

Artillery
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GAGOSIAN

ARTILLERY

LINE INTO COLOR, COLOR INTO LINE: HELEN FRANKENTHALER
Paintings 1962 – 1987

Ezrha Jean Black ·



"Brother Angel" (1983), acrylic/canvas, 168.3x297.2 cm, (c) 2016 Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, Inc./ARS, courtesy Gagosian Gallery

It is almost an existential question – of art, creation, medium – the ‘still point of the turning world ... (w)here the dance is,’ to paraphrase Eliot’s “Burnt Norton.” Helen Frankenthaler was already well into her early maturity by 1962, which is where this 25 year survey begins; but those critical, quasi-existential questions of figure and ground, defining a contour out of the surround – the ‘formless void’ lit by the ‘grace’ of color – remain at the heart of an artistic project that luxuriated in its paradoxical conditions and never compromised. Within the scope of only seventeen large canvases – the most succinct and self-contained of the current crop of museum quality exhibitions in L.A. galleries right now – the show takes us from an almost lyrical abstraction verging on landscape to a kind of linear gesture against ephemeral color field that’s almost a painterly haiku; from the most vibrant exegesis of edge and morphing shape to surreal abstraction alive with incident both linear and chromatic. A video excerpt from *Frankenthaler: Toward a New Climate* (did she foresee that, too?) gives us a taste of her incisive intellectual clarity. We go out the way we came in; and Frankenthaler’s work never loses sight of it.