

GAGOSIAN

ARTFORUM

**Helen Frankenthaler**

***GAGOSIAN / 541 WEST 24TH STREET 541 West 24th Street March 9–April 15, 2023***

David Whelan



*Helen Frankenthaler, Magnet, 1992, acrylic on canvas, 106 × 81 3/4".*

From 1974 to 1997, Helen Frankenthaler (1928–2011) lived and worked between New York City and Shippan Point in Stamford, Connecticut. Yet during the summers of 1990 and '91, she was a master-in-residence at the Santa Fe Art Institute in New Mexico. Amid the landscapes of these opposing coasts—in both climate as well as spirit—she furthered the formal and affective scope of her painterly investigations. “Drawing within Nature: Paintings from the 1990s” offers a glimpse into this late period of the artist’s making.

In *Western Roadmap*, 1991, a gray-purple cloud floats like a storm over arid land. Dollops of gel medium and beefy impasto catch the edges of softer brushwork, creating a sense of revision and change—the thickly worked material hovers over a diffuse array of evanescent stains. The cascades of violet, white, and brown in *Magnet*, 1992, however, have been combed through with a hard-edged rake. Wrought with surprising bravado, Frankenthaler draws striations through the surface, spreading out the paint while scraping it in, leaving behind sediment and grit. From one edge of the canvas, a strip of aqua quietly holds the amorphous composition in place.

*Vespers*, 1992, is a smaller but no less moody work. A stain of ash gray lies beneath a sheet of thick white paint, with various clumps settling like silt in a nocturnal sea. The clusters look incidental, as though they're floaters drifting through one's field of vision; nonetheless, they've been placed with extreme discernment.

Frankenthaler never rendered any form of landscape directly; instead, she allowed her memories of it to emerge through the painting itself, conjuring the feel of a place both in mind and material. She attended to the unforeseen in her art and spent her life exploring its endless permutations.