

# Helen Frankenthaler

Born 1928, New York, New York, U.S.; died Darien, Connecticut, U.S., 2011



**Helen Frankenthaler** American, 1928–2011. Born in Manhattan, New York, in 1928, Helen Frankenthaler grew up visiting museums like the Metropolitan Museum of Art and going on summer trips to the countryside. She decided as a teenager that she wanted to become an artist and studied art with the painter Rufino Tamayo when she was fifteen years old. In the early 1950s, Frankenthaler met many famous artists working in New York City, including Jackson Pollock. Inspired by Pollock's work, she began experimenting with new ways to make paintings by pouring thinned paint and letting the colors soak into the canvas. She is associated with the Color Field Movement, a style that began in the late 1940s and emphasized the expressive power of paintings constructed primarily out of large fields of color. Throughout her life, Frankenthaler experimented with different processes and forms of art-making—from sculpture and ceramics to stage sets and costumes she designed for the ballet.



Helen Frankenthaler, *Interior Landscape*, 1964

Frankenthaler made this large painting by pouring watered-down acrylic paint in large forms onto the canvas and letting them seep in and stain the canvas. Features of the landscape and physical spaces from the artist's own life often served as inspiration. Frankenthaler referred to this work, along with others from this time, as "interiors" saying, "They are things inside of things."

## Fun Fact!

Helen Frankenthaler developed the "soak-stain" method—a technique of pouring diluted paint on her canvases so the pigment soaked into the fabric and created stains of color.

## Explore

Describe the colors in this work. Do you see more warm colors, like red, orange, and yellow, or cool colors like blue, green, and purple? Do you see any analogous color groupings? Analogous colors are those near each other on the color wheel, such as blue, blue-green, green, and yellow.

Describe the shapes you see in this artwork. Do you see geometric shapes, such as squares, rectangles, or triangles? Do you see organic shapes, or shapes that remind you of forms you might find in nature, like leaves or clouds?

How would you describe the mood of this picture—happy, sad, calm, excited? What do you see that makes you say that?

Look at the title of this work. Does knowing the title change your understanding or appreciation of this work of art? If so, how?

# Create

Though Frankenthaler's works are nonspecific, the colors and shapes evoke different moods and associations which are often tied to nature.

Write a cinquain poem that expresses the mood or associations you see in this work.

The word "cinquain" comes from the French word *cinq*, which means "five." A cinquain poem has five lines in the following pattern:

- Line 1: one word
- Line 2: two words
- Line 3: three words
- Line 4: four words
- Line 5: one word

While there are no specific rules about writing a cinquain other than it must have five lines and the correct word count, below is a suggestion for writing your poem.

- Line 1: one word that describes your overall impression of the work
- Line 2: two words that describe your overall impression
- Line 3: three action words about the work
- Line 4: four words that express the mood or feeling of the work
- Line 5: one synonym, or similar word, to the word used in Line 1 of your cinquain

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Front cover image: Helen Frankenthaler, *Interior Landscape*, 1964 (detail); collection SFMOMA, gift of the Women's Board; 2021 Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, Inc. / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

For more information about this work, check out [sfmoma.org/artwork/68.52/](https://sfmoma.org/artwork/68.52/).



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