

Upcoming Exhibition at Bowdoin College Museum of Art Showcases Groundbreaking Work of Helen Frankenthaler and Jo Sandman

Experimental works break through the Abstract Expressionism movement

Brunswick, Maine, August 16, 2022—This fall the Bowdoin College Museum of Art will present *Helen Frankenthaler and Jo Sandman: Without Limits*, a focused exhibition highlighting the groundbreaking work of two pioneering artists whose early training grew out of the Abstract Expressionist movement. Drawn from recent gifts by the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation and the artist Jo Sandman, the show will feature ten editioned prints and eight related proofs donated by the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation as part of their “Frankenthaler Prints Initiative” for university-affiliated museums, highlighting the artist’s experimentation with screen printing, lithography, etching, and Mixografia. Nine works given by Sandman showcase her innovative folded fabric drawings, collages, and mixed media pieces. The exhibition will be on view September 15, 2022, to March 15, 2023.

While Frankenthaler and Sandman were not personally or professionally connected, the two came of age artistically in similar circumstances. Just three years apart in age, they each forged new creative pathways, breaking away from Abstract Expressionism and moving into revolutionary styles of art. Frankenthaler, while never abandoning painting, embraced ground-breaking printmaking, and Sandman turned to process and conceptualism.

“It is fascinating to trace the paths of Helen Frankenthaler and Jo Sandman. Their upbringing, education, and training in the Abstract Expressionist style were analogous, but their artistic careers went in different directions. They pushed beyond the constraints of painting, not abandoning the medium, but advancing into exciting experimentation,” said Anne Collins Goodyear, co-director of the museum. “We hope visitors discover something new about both Frankenthaler and Sandman, two remarkable artists who refused to be defined by inherited conventions.”

Frankenthaler’s works in the exhibition include *Sanguine Mood* (1971), which incorporates pochoir (stencil) and silkscreen, together with eight proofs of the piece. Exposed to the creative process, viewers can trace the artist’s experimentation with the print’s orientation and the placement and saturation of color before she finalized the vibrant edition. Other techniques evident in works on view by Frankenthaler include woodcut, different methods of etching, and lithography. These works are contrasted with objects by Sandman, such as two folded fabric drawings, which used dry cleaning presses to create crisp edges in Belgian linen and cotton duck to create marks without using pigment. Also present are works by Sandman using paint-splattered drop cloths, roofing tar, copper wire, and interior insulation foil as media.

Through their enthusiastic experimentation, Frankenthaler and Sandman encouraged their audiences to explore new directions, ask new questions, and challenge the status quo. Through their juxtaposition, the works of Frankenthaler and Sandman demonstrate the creative potential available in the transformation of artistic paradigms.

Helen Frankenthaler

Helen Frankenthaler (1928 – 2011) grew up in New York, and her early life was shaped by her relationship with her close-knit family and her education at Bennington College. After college, she briefly attended the Provincetown school of Hans Hofmann on the recommendation of the influential critic Clement Greenberg. In 1950, her painting *Beach* (1950) was featured in the exhibition *Fifteen Unknowns: Selected by the Artists of the Kootz Gallery*. Her first solo exhibition followed in 1951, at New York's Tibor de Nagy Gallery, and that year she was also included in *9th St. Exhibition of Paintings and Sculpture*, a landmark exhibition.

In 1952 Frankenthaler applied thinned paint directly onto unprimed canvas laid on the studio floor, using her “soak-stain” technique, creating *Mountains and Sea*. It was a breakthrough for American abstraction and was immediately influential for the artists who later formed the Color Field school of painting, including Morris Louis and Kenneth Noland.

Frankenthaler was regularly included in exhibitions around the world. She won first prize in painting at the Première Biennale de Paris in 1959, and in 1966 she represented the United States in the 33rd Venice Biennale, with Ellsworth Kelly, Roy Lichtenstein, and Jules Olitski. In 1960, New York's Jewish Museum hosted her first major museum exhibition, and her second followed in 1969 at the Whitney Museum of American Art, touring in Europe after.

Frankenthaler experimented tirelessly throughout her long career. In addition to producing unique paintings on canvas and paper, she worked in a wide range of media, including ceramics, sculpture, tapestry, and especially printmaking. She was significant to the mid-century “print renaissance” among American abstract painters, and she is renowned for her woodcuts. Frankenthaler's openness to experimentation—particularly her use of raw canvas to create her pathbreaking color field paintings from the 1950s forward—appears to have provided a critical guide for Sandman.

Jo Sandman

Jo Sandman, also close to her family, grew up outside of Boston, went to college at Brandeis, and made her way to Black Mountain College in the summer of 1951, a year before graduation. The burgeoning artist was exposed to many significant creatives at the school, including Robert Rauschenberg, Cy Twombly, David Tudor, and Robert Motherwell. She later traveled to Provincetown to attend Hofmann's school in 1952, following him to New York to continue her studies with him that fall. She would remain for close to a year, during which time she served as the part-time registrar at Hofmann's school and studied with Robert Motherwell—Frankenthaler's future husband—at Hunter College. Sandman became a member of The Club, an eighth street loft that welcomed free-thinking avant-garde artists and musicians, continuing her education outside of the classroom. She received an MFA from Berkeley in 1954, training in the principles of Abstract Expressionism.

Originally schooled as a painter, Sandman's work expanded to explore innovative drawing techniques, experimental sculpture and installation, and photography. Sandman's work is included in the collections of the Addison Gallery of American Art, Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the Rhode Island School of Design, among others. She has been awarded a Massachusetts Artist Fellowship, a Mary Ingram Bunting Fellowship at Harvard, a Boston Society of Architects Citation for

Excellence, and an IAAC Award for Best Mid Career Show in Boston. She has also received grants from the NEA and the Rockefeller Foundation. She has taught at Wellesley College, The Art Institute of Chicago, and Massachusetts College of Art and Design, as well as at many visiting artist posts.

Bowdoin College Museum of Art

The Bowdoin College Museum of Art is the cornerstone of the arts and culture at Bowdoin. One of the earliest collegiate art collections in the nation, it came into being through the 1811 bequest of James Bowdoin III of 79 European paintings and a portfolio of 140 master drawings. The collection has been expanded through the generosity of the Bowdoin family, alumni and friends, and now numbers more than 20,000 objects, including paintings, sculpture, works on paper, decorative arts and artifacts from prehistory to the present from civilizations around the world. www.bowdoin.edu

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