



ART TALK

PIGMENTS OF HER IMAGINATION

On view at Gagosian in New York, Helen Frankenthaler's little-seen late work reveals a mature talent exploring new techniques.

HELEN Frankenthaler is best known for her soak-stain paintings—raw canvases saturated with washes of paint that helped birth the color-field movement. But a cache of late paintings and works on paper is shining a new light on her oeuvre in *Drawing Within Nature: Paintings From the 1990s*, at Gagosian's 541 West 24th Street

space in Manhattan through April 15. Frankenthaler, who died at 83 in 2011, made these works in her 60s. She kept them for herself, and some have never been shown.

"I think people will be surprised by how densely painted some of them are," says John Elderfield, chief curator emeritus of painting and sculpture at New York's Museum of Modern Art, who is updating his Frankenthaler monograph with a new chapter on this period. Some also show traces of unorthodox tools, like a rake, having been dragged through the pigment. "If you went to a dinner party at Helen's, you didn't take a bottle of wine, you [took] syringes or squeegees," he says. "She had this whole mass of different ways of moving paint."

At the time, Frankenthaler had just had her 1989 MoMA retrospective—one of the few the museum had ever given to a woman—and it had not been well received, in part because, Elderfield says, "people were repeating the old thing about softly painted pictures looking feminine." With these new paintings, he says, "it was almost as if she was saying, 'I'm going to show you something very different.'"

The exhibition also includes large works on paper, like *Flirt* (shown), made on giant tables that Frankenthaler built so she could stop working on the floor so much. Once asked why she'd changed, she was quoted as saying, "I no longer stoop to conquer." *Gagosian.com* —Carol Kino