And thrilling and really brilliant, at moments.

MOLESWORTH: This sense of herself as an equal to her teachers propelled her and a friend to organize an art exhibition of their Bennington peers. With characteristic gumption, Frankenthaler decided to throw an opening party and invited the most important members of the New York cultural world. This included the prominent critic of the day, Clement Greenberg. Greenberg, or Clem, as he was called, was twenty years Frankenthaler's senior and would ultimately play an enormous role in her life. She later told Barbara Rose:

FRANKENTHALER: So I called Clem and I explained and he said, "Oh, I *love* Bennington. I love Bennington girls. But I'll only come if there are drinks." [she chuckles; inaudible]. I said, "Well, it just so happens that we have enough money to have a lot of liquor, and we're not only going to have drinks, but we're having both martinis and manhattans." I was twenty then. And he said, "Well, then I'll come." Anyway, the entire art and literary world of the New York avant-garde showed up to this Bennington show. I mean, you never get a crowd like that together anymore. Everyone got plastered. And Clem walked around the show with me.

Anyway, we were extremely interested in each other, and that was that. And we had a long phone call, in which it was very clear that we shared a certain humor and interest, and we made a date for drinks, and that was the beginning of a five-year relationship.

MOLESWORTH: Her romantic relationship with Greenberg meant invitations to dinners, art openings, and smoky bars where Frankenthaler had a front row seat to the robust and burgeoning avant-garde art scene of the late 1940s and early '50s. This nearly unparalleled access would not have been possible had she merely been a young ambitious woman or painter on her own. One thing we hear in her interview with Barbara Rose is her remarkable independence when it came to being a younger artist attached to much more powerful older man.

BARBARA ROSE: Did he look at your paintings and criticize them?

FRANKENTHALER: Mm-hm.

ROSE: What kind of thing did he say? Did he respect you?

FRANKENTHALER: It was much more sort of, "go to it." Very often, to his astonishment, I mean, I was knocking out paintings that were pretty terrific.

ROSE: And you think he was surprised.

FRANKENTHALER: No. It went hand-in-hand. It was very beautiful. I was off on my own. I'd had my own history. I was developing. But I was also developing suddenly in the context of the New York avant-garde of 1951.

MOLESWORTH: Once again, we hear Frankenthaler's cheeky confidence, emphatically stating that she was "knocking out" pretty terrific paintings. But her big leap forward would be her engagement with the work of Jackson Pollock. Pollock had recently abandoned brushes in order to drip and fling paint. Equally radical was that he had started to place his canvases on the floor rather than on an easel. Frankenthaler's encounter with Pollock's work formed the bedrock of everything that she would go on to explore in her own paintings. Here's Rose asking about Pollock:

ROSE: Did you know Jackson before you saw the paintings or—?

FRANKENTHALER: I had not met him until I saw his show. And we went up to Betty Parsons. And I was very nervous, because I knew what it meant to Clem. He wasn't nervous about it, but I had no opinion and I had no experience and I had an interest, and I was on guard. It was as if I suddenly went to Lisbon and knew no Portuguese but had read enough and had a passionate interest and was eager to live there. I mean, I wanted to live in this land. And I had to live there, but I just didn't know the vocabulary. I mean, I was a learning the words.

And Clem, as we got off the elevator, he said, "Now you're on your own. Just look around at the show and tell me what you think of it." And I was suddenly blinded, as if you'd put me in the center ring of Madison Square Garden. And there were those pictures, like *Number 1*, *Number 14*, the one that's at the Metropolitan now.

MOLESWORTH: It's hard to imagine in our internet saturated world, in which we all seem to have already seen everything, the excitement and raw newness that Pollock's work created for people. What feels familiar to me in this story is the wide-eyed quality of being thrust into an adult milieu and having to somehow navigate that world on your own. I asked Rodney McMillian what he thought about Frankenthaler's first encounter with Pollock's work

MCMILLIAN: I got the sense that she was very well aware of her aloneness within that context. Greenberg even tells her, "You're on your own." It's like a growing kind of challenge. A sink-or-swim kind of moment. You know, it's like, let's see how you fare in this context. You know, like, do you have the stones? Do you have the chops? Do you have the grit to kind of be in that world? And I think the thing that she said that was really quite poetic was that she said, you know, she wanted to be in this land. And I think that's a wonderful line, because it talks about the terrain that she's going to be in, and within that context, there's like an awareness of history.

MOLESWORTH: To me, Rodney's read is really astute. The young Frankenthaler sees herself as participating in history in the making. She is eager to be part of this world, even if she does not yet fully know her role in it. I asked Alex Nemerov about this same story.

NEMEROV: I think that she's being put on the spot, under the spotlight, and that Greenberg actually is the person that she is feeling gazing at her as though the entirety of Madison Square Garden is seated with 18,000 Clement Greenbergs. Because although he said, you know, "You're on your own," I think we can— Well, she also said that she was nervous going over there because she knew how much these pictures meant to him. So in our world, it might be like going to a movie with a friend who absolutely adores a certain movie, and although the friend is gracious enough to grant us our own independent relation to it, obviously they're going to be crestfallen if we don't share their enthusiasm.

MOLESWORTH: What Frankenthaler would ultimately do as a result of her exposure to New York's avant-garde remains the stuff of legend. In 1951, she accompanied Greenberg out to Springs, Long Island, to visit with painters Lee Krasner and Jackson Pollock. It was there she saw Pollock's studio, with the canvas on the floor rather than the easel. Barbara Rose was clearly very interested in getting to the bottom of this encounter.

ROSE: What was it so much about the paintings that hit you, do you remember?

FRANKENTHALER: I think the thing that hit me most of all was that while I knew it was a fact, it became a physical necessity to get pictures off the easel. And therefore,

for me, not even on a wall. The reach or fluidity of working from above down into a field, really registered when I saw his studio and he unrolled his paintings on the floor that he had painted them on. Now, I was never drawn to the idea of a stick dipped in a huge can. One thing I have never liked is a drip. And I think that's one reason I took pictures off the wall, because if something's upright and liquid, [ROSE: It drips.] it drips. But he—

ROSE: Why didn't you like the drip? Do you know?

FRANKENTHALER: It's a kind of boring accident to me, a drip. There are many accidents that are very rich that you use; but if you exploit a drip, it's very boring and familiar, to begin with. Drips are drips.

MOLESWORTH: Frankenthaler has said a lot about this experience of seeing Pollock rolling his canvases out on the floor, but this is my favorite of her responses:

ROSE: What do you feel that you got out of this encounter? I guess the encounter really was with the work.

FRANKENTHALER: I think a certain attitude that was probably in me already, but I hadn't used it yet. And that was sort of, let 'er rip. Go free. You have the wherewithal. Just go. Run with it. Try it. Fool around.

MOLESWORTH: What's extraordinary to me here is that she never mentions what the Pollock paintings actually look like. Already a working artist, she moves right past his finished imagery and delves into his process. She states emphatically that she doesn't like the drip, by which I take her to mean that she's not interested in chance or the lack of painterly control implied by a drip. Rather what's at stake for her is an opening of possibility about what could be done in and around a canvas, that she could "fool around" and "let 'er rip."

Alex Nemerov:

NEMEROV: I think what Pollock did for her is he showed her what was already inside herself, but she needed the sanction, or simply the sight of in the work of another, in order to realize. Which was, for lack of a better phrase, a kind of ecstatic, grave freedom that was unconstrained by the expectations and the various other end games of the art world.

MOLESWORTH: I love Alex's sense of her having a kind of ecstasy or freedom. I think that's something we can see in the way her paint blooms, the way those lovely soft edges of her shapes abut one another. And when Alex says "grave freedom," I think about how Frankenthaler lets clumps or smears of paint sit on top of the canvas, as if they are free to just be paint, as if that is enough. It's all that's expected of them.

One of the things Frankenthaler said about painting and pouring on the floor, rather than painting at an easel, was that it meant she could use her whole body, not just work from her wrist. I asked Rodney McMillian, an artist who also pours paint, if he could tell us something about what that means or how that feels.

MCMILLIAN: I'd say, when I'm painting with my wrist, it's a neck-up operation. And when I'm painting with my body, it's from the top of my head to below my feet. So it's the whole of me, in a certain way. So it's not just whatever intellect that I bring to the work; it's also body memory, it's also the realities of the day. Like, did I sleep well and eat well and is my body tired that day. It's the physicality, it's age, it's youth. It's like a memory of how my body has worked before and how it's working now. It's an

understanding of what certain gestures that I may do on the canvas, what kind of associative aspects there are.

MOLESWORTH: When Rodney mentions the associative aspects of Frankenthaler's work I immediately think about her painting's relationship to landscape. When she was still involved with Greenberg she studied with Hans Hoffman in Provincetown, a small fishing village and artist colony at the tip of Cape Cod. Surrounded by water Provincetown is renowned for its exquisite northern light. Several years after her studies with Hoffman, Frankenthaler and her husband Robert Motherwell began spending summers in Provincetown. I for one can't help but see her extraordinary play with blues and pinks, and the atmospheric blossoming of her liquid pours of paint on unprimed canvas, as being highly evocative of her watery summer landscape.

Despite my romantic leanings in this regard, Frankenthaler erected barriers to this kind of thinking. She almost audibly bristles when critic Cindy Nemser asks her about her work's relationship to nature.

FRANKENTHALER: Well, it depends on what you mean by nature. If you mean is there a— Well, what *do* you mean by nature?

CINDY NEMSER: Well, the reference to the outside world.

FRANKENTHALER: Well, I'm not doing landscapes.

NEMSER: No, I don't think that's what's there, but there seems to be a landscape quality in the work, or a kind of reference.

FRANKENTHALER: I think there is. But not a conscious effort. I'm not involved in nature per se. I'm involved in making pictures. **[NEMSER: Right.]** And I think what you all nature is an aspect of something, but often a handle that is held onto by people who want a clue as to how to read abstract art. And that's their problem, whether nature's in it or not.

NEMSER: Yeah. But you consider the paintings totally abstract?

FRANKENTHALER: I call them abstract paintings.

MOLESWORTH: Alex, I love that last line. "I call them abstract paintings." I mean, I feel like Nemser's trying to get something out of her, and Frankenthaler won't budge.

NEMEROV: I'm sure that you're not imagining the taciturn nature of her response. The phrase "suffer no fools" comes to mind. Not any criticism of Nemser, but just Helen feeling, perhaps, that this person is less of an insider, like an approved insider to her work, which Barbara Rose would've been. Barbara Rose wrote that big book on Helen. And I think Helen could be very arch and even insulting to people who, quote/unquote, "didn't get" her work.

MOLESWORTH: And yet, for me, the logic of landscape persists. This feeling, to use Alex's phrase, of catching life on the quick, this fleeting quality of impressions, to which I would add the clarity of her use of color, and the way she seems to capture light and atmosphere.

Alex, again:

NEMEROV: I think the purity of the color, the way the gestures seem to split the

difference between chaos and structure, which is something that, for example, Frank O'Hara praised in her work as, you know, allowing for almost like the perfect combination of spontaneity and judgment. The way I say it to my students, it's like if you picture one of these color shapes or these lines, et cetera, or spatters, it's like the butterfly still flying in the field, as opposed to the butterfly caught and pinned and desiccated in one's taxonomy. You know, that Frankenthaler's paintings, have, again, this feeling of the directness of life, though again, transmuted into, you know, what they call abstraction, but I would just say aesthetic form.

MOLESWORTH: I also wanted to hear about Rodney's perception of Frankenthaler's relationship to landscape.

MCMILLIAN: It was kind of nice to think about her as a landscape painter, because I hadn't really thought about it in that way, because I always thought about her as kind of an abstractionist. You know, like a strict kind of like person who's involved with, you know, ideas around abstraction. But in looking back at some of the work, it's like, oh, she was completely, like, a landscape painter. Which really warmed me to the work and to what her endeavor was.

MOLESWORTH: We can't really talk about Frankenthaler's endeavor without talking about pouring and staining. She developed this technique by diluting her paint with turpentine, until it had a consistency that allowed her to pour it easily from a coffee can. With the use of brushes and tools, the thinned paint could now seep into the tooth of the unprimed canvas. This enabled her to stain rather than paint in a traditional way. These gestures of thinning, pouring, and staining, combined with her remarkable use of color, were to become the hallmarks of a Frankenthaler painting. These methods were quickly taken up by Morris Louis and Kenneth Noland, both of whom gained great notoriety for their stained canvases. So much so that sometimes they were credited with the invention of staining itself.

Here's Frankenthaler telling Barbara Rose about her first meeting with Louis and Noland, both of whom were friendly with Clement Greenberg:

FRANKENTHALER: Ken had known Clem at Black Mountain, and brought Morris to meet Clem. And Clem told him about me, introduced us, and they saw the *Mountains and Sea* picture. They really admired it, admired me, wondered at it, and were going to lick it. Join it and lick it both. And I liked that. In those days, with many people, I think because money and power was out, in a certain sense, that there were real youthful joys of competitive exchange. You know, you made that and it's great, you bastard; now I'm going to run home, make one, and bring it and show you; don't you love it?

MOLESWORTH: What's so compelling to me about this story is her sense of mutual comradery and rivalry. Frankenthaler says Louis and Noland wanted to "join it and lick it both."

NEMEROV: I can believe that she is just enjoying the competition. And as we know, she is not really activated by a sense of being wronged as a woman, and doesn't mind having taken this particular, and to some extent exalted, role in the mythology of abstract expressionism.

MOLESWORTH: The other thing I hear her saying is that some of the highest praise artists can bestow on each other is a kind of theft. She knows that you can see a breakthrough in another artist's work—just as she did with Pollock—and that it can propel you back into your studio in an attempt to take that new move and make it

your own.

Rodney McMillian:

MCMILLIAN: The comment about lack of bitterness with Morris Louis. I was struck by that, too. And I was like, well, maybe it's because he acknowledges that he got it from her. And maybe it's no different than her acknowledging what she got from Pollock. And maybe it's no different than what Pollock, you know, got from the European modernists that he was engaged with. So in that regard, you know, she's kind of just acknowledging the lineages that are happening. And so may— perhaps had he not, you know, said, you know, "I got this from Helen," there may have been a problem. But he said it. And then it's written down and it's in the books.

MOLESWORTH: We've heard this all the way through, that part of her confidence stems from her knowledge that she was participating in something that would become historical. And that, as Alex says, she does not feel wronged in any way. To not feel wronged is a very confident position, and it appears that Frankenthaler is bolstered by the envy and admiration her painting has inspired in her peers. Rodney McMillian reminds us that this confidence also comes as much from her social status and upbringing as it does from her fellow artists:

MCMILLIAN: In listening to the tape, what I was struck by was kind of the nuts and bolts of what we hear all the time about, like, what we're offered, what is expected, and what opportunities exist. And she spends a lot of time in that tape talking about her parents and how her parents talked about her being special; also provided every opportunity for her in great education. There were people who looked out for her, who gave her the benefit of the doubt, in terms of her academics, and provided all the possible opportunities that she could possibly ever have. So it's not mysterious, why she has this sense of entitlement or— And I don't mean entitlement in a pejorative way in this sense, but more like the sense of possibility. It's because she's been told and taught that and everything has been mapped out for that to be true for her. And that's not the case for the 99% rest of us, or many others. And I think what is wonderful about her being so candid about that is that it goes to show that if those possibilities are there, for an individual, then they can happen.

MOLESWORTH: I think it's very compelling to see her, as Rodney does, as someone who is tacitly aware of how much has been made possible for her by others. To see her not feeling maligned or wronged by history, but rather to see her as she sees herself: as someone who helped make history. For surely, Frankenthaler opened a profound space of possibility for other artists through her novel deployment of paint, a gesture used by innumerable artists in her wake—from Lynda Benglis to Rodney McMillian.

But Frankenthaler didn't *just* develop a way of painting used by others. She also produced tender and sensitive canvases that introduced different kinds of bodiliness and a new kind of temporality into the muscular realm of abstract expressionism. So much of what we've heard in these tapes—her confidence, her interest in abstraction, in gesture, in using her body, in situating herself in time and space—comes together in the paintings themselves.

Alex Nemerov:

NEMEROV: Helen said that she wanted to get the feeling of an explosion held on the surface of the canvas. So if you imagine, for example, being a photographer and being at the scene of an explosion, and you happen to take the photograph at the

moment when the debris is flying towards you, if you try to transpose that over into the realm of painting, I think she had a notion, when she was painting, of things rising, exploding up to the surface from some imaginary depth below the canvas. And then she would portray them on that surface in such a way that all the depth out of which they came would be held, you know. The explosion, the energy, the life would be held there, suspended, palpating.

I tell my students, it's like, imagine a fish coming up from the depths of the water right up to the surface, and how magical that is, where you see the silver scales and the mouth and so on. And you know that this thing which appears momentarily on the surface is the denizen of some deep that one will never know. And I think something like that is the essence of the personal revelation, the quest for some metaphysical presence that Helen's work is about.

MOLESWORTH: One of feminism's rallying cries has long been "the personal is political." When Alex sees the essence of "personal revelation" in Frankenthaler's work, I wonder if that is one of the reasons we continue to understand her as a keystone for thinking about what it means to be an artist, and a woman artist. She painted during the period when being a woman artist became a category to contend with. But she remained deeply ambivalent, to the point of denial, about the need to attach the word woman to the word artist. She tackled the question of gender and art head on in a letter written in response to critic Cindy Nemser's 1970 questionnaire about the role of women artists in the art world. Given Frankenthaler's fierce independence it seems only fair to let her have the last word. This is her letter.

January 26, 1970.

Dear Cindy Nemser,

Thank you for your letter about the article you are writing for *Art in America* about women in art. In answer to your many questions on this subject, I can only answer in general that it is not a topic I dwell on, because it has never been a troublesome issue for me in relation to my aesthetic. I like to feel that I am concerned primarily with Painting and not Painting by Women—big women, small women, black, white, yellow women, rich, poor, etc., etc., women. But, how does the picture look on the wall along with other pictures by other painters. I think on "reforms in regards to women artists' rights" that the reforms have to be made by the women themselves; that is, they should just go about being the people and mélange of identities that they are, and proceed from there to make paintings, and the question of sex will take care of itself. I don't feel women should be either neglected or praised in relation to the fact that they are females making art.

I do not wish any of the above in any part to be quoted in or out of context unless you send me a copy of what you wish to use, and the context in which it will appear.

Good luck on your piece.

Sincerely yours,

Helen Frankenthaler

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