

For Immediate Release

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NYU's Grey Art Museum Highlights the Role of Music in Helen Frankenthaler's Prints

Making Music: Helen Frankenthaler Prints from the New York University Art Collection
September 9, 2026–July 3, 2027

The exhibition examines the pivotal Abstract Expressionist's career-long engagement with the performing arts across her printmaking practice



Helen Frankenthaler, *La Sardana*, 1987. One color sugar-lift aquatint with hand additions in gouache, working proof II, 25 x 35 1/4 in. Grey Art Museum, New York University Art Collection. Gift of the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, 2023.9.9.8. © 2026 Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, Inc. / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / Ediciones Polígrafa, S.A., Barcelona. Photo: Thomas Barratt, courtesy Helen Frankenthaler Foundation

(NEW YORK, NY, July 22, 2026)—New York University's Grey Art Museum presents *Making Music: Helen Frankenthaler Prints from the New York University Art Collection*, the first exhibition to explore the artist's career-long engagement with music and dance as seen through her printmaking practice. On view from September 9, 2026, through July 3, 2027 at 18 Cooper Square, the exhibition brings together nine prints from 1965 to 2000. Selected primarily from a 2023 gift from the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation's Prints Initiative, the featured works shed new light on how the performing arts intersected with Frankenthaler's visual language, inviting a broader consideration of their role in her life and legacy.

Like many artists of her generation, Helen Frankenthaler (1928–2011) recognized a profound affinity between visual abstraction and musical expression. In music, which she described as “the most abstract of all arts,” Frankenthaler saw a kindred desire: to transcend the literal and give form to feeling. Throughout this lifelong dialogue, she repeatedly turned to the performing arts as a source of inspiration, creative fellowship, and titles for her works. From the jazz clubs of 1950s New York—including the iconic Five Spot Café, then located near the Grey’s current home at Cooper Square—to the ballets and operas she frequented throughout her life, Frankenthaler engaged with the performing arts as a devoted participant. She cultivated long-term relationships with musicians, designed costumes and sets for the stage, and produced commissioned prints for arts institutions and festivals.



Helen Frankenthaler, *Making Music*, 2000. Etching, aquatint, and mezzotint, artist proof I, 15 1/4 x 26 in. Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, New York. © 2026 Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, Inc. / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / Tyler Graphics Ltd., Mount Kisco, New York



Helen Frankenthaler, *Divertimento*, 1983. Four color lithograph, ed. 31/39, 37 x 27 in. Grey Art Museum, New York University Art Collection. Gift of the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, 2023.9.5. © 2026 Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, Inc. / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / Multiples, Inc., New York. Photo: Thomas Barratt, courtesy Helen Frankenthaler Foundation

“When we first began looking at Frankenthaler’s prints in the NYU Art Collection, we were struck by her recurring musical references—an angle of her work that is rarely explored,” says Tyler Spencer, co-curator. Co-curator Saskia Verlaan notes, “Digging into her career and archive, we encountered an artist who exuberantly engaged with the performing arts. It feels especially fitting to explore this history at the Grey, just across the street from one of her preferred jazz haunts, the Five Spot Café.”

Frankenthaler began making prints in 1961 and quickly established herself as a central figure in the postwar revival of American printmaking. The medium demanded a fundamental shift in her practice—accustomed to the spontaneous gestures of painting, she found that printmaking required her to slow down, work in stages, and collaborate with master printers. The exhibition traces this technical and thematic evolution, evidenced by works such as *Divertimento* (1983), a vibrant lithograph created with master printer John Hutcheson. Borrowing its title from the lighthearted classical music genre favored by composers Joseph Haydn and Wolfgang Amadeus

Mozart, the print captures a buoyant mood through vivid red ink on rosy pink paper, exemplifying Frankenthaler’s technical experimentation and dialogue with musical structure. Bringing the exhibition’s narrative into the final decade of her career is *Making Music* (2000), from which the exhibition takes its title. Combining aquatint, mezzotint, and etching, the print

preserves the characteristic painterly quality of her canvases. Its central rectangular form evokes both a brushstroke and a musical staff, while floating blots of ink recall quarter notes, drawing a parallel between artistic and musical composition.

“We are honored and delighted to have been gifted such a lyrical group of prints from the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, especially given the artist's ties to the Grey,” says Alison Weaver, Director. “She visited frequently during her lifetime, donated an important painting *Seascape with Dunes* (1962), taught at NYU as a visiting professor, and was awarded an honorary doctorate in 1979. The curatorial research behind *Making Music*, by NYU alumna Saskia Verlaan '02 and Institute of Fine Arts PhD candidate Tyler Spencer, demonstrates that these works can inspire fresh insights from a new generation of scholars that advance the study of Frankenthaler's printmaking practice.”

Making Music: Helen Frankenthaler Prints from the New York University Art Collection is curated by Saskia K. Verlaan, Head of Collections, and Tyler C. Spencer, Graduate Curatorial Assistant (2024–26). The exhibition is organized by the Grey Art Museum with support from the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation's Prints Initiative. A free brochure featuring an essay by the curators accompanies the exhibition.

Featured Program

On September 23, the Grey Art Museum will host a conversation and performance with award-winning composer Kenneth Fuchs (Professor of Composition, University of Connecticut) who has penned concertos and other music inspired by Helen Frankenthaler's Abstract Expressionist paintings. Fuchs will be in dialogue with Dr. Douglas Dreishpoon (Director, Helen Frankenthaler Catalogue Raisonné), and student musicians from NYU Steinhardt will perform a movement from Fuchs's *Fire, Ice, and Summer Bronze* (1986).

Sponsorship

Making Music: Helen Frankenthaler Prints from the New York University Art Collection is organized by the Grey Art Museum, New York University, and curated by Saskia K. Verlaan, Head of Collections, and Tyler C. Spencer, Graduate Curatorial Assistant (2024–26). The exhibition is supported by the Frankenthaler Prints Initiative, a grantmaking program established by the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation in 2018 to enrich academic institutions' collections and resources and promote scholarly research on Frankenthaler's innovative contributions to the field of printmaking.

Helen Frankenthaler Foundation

About the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation

Established and endowed by Helen Frankenthaler during her lifetime, the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation advances the artist's legacy and inspires a new generation of practitioners through a range of philanthropic, educational, and research initiatives. Since becoming active in 2013, the Foundation has continued to strategically expand its program, which includes organizing and

supporting significant exhibitions of the artist's work, fostering new research and publications, advancing educational programs in partnership with arts organizations around the world, and launching groundbreaking initiatives that foster systemic change in the field. As a primary resource on the artist, and a steward of her collection and archive, the Foundation holds an extensive selection of Frankenthaler's work in a variety of mediums, her collection of works by other artists, and original papers and materials pertaining to her life and work.

About the Grey Art Museum

The Grey Art Museum is New York University's fine arts museum, dedicated to advancing knowledge of different cultures, contexts, and histories across time. Over the last five decades, the Grey has organized exhibitions that have encompassed all the visual arts—including painting, sculpture, photography, film, and performance—often traveling to venues in the United States and abroad. As a university museum, the Grey shares NYU's fundamental commitment as a global research university by producing scholarly exhibitions and publications, hosting interdisciplinary public programs, and stewarding the NYU Art Collection and the Abby Weed Grey Collection of Modern Middle Eastern and Asian Art.

General Information

Grey Art Museum, New York University
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(Mailing address: 20 Cooper Square, 2nd Floor, New York, NY 10003)
Tel: 212-998-6780, Fax: 212-995-4024
E-mail: greyartmuseum@nyu.edu Website: greyartmuseum.nyu.edu

Hours

Tuesday: 11 am–6 pm
Wednesday: 11 am–8 pm
Thursday: 11 am–6 pm
Friday: 11 am–6 pm
Saturday: 11 am–5 pm
Closed Sunday, Monday, and major holidays

Admission

Free admission for the public and NYU community

Press Contact

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