

# FRANKENTHALER'S FORTUNES

## ON CLASS PRIVILEGE AND THE ARTIST'S RECEPTION

By Anna C. Chave

In 1969, a forty-year-old painter so successful as to be enjoying already a second New York museum retrospective (Fig. 1) got cast in an odd but telling role by a mass-market magazine headline: that of the “heiress” (Fig. 2).<sup>1</sup> Ostensibly, *Time* was framing Helen Frankenthaler, as she got framed throughout her career, as the heiress to the New York School—above all to Jackson Pollock, who inspired her to pour paint over horizontally positioned canvas. But *Time*'s characterization had some snarky overtones besides. Stereotypically, an heiress is a socially extraneous figure without incentive to work. And Frankenthaler's way of realizing painting that looked, as she said, “as if it all happened or was made in one stroke,”<sup>2</sup> tended to resonate with old-time suspicions concerning avant-garde artists' endemic laziness, as Suzanne Hudson recently noted.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, what got described as Frankenthaler's “impulsive” or “impetuous” technique<sup>4</sup> disallowed extensive re-working of her canvases, which meant that she had to be prepared to waste plenty of art supplies, as indeed she was.<sup>5</sup> That such extravagance did not unduly tax her bank account was made effectively explicit also by *Time*, which identified Frankenthaler as in a more literal sense an heiress to a “sizeable estate” left by her father, a former New York State Supreme Court justice.<sup>6</sup> In contrast to the enduring trope of the struggling or bohemian artist whose life and art stand as a rebuke to bourgeois values, Frankenthaler would all along embrace her class privilege—a choice that affected her art's reception, or so I will argue here.

Not fortunate in all ways, Frankenthaler lost her father in 1940, while still a child. At his funeral, the honorary pallbearers reportedly included New York's governor and the mayor as well as a United States Supreme Court Justice.<sup>7</sup> Alfred Frankenthaler had gained not only great professional stature but financial success, and the family lived on Park Avenue, on Manhattan's wealthy upper east side. Helen's family



Fig. 1. Helen Frankenthaler posing before *Blue North* (1968), clipping from *New York* (Feb. 17, 1969). Photo: Morris Warman. Helen Frankenthaler Foundation Archives, N.Y.

considered it “a great coup” when she gained admission to the Brearley school, whose Jewish quota she mentioned in a 1968 interview with her friend Barbara Rose.<sup>8</sup> But such on-the-record acknowledgement of a price attaching to her

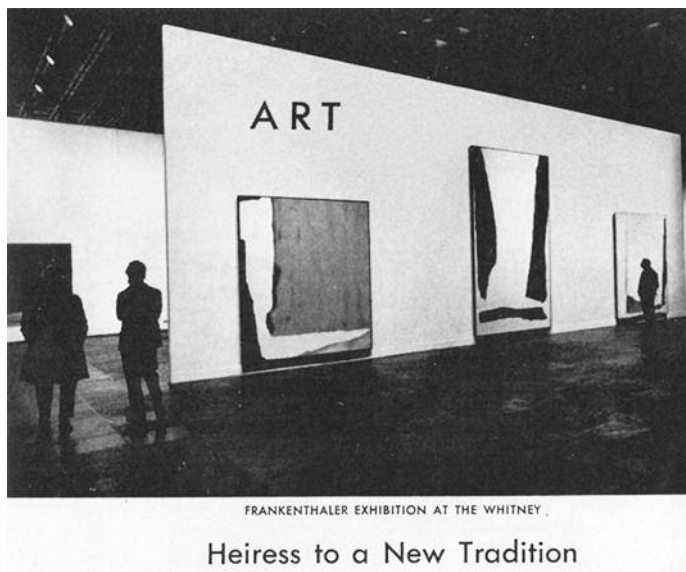


Fig. 2. "Heiress to a New Tradition," clipping from *Time* (March 28, 1969). Photo: Henry Grossman. Helen Frankenthaler Foundation Archives, NY.

Jewishness was a rarity for Frankenthaler, whose generation was not prone to foreground identity issues. She was loath also, for that matter, to address the topic of her gender, which writers, regardless, endlessly broached with her.

Within the ambit of the New York School—the diving board from which she launched, as she envisioned it<sup>9</sup> (with the troping to the fluid that ran deep with her)—Frankenthaler's being Jewish may have counted, if anything, as a plus. Some of the school's founding figures were Jewish—such as Mark Rothko, with whose work Frankenthaler's manifested at times a real affinity; and there was, too, what Max Kozloff termed that "old time Jewish sect called American art criticism."<sup>10</sup>

Being a woman was quite another matter, however. For a wealthy female born in 1928 who wished to make a mark, the available roles remained predominantly of a supporting kind: the networking role of the hostess, for instance. In Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, published in 1925, as the title character readies for a party she dwells on the perception that her motive is "to have famous people about her; great names"; and indeed the prime minister will attend her grand affair. But, muffling any social ambition, Clarissa Dalloway preferred to view her parties as an "offering"; and "She did think it mattered, her party," for "it was possible to say things" on such an occasion that "you couldn't say anyhow else."<sup>11</sup>

As for Frankenthaler, her renown as a hostess was legendary. Her *New York Times* obituary, no less, relayed an account by the British sculptor Anthony Caro of being welcomed to New York in 1959 by a dinner party for "some 100 guests," at which he got "seated between David Smith and the actress Hedy Lamarr."<sup>12</sup> The painter's most consequential party, however, was a 1950 gallery opening for a show of Bennington College graduates' artwork that she, a recent alumna, got tapped to organize. Seeking publicity, she cold-called a leading *New York Times* critic as well as Clement Greenberg to ask them to the opening. Greenberg accepted,

providing alcohol was served, and she recalled promising him "a lot of liquor," including "martinis and manhattans." Though a savvy enough twenty-one-year-old to know of Greenberg's stature, Frankenthaler did not pretend to have read his work. Neither did Greenberg pretend, once the event transpired, to have the least esteem for her painting.<sup>13</sup> But she was then a "delicious young morsel," as the painter Friedel Dzubas reminisced,<sup>14</sup> and—notwithstanding that Greenberg was bald and nearly twice her age, with a messy personal life and a short fuse—the two began a liaison that lasted five years.<sup>15</sup> Whatever genuine personal chemistry existed between them, gaining close proximity to an influential man then represented the most time-tested strategy for attaining visibility in the world for a straight woman of any class.

Among the unappealing attributes that can attach to the condition of being privileged is obliviousness to the full dimensions of the benefits that privilege entails. (Consider that old jibe that so-and-so 'was born on third base and thought he'd hit a triple.') So it was with Frankenthaler as regards the remarkable perquisites that followed from her tie to Greenberg. In her interview with Rose, the painter called it a point of honor that neither of them would ever use the other in the service of their careers. Yet, from one reply after the next to Rose's questions, it becomes blatantly clear that Frankenthaler's career must have taken another shape entirely were it not for the entree Greenberg supplied.<sup>16</sup> Not only did he introduce his new protégée to Pollock, taking her to his important 1950 Betty Parsons Gallery show and, afterward, repeatedly to his home and studio—a life-altering experience for her by all accounts<sup>17</sup>—but the couple regularly visited other galleries together besides. Frankenthaler followed Greenberg also, briefly, to the legendary Black Mountain College, which she found, however, too "dreary," because there was "no water" except a "swimming hole," and "Most of the people were dingy. The barracks were unspeakable." More successfully, he steered her to Hans Hofmann's Provincetown academy for some indoctrination into the verities of painting as both men perceived them. Soon thereafter a small painting by Frankenthaler that Greenberg displayed in his home caught the eye of Adolph Gottlieb, who selected her for a 'new talent' show. Other introductions to players of all kinds in the art world—including John Meyers when he was on the verge of opening the Tibor de Nagy gallery, which promptly took her into its stable—were made over regular dinner or drink dates and trips to The Club.<sup>18</sup>

Then there was the fabled trip through Nova Scotia, where Frankenthaler and Greenberg painted watercolor landscapes side by side, which led afterwards in her New York studio to the realization of the loosely Marin-esque *Mountains and Sea* (1952; Fig. 3). That a novice twenty-three-year-old painter could have the leading critical voice of the day come at once to her studio to assure her that her latest experiment was "terrific" and that she was "red hot," as Frankenthaler recalled it,<sup>19</sup> was strictly the stuff of pipe dreams, of course. And though the 1952 painting soon showed at Tibor to no acclaim, its breakthrough status got secured once Greenberg brought Kenneth Noland and Morris Louis—up-and-comers whom he had been nurturing—for a five-hour visit to Frankenthaler's



Fig. 3. Helen Frankenthaler, *Mountains and Sea* (1952), oil and charcoal on canvas, 86 3/8" x 117 1/4". Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, N.Y., on extended loan to the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

studio (in her absence).<sup>20</sup> Afterward, she accompanied Greenberg to their Washington, D.C. studios to discuss what was being made of her so-called soak-stain method, whereby dilute paint got deployed on unprimed canvas. And so "color-field" painting emerged and entered high-profile collections, framed by Greenberg as the due successor to the New York School. Further, Frankenthaler got positioned in historical narratives, unprecedentedly, as a founding *mother* for an avant-garde movement. But that coup came at a price; for her legacy would remain constrained (at least until recently<sup>21</sup>) by a defunct critical paradigm, no matter that she ultimately figured in Greenberg's writings just parenthetically, as a special case<sup>22</sup>—a mere "bridge between Pollock and what was possible," as Louis himself once indelibly put it, pointing toward the work of Noland and himself.<sup>23</sup> By the time Greenberg had occasion to publish on these figures, his relationship with Frankenthaler had deteriorated. He even assaulted her at a party, class privilege affording no warrant against domestic violence.<sup>24</sup>

Despite Greenberg's initial success at promoting color-field painting, in the course of the 1960s critical discourse in the United States turned increasingly toward artwork perceived as somehow more readily endued than painting with critical or political valences—especially art modalities that violated what

Greenberg had decreed as the necessary separation amongst media, such as the "specific objects" endorsed by Donald Judd, who was Frankenthaler's exact contemporary.<sup>25</sup> She began to look somewhat marginal within this milieu, regardless that she produced during the 1960s the best work of her career, in my estimation, as she adopted the acrylic paint that ideally suited her process; folded her drawing into her shape-making; and conjured an at times Matissean élan—as for example in the blithe *Interior Landscape* or *Small's Paradise* (Pl. 9), both of 1964. Not these works, however, but *Mountains and Sea* got enshrined as the vital instant of Frankenthaler's career. Art historians typically isolate a given interval or so within any artist's oeuvre as key, but in her case that interval could finally amount to but a single painting. Thus, Alison Rowley adjudges starkly that, "Art historically, Helen Frankenthaler's practice never has had much of a life after *Mountains and Sea*"<sup>26</sup>; and, regarding the artist's image as a bridge figure, Hudson quips that it "turned out to be a bridge to nowhere."<sup>27</sup>

That Frankenthaler got trapped beneath a Greenbergian bell jar (to switch up metaphors) was partly a factor of her emergence having been "co-extensive with the Greenberg effect," as Caroline Jones frames it,<sup>28</sup> but was no less a matter of her reluctance to leave. Late in her career she could



Fig. 4. Interior of Frankenthaler and Motherwell's Manhattan townhouse. Clipping from *House and Garden* (July 1969). Photo: Tom Yee. Helen Frankenthaler Foundation Archives, N.Y.

unabashedly affirm to Rowley, for instance, such an anachronistically Greenbergian tenet as: "The end of painting was with Noland's final chevrons."<sup>29</sup> Close in age to Frankenthaler, the erstwhile émigré Yayoi Kusama, by contrast, likewise made captivating extrapolations from Abstract Expressionist painting during the 1950s, absent Greenberg's support. But though from a wealthy family herself, Kusama had scant independent income, and she was impelled to scavenge some as she ventured alongside or ahead of a network of peers who were assaying performance, assemblage, Pop and other new strategies. Meantime, Frankenthaler began to question the counter-orthodox tactics deployed by such avant-gardists, while disdaining to confer membership in a "real" avant-garde to anyone following her own peer group. She began to complain, too, about a paucity of worthwhile art writing, advising her Yale University art students in 1970, for instance, to read especially those authors who favored her, and to abjure the art magazines.<sup>30</sup>

By her own account, Frankenthaler had been a favored child: used to being waited on, to having her way, and to extravagant praise; used, in short, to being center stage.<sup>31</sup> Faced as an adult with a critical climate increasingly indifferent, if not adverse to her, she would often endeavor to stage-manage

a more flattering reception. More so than is typical with artists generally, those who devoted catalogues or monographs to her—such as Frank O'Hara, Rose, and Eugene Goossen—were friendly admirers, or were handpicked by her, such as John Elderfield.<sup>32</sup> But the critics or journalists assigned to cover her were less predictably sympathetic. And, whether avowed allies or not, writers did tend to subject her to (overtly or tacitly) sexist treatment, as Lisa Saltzman and others have discussed.<sup>33</sup> In general, Frankenthaler attempted either to woo those assigned to write about her, or to spar with them, or both. Thus, for instance, in 1966 she evidently extracted major revisions to a review by B.H. Friedman, initially by appealing directly to him—for he was a friend, whom she and her first husband Robert Motherwell had earlier driven in their Bentley to a pheasant dinner at a swank Greenwich restaurant—but finally by going over his head to *Art News's* lead editor.<sup>34</sup> Frankenthaler's fully staffed Upper East Side townhouse intermittently received journalists of varying stripes (such as from *Women's Wear Daily*, which dubbed it "a curiously snob mixture of Victorian, modern and country"<sup>35</sup>) (Fig. 4). At her studio, the "arched double portal...big enough to let in a coronation carriage," plus the splits of French champagne awaiting favored visitors impressed author Eleanor Munro.<sup>36</sup> And at the Connecticut house run "like a grand hotel" that Frankenthaler owned with her investment-banker second husband,<sup>37</sup> *New York Times* feature writer Deborah Solomon stayed in 1989 in a "pretty guest room overlooking Long Island Sound and equipped with little niceties" and partook of a lobster supper (*female* lobster, for the roe).<sup>38</sup> Years earlier, Dore Ashton had made out better still, having received an artwork from Frankenthaler upon issuing a favorable review.<sup>39</sup>

Frankenthaler did of course receive a quotient of admiring press. Some style-page writers fawned over her coif by Kenneth, her Chanel handbags, and her designer outfits. But numerous other writers upbraided the artist for her high-handed attempts at controlling their encounters. Thus, the acerbic *Women's Wear Daily* reporter described in 1969 how she had demanded to direct every photograph taken (full-face only; never profile); questioned every question she got posed; and required that "every sentence be read back, rephrased, rewritten."<sup>40</sup> Decades later, *People Weekly's* reporter described undergoing a "Monty-Pythesque satire of an interview" involving pre-typed questions and answers read mechanically aloud.<sup>41</sup> Whether adulatory or not, the prevailing account of Frankenthaler that emerged in the general press was of a born and bred socialite—a patrician, at times imperious woman concerned with protocol and appearances; with home decor and entertaining; and with enjoying the finer things in life, as her wealthy peers defined them. Yet this particular socialite was the only soignée woman at, say, the 1969 gala opening of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's ambitious "New York Painting and Sculpture" show to actually have work displayed therein, and would attain in 1989 the utmost honor—then nearly unheard of for a woman—of a full Museum of Modern Art retrospective.

The text of Frankenthaler's 1989 retrospective catalogue (produced not by MoMA, but by the show's originating

institution, the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth) was throughout underpinned, or constrained, by her own dictates on her work. But curator E.A. Carmean gainsaid at the outset any presumption that the literature on her must be “largely... Greenbergian.”<sup>42</sup> Departures from Greenbergian orthodoxy included ongoing attention to poetic suggestions of imagery in her art—suggestions at times encouraged, at times deflected by the artist. Frankenthaler was long intrigued by the specter of hidden imagery in Pollock’s work, and she enjoyed the child’s-game-like aspect of this type of diversion: find the swan (in her own *Swan Lake I* of 1961, for instance), or the fox, or what have you. (She titled some paintings for juvenile pastimes, too, and her earlier works, such as *Eden* of 1956, can betray child-art-like formulae—all of which may betoken the cherished view she held of her early childhood.) A Greenbergian emphasis on painting’s necessary flatness would remain throughout ingrained in accounts of Frankenthaler’s tactics, however—though she herself could complicate the notion, in part through a Greenbergian resort to the exemplar of Cubist space.<sup>43</sup> What tends to follow from the banishment of illusionistic space, in this episteme, is a bid to recover space through a lateral extension of the picture plane. As she saw it, Frankenthaler’s best work was big work<sup>44</sup> that required a lot of real estate to execute and to show. Whether in museums or collectors’ homes, such real estate came at a premium, as did (and do) the outsize paintings in question. Some apartments had initially to be altered to accommodate large canvases, as Lane Relyea recently noted while tracing the efforts of ‘shelter magazines’ to pitch the new look of an expansive canvas in an expansive interior.<sup>45</sup> Frankenthaler’s clipping files contain images, for instance from *House and Garden*, of her work installed in various stylish homes (Fig. 5).

Frankenthaler’s paintings have at times been derided as, for example, “boardroom” art.<sup>46</sup> But when Relyea alleges that her work’s “goal” was “precisely to go well with the couch,” he means instead to boldly redeem her legacy by invoking present-day interests in reclaiming the decorative—as evinced, say, by Jorge Pardo or Andrea Zittel. ‘Second-wave’ feminists importantly anticipated that revaluation, however, with Lynda Benglis, for one, devoting a productive career to the interrogation and re-imagining of the decorative, as in her outlandish, poured pigmented latex *Odalisque* of 1969, subtitled *Hey, Hey, Frankenthaler*—a salute the latter disdained to return. In Frankenthaler’s lexicon as in Greenberg’s before her, the term “decorative” was primarily a slur.<sup>47</sup> Her own account of her goals turned almost invariably on the concept of the beautiful, which she often linked (in the Keats-ian way) to truth. When deployed by female artists, aspirations for beauty came of course heavily freighted or pre-depreciated, as it were. “Art must be beautiful; artist must be beautiful,” chanted a vamping Marina Abramovic in a 1975 video by that name. But in view of Frankenthaler’s conventionally glamorous persona—which she could willingly commercialize, once touting that pricey status symbol, the Rolex watch, for instance (Fig. 6)—her professed quest for beauty became the more susceptible to mundane or belittling responses. “Her paintings, as much as the woman who created



Fig. 5. Photo of Yann Weymouth’s New York living room. Magazine clipping from *House and Garden* (Jan. 1970). Helen Frankenthaler Foundation Archives. N.Y.

them, seem intent on providing worldly pleasure,” observed Solomon in 1989, adding, “Her lesser paintings...fit in a bit too comfortably with the décor.”<sup>48</sup> A few years later, *New York Times* critic Holland Cotter commented that, “Because Ms. Frankenthaler works on a heroic scale, the work has tended to look ‘important,’ though in fact it got by largely on elegance and seemingly effortless charm.”<sup>49</sup>

As I see it, Frankenthaler’s art shows scant engrossment with the idioms of the decorative. Her lesser work is neither merely, nor too, decorative or beautiful, as her detractors would often have it: Call it instead formulaic, or facile, or uninspired. (For that matter, Frankenthaler herself once acknowledged there being aspects of her practice where she ran the risk of proving “facile” and “seducible by my own talent.”<sup>50</sup>) And her successful work—say the luminous, poetic, playful *The Bay* of 1963 (Pl. 10)—is outright beautiful, just as she claimed. She “chanced beauty in the simplest and most forthright way,” declared poet James Schuyler in 1960.<sup>51</sup> A few years later, however, Donald Judd invoked Bonnard in characterizing what he called Frankenthaler’s “softness,” while adding that her work would be “more profound if it were also hard.”<sup>52</sup> And while such gender-loaded terms might be expected of Judd, Frankenthaler did persistently get “pegged as...a purveyor of prettiness on a



Fig. 6. Rolex advertisement. Clipping from *New Yorker* (1989, n.d.). Helen Frankenthaler Foundation Archives, N.Y.

grand scale, a sort of Park Avenue Boucher," as Barry Schwabsky summarized it late in her career.<sup>53</sup>

Over the course of Frankenthaler's professional lifetime, critics came increasingly to view the pleasing of viewers through a pursuit of beauty as, of itself, an unduly limited aesthetic undertaking, and one perhaps tantamount to marketplace pandering; a comparison to Boucher could not, in this climate, be mistaken for a compliment. "The role of pleasure in modern art has itself been a contested subject...—exactly whose pleasure does art represent, and for what audience?" observes Kenneth Silver, while invoking "the question of whether pleasure of any kind is commensurate with art's sterner demands." Adds Silver: "One way to cope with the pleasure problem is to deny it, a venerable tactic in art criticism."<sup>54</sup> Thus, for instance, Matisse's early twentieth century ambition—to create "art which could be ... for the business-man as well as the man of letters, for example, a soothing, calming influence on the mind, something like a good armchair"—came to be reflexively rebutted by his would-be defenders.<sup>55</sup> Viewers continued to luxuriate in those 'armchairs,' of course, regardless that only successful businessmen, or those of like class (including for a time the Motherwells), could acquire them.<sup>56</sup> Pleasure, in its infinite variety, has remained inextricable to art. And while Benjamin Buchloh, for one, can freely deride artists who produce "objects of desire for speculation with [the] surplus capital" of "card-carrying members of the international art-world party,"<sup>57</sup> the paintings of his own favorite, Gerhard Richter, may answer also to that description: They circulate through a marketplace continuous with, if more globalized, crass, and cynical than the one where

Frankenthaler's art took hold. 'High' art mostly remains affordable only to the present-day equivalent of Boucher's aristocracy—to the 'one-percent,' in today's vernacular. Art institutions and the art historical field remain accordingly, in so many ways, class and race-bound. What separated Frankenthaler from most other artists who succeed in the marketplace was that she all along owned as her birthright her membership in the collector class: "My life is square and bourgeois," she affirmed in 1989—though *haute* bourgeois is more like it. And when she described what constituted successful art of any era, she could casually speak in marketplace terms of a desire, "if I have the cash" to "buy and hang [it] up."<sup>58</sup>

Critics nowadays (myself included) mostly continue to privilege work that is somehow endowed with political 'teeth,' which were never evident in Frankenthaler's art. She passed her youth during the Great Depression and World War II—including, as someone of German-Jewish heritage, through revelations of the Holocaust; and her earlier adulthood coincided with the Cold War and the activist 1960s. But due in part, perhaps, to the insulation afforded by her wealth (as some suggest), Frankenthaler seems never to have assumed a public political identity, unless we may count, say, her unapologetic attendance at a Reagan White House party.<sup>59</sup> In her mind, moreover, as she plainly put it, "art always implies elitism."<sup>60</sup> The beautiful was "something moving to someone who really knows," she declared in 1961, adding, "there are relatively few people like this," people who "have seen enough and know enough.... And you become a snob about it," she admitted. "Or you try to be very polite about it."<sup>61</sup>

Frankenthaler saw the pursuit of beauty as apart from politics: so she told Hilton Kramer in 1992. But then she mustered a more complex idea than usual when affirming a self-evident (to her) artistic aim. "When art is really beautiful and moving, it brings with it not only growing pleasure but also a sense of truth. This truth, this reality—something so spiritual and unnameable, unprovable—is and has always been a political force in itself."<sup>62</sup> Such a claim may elicit a cynical reaction, as it did from Rowley: "Insulated by wealth and privilege... Frankenthaler was free to pursue the 'unnameable, unprovable' truths of painting undisturbed."<sup>63</sup> But I admit to being more moved by her avowal. I recall Jacques Rancière's reminder that what Greenberg had, at bottom, sought was "a way of separating art radically from politics in order to preserve its political potential."<sup>64</sup> "Aesthetics entails a politics of its own," Rancière argues further; and "The political act of art is to save the heterogeneous sensible that is the heart of the autonomy of art and its power of emancipation."<sup>65</sup> Key among art's many roles, in short, is that of bringing a public to its senses, a role it may perform—pace Frankenthaler—not only for an elite. •

**Anna C. Chave** is Professor Emerita at The Graduate Center, CUNY. She has published extensively on issues of identity and interpretation concerning figures ranging from early Picasso and O'Keeffe to Pollock and Wilke; revisionist readings of Minimalism, and monographs on Rothko and Brancusi (1991 and 1993).

## Notes

This paper is a slightly revised version of a talk delivered at a Frankenthaler symposium organized by Rob Slifken and Pepe Karmel at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, October 23, 2015.

1. "Heiress to a New Tradition," *Time*, March 28, 1969, 64.
2. Frankenthaler, cited in Emile de Antonio and Mitch Tuchman, *Painters Painting: A Candid History of the Modern Art Scene, 1940-1970* (New York: Abbeville, 1984), 85. This book, and the eponymous film by de Antonio that preceded it, incorporates interviews with various artists (including Frankenthaler) said to have been conducted in 1970; *ibid.*, 9.
3. Suzanne Hudson, "A Comma in the Place Where a Period Might Have Gone," in Katy Siegel, ed., *"The heroine Paint": After Frankenthaler* (New York: Gagosian Gallery, 2015), 232-33.
4. The term "impulsive" may be found in Irving Sandler, *The New York School: The Painters and Sculptors of the Fifties* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 67. For the term "impetuous," see Jean Lipman and Cleve Gray, "The Amazing Inventiveness of Women Painters," *Cosmopolitan*, Oct. 1961, 66 (reproduced in Siegel, ed., *"The heroine Paint,"* 83).
5. "I throw out I can't tell you how many paintings a year. I mean for every one that I show there are many, many in shreds in garbage cans"; oral history interview with Helen Frankenthaler, 1968, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Hereafter, Oral history interview, AAA.
6. "Heiress to a New Tradition," 64.
7. Roberta Brandes Gratz, "Woman in the News: Helen Frankenthaler," *New York Post*, Feb. 22, 1969.
8. Oral history interview, AAA. Although she attended Brearley for a time, Frankenthaler ultimately graduated instead from the more liberal Dalton school.
9. When Rose asked Frankenthaler how she initially responded to Pollock's paintings, she recalled that she "knew that this was my message, that this was a, what do you call it? What do you dive off from?" Rose suggested, "A diving board?" and Frankenthaler answered, "Yes." Oral history interview, AAA.
10. This phrase, which Kozloff coined in an April 1976 *Artforum* essay ("Jewish Art and the Modernist Jeopardy"), was recouped by Mark Godfrey as the title for his own essay in Norman L. Kleeblatt, ed., *Action/Abstraction: Pollock, de Kooning, and American Art, 1940-1976* (New York: Jewish Museum, and Yale Univ. Press, 2008), 247ff.
11. Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 1925 (repr. San Diego: Harcourt, ca. 1981), 121, 122, 168, 171.
12. Grace Glueck, "Helen Frankenthaler, Abstract Painter Who Shaped a Movement, Dies at 83," *New York Times*, Dec. 27, 2011. When made the subject of a documentary—Perry Miller Adato's 1978 "Frankenthaler—Toward A New Climate"—the artist seemed to relish performing the hostess role for the camera, while a liveried maid tended the guests around her table.
13. Oral history interview, AAA.
14. In Adato, "Frankenthaler." Dzubas and Frankenthaler shared a studio for a time in the early 1950s; see "Chronology," in E.A. Carmean, *Helen Frankenthaler: A Paintings Retrospective* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, with Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, 1989), 96.
15. For details, see Florence Rubinfeld, *Clement Greenberg: A Life* (New York: Scribner, 1997).
16. Oral history interview, AAA.
17. See for instance Larry Rivers's vivid account of Pollock's impact on Frankenthaler and himself at this early juncture, cited in B.H. Friedman, *Jackson Pollock: Energy Made Visible* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972), 221.
18. Oral history interview, AAA.
19. de Antonio and Tuchman, *Painters Painting*, 78.
20. Rubinfeld, *Clement Greenberg*, 181.
21. The boldest attempt to date to reposition Frankenthaler is that made by Siegel, ed., *"The heroine Paint."*
22. Frankenthaler and Paul Jenkins were mentioned in parentheses, paired as "special cases," in a 1960 essay on "Louis and Noland," repr. in John O'Brian, ed., *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism: Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957-1969*, vol. 4 (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1993), 95.
23. Louis, cited originally in James M. Truitt, "Art-Arid D.C. Harbors touted 'New' Painters," *Washington Post*, Dec. 21, 1961.
24. Two instances of Greenberg's violent treatment of Frankenthaler are narrated in Rubinfeld, *Clement Greenberg*, 198.
25. See Judd's canonical 1965 "Specific Objects" essay, repr. in *Donald Judd: Complete Writings 1959-1975* (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1975), 181-89.
26. Alison Rowley, *Helen Frankenthaler: Painting History, Writing Painting* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 129.
27. "...or at least to nowhere beyond itself," Hudson, "A Comma in the Place Where a Period Might Have Gone," 226.
28. Caroline A. Jones, *Eyesight Alone: Clement Greenberg's Modernism and the Bureaucratization of the Senses* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2005), 306.
29. Rowley, *Helen Frankenthaler*, cites the artist from an interview Rowley conducted in 1998, 75.
30. Transcript of lecture at Yale Univ., Jan. 20, 1970, Helen Frankenthaler Foundation. The Foundation has stipulated that the immediate context for the word cited here must be provided, as follows: "And what struck me—and this is another thing; I'm glad you brought it up—what strikes me more and more is how damn good everybody's getting. In other words, umpteen people can make umpteen gorgeous, hangable, salable, beautiful avant-garde pictures. And I'm putting that all in quotes, meaning they don't come off at all. They're all pastiche. They're hideously beautiful. And it's gotten so knowing that the whole real avant-garde is threatened or has jumped out the window."
31. Frankenthaler told numerous interviewers how her "parents...thought I was the most wonderful, gifted, complicated, hopeful creature in the world. I mean my father would walk behind me with my mother and say to her sometimes audibly to me, but she would tell me about this years later: 'Watch that child. She is fantastic.' And I think in a way I was fantastic." Oral history interview, AAA. "If you have a gift, it is your halo and your cross [...] I was a special child, and I felt myself to be. [...] I had the genes...intelligence... talent... the 'gift'"; cited in Eleanor Munro, *Originals: American Women Artists* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 210-11 (unbracketed ellipses as in original).
32. Regarding her inviting Elderfield to write a monograph about her, to be published by Harry N. Abrams, see Amei Wallach, "Living Color at MoMA: Frankenthaler in Retrospect," *New York Newsday*, June 5, 1989.
33. Lisa Saltzman, "Reconsidering the Stain: On Gender and the Body in Helen Frankenthaler's Painting," in Norma Brode and Mary D. Garrard, eds., *Reclaiming Female Agency: Feminist Art History After Postmodernism* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2005), 372-83.
34. B.H. Friedman, "Art World Details: Journal Excerpts," *Grand Street* 51 New York (Winter 1995). See excerpts of diary entries from Feb. 19, 1961 (146) and June 8, 1966 (149), where Friedman described himself as "shocked" by the "changes in content" that Frankenthaler secured: "I understood that Helen had chosen careerism over friendship."

35. Angel Cuccio, "The Fashions: Frankenthaler," *Women's Wear Daily*, March 28, 1969.
36. Munro, *Originals*, 207, 210.
37. "Ms. Frankenthaler and Mr. Motherwell were divorced in 1971. In 1994 she married Stephen M. DuBrul Jr., an investment banker who had headed the Export-Import Bank during the Ford administration," reported Glueck, "Helen Frankenthaler, Abstract Painter."
38. Deborah Solomon, "Artful Survivor," *New York Times Magazine*, May 14, 1989.
39. Rubinfeld, *Clement Greenberg*, 274.
40. Cuccio, "The Fashions." Remarkably, the impulse to discipline or micro-manage those writing on Frankenthaler seems not to have died with the artist. In seeking permission to publish some unpublished statements by her, I submitted a few brief excerpts from the present text to the Frankenthaler Foundation, whose director, Elizabeth Smith, responded in part by re-drafting some of my prose and asking me to substitute her versions, whereby, for instance, a (more saintly) Frankenthaler would not have "complained," but would instead have "voiced her opinion"; email communication to the author, Jan. 8, 2016.
41. Susan Reed, "Arts," *People Weekly Magazine*, Dec. 4, 1989, 117.
42. Carmean, *Helen Frankenthaler*, 7.
43. Frankenthaler discussed the importance to her of Cubist space in, for instance, de Antonio and Tuchman, *Painters Painting*, 75.
44. "I feel my best pictures generally are big pictures," transcript of Frankenthaler lecture at Skidmore College, August 1973, Helen Frankenthaler Foundation.
45. Lane Relyea, "The Apollonian Domestic," in Siegel, ed., "The heroine Paint," 122.
46. "The *New Yorker* has dismissed her work as 'boardroom' art, then groused about her 'high-priestess airs," reported Reed, "Arts," 117.
47. For instance: "'Color doesn't work unless it works in space,' she [Frankenthaler] says, launching one of her favorite subjects. 'Color alone is just decoration—you might as well be making a shower curtain'; cited in Solomon, "Artful Survivor."
48. Ibid.
49. Holland Cotter, "Art in Review," *New York Times*, Nov. 27, 1992.
50. See "Helen Frankenthaler: Interview with Henry Geldzahler (1965)," repr. in Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz, eds., *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1996), 31.
51. Cited in Sandler, *The New York School*, 67.
52. Judd, "In the Galleries," *Arts*, April 1963, repr. in *Donald Judd: Complete Writings*, 83.
53. Barry Schwabsky, "Art Review: Deeper, Not Sadder: A Painter Looks Inward," *New York Times*, Feb. 14, 1999.
54. Kenneth E. Silver, *Making Paradise: Art, Modernity, and the Myth of the French Riviera* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 17, 18.
55. Henri Matisse, "Notes of a Painter," 1908, repr. in Jack D. Flam, *Matisse on Art* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1978), 38. Flam's express concern about this passage may be taken as typical, or symptomatic: "Unfortunately the phrase 'something like a good armchair', which has been quoted so often, tends to give the impression that Matisse desired from painting merely a means of relaxation or of entertainment—in short that his ideals were somewhat superficial. Matisse, however, does not advocate an art of superficial decoration or entertainment, but states his belief in art as a medium for the elevation of the spirit..."; in *ibid.*, 34.
56. A cut paper work and a drawing by Matisse appear in photos of the Motherwells' townhouse published in *House and Garden*, July 1969.
57. Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Venice 2015: Biennale on the Brink," *Artforum* 54, no.1 (Sept. 2015), 309.
58. Transcript of lecture at Yale Univ., Jan. 20, 1970, Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, 21. The Foundation has stipulated that the immediate context for the words cited here must be provided, as follows: "But I can also feel, if I hit WQXR and Verdi or Mozart or Hayden, oh, God, that's divine! Listen to it. You know. Well, I still have the same feelings. It's still the same piece of music, played angelically, in the same way that I can see a great Quattrocento picture in the Fogg or the National Gallery, or an Impressionist or a Pollock or a Morris Louis. In other words, it's the experience and the feeling and the beauty of it still, for me, that I want to be surrounded by. Or if I have the cash, would buy and hang up. Now, I don't want to hang up that rather ugly lamp, no matter who's signed it or what group made it. Now, is that my problem? Or is there a dimension that is involved in something totally different? ...But if I buy a work of art, I still think I want a beautiful picture. And certainly, if I'm making something, I want to make a beautiful picture, I myself." (N.B. In context, it emerges that the reference to the "ugly lamp" is to work by artists such as Dan Flavin.)
59. "The kitchen of her town house is filled with photographs that show her socializing with people ranging from old artist-buddies like the late David Smith to Princess Diana and President Reagan. ('Some of my friends criticized me for going to the White House, but it was a great party,' she says"); in Solomon, "Artful Survivor."
60. Transcript of Frankenthaler lecture at Bard College, 1977, Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, 12. The Foundation required that a fuller version of the statement cited here be provided, as follows: "Well, unfortunately, art always implies elitism... By elitism, I mean that there aren't many good ones [i.e., works of art or artists]. And elitism probably involves people who say, I choose this and I think it's good and I think it's right... But you have to be right for you. Otherwise, you are everything to everyone, and very often, nothing to yourself. Which doesn't mean that we all shouldn't... be charitable, or encourage anybody to try anything. I mean, that's giving and social and democratic, and hurray. But I'm very bad at political science."
61. Dec. 1961 interview with Frankenthaler (edited in part by her), in David Sylvester, *Interviews with American Artists* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2001), 105. In mentioning people who "have seen enough and know enough," Frankenthaler may be implying in part people privileged, as she herself was, to tour extensively through European art collections, including in an era when the cost of such travel remained prohibitive for most.
62. Hilton Kramer, "An Interview with Helen Frankenthaler," *Partisan Review* 61, no. 2 (1994), 241. (The interview in question is said to have taken place at the New York Public Library on Dec. 8, 1992.) "[P]olitical movements during the sixties did not impinge in any way on my concerns as an artist when I was working in my studio... When I leave my studio of course these might be my concerns," hedged Frankenthaler, adding that she wanted her message to emerge "in aesthetic not political terms... Recently, that view seems to be most unpopular"; in *ibid.*, 243.
63. Rowley, *Helen Frankenthaler*, 111.
64. Jacques Rancière, cited in Peter Hallward, "Politics and Aesthetics: An Interview," trans. Forbes Morlock, *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 8, no. 2 (August 2003), 206.
65. Jacques Rancière, "Contemporary Art and the Politics of Aesthetics," 2009, repr. in Zoya Kocur and Simon Leung, eds., *Theory in Contemporary Art Since 1985*, 2nd ed. (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 76, 78. "What could be the ultimate paradox of the politics of aesthetics is that perhaps by inventing new forms of aesthetic distance or indifference, art today can help frame... new political communities of sense"; in *ibid.*, 86.





Pl. 9. Helen Frankenthaler,  
*Small's Paradise* (1964),  
acrylic on canvas,  
100" x 93 5/8".  
National Museum of  
American Art,  
Smithsonian Institution,  
Washington, D.C.  
Gift of George L. Erion.



Pl. 10. Helen Frankenthaler,  
*The Bay* (1963),  
acrylic on canvas,  
80 3/4" x 81 3/4".  
Detroit Institute of Arts.  
Gift of Dr. and Mrs.  
Hilbert H. DeLawter.