

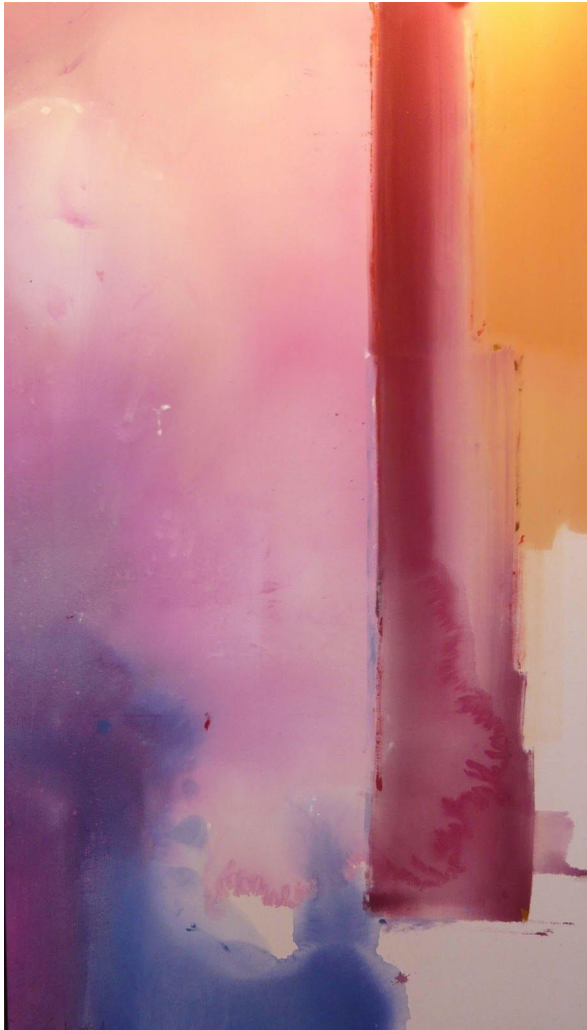
Helwaser Gallery

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Helen Frankenthaler

Sérénade, 1988

Acrylic on canvas

81.4 x 45 in.

207 x 115.3 cm

Contemporary Masters

From 1960 to present: Selected Works

Helen Frankenthaler, Adolph Gottlieb, Theodoros Stamos, Ed Ruscha, Robert Rauschenberg, Gilbert & George

Contemporary Masters brings into focus the gallery's long-standing emphasis on Abstract Expressionism and Pop works, particularly those made in the 1960s and beyond. Featuring the works of artists such as Helen Frankenthaler, Adolph Gottlieb, and Theodoros Stamos alongside the likes of Robert Rauschenberg and Gilbert & George, the exhibition selects master works from artists that have been an integral part of 20th-century Western art history. On view for public perusal, the exhibition invites the public to consider the different forms that art appeared in from the later half of the century till the present day.

Tracing the chronology of art movements that centered around New York from the 1960s onwards, the exhibition observes the differences within and between the two art movements that occurred. With a special highlight section on Abstract Expressionism, the exhibition points to the disparate styles that exist under the singular term. As Willem de Kooning noted as early as 1950, whilst in conversation with Alfred H. Barr, that "it is disastrous to name ourselves", this exhibition aims to highlight the discrepancies and disruptions that have taken place over the later decades of the 1900s, even within seemingly coherent movements such as Abstract Expressionism. Seen in the wider context of Pop art, with collages by Robert Rauschenberg and the photo-based work of the duo Gilbert & George, *Contemporary Masters* is as much a study in differences as it is a look back at some of the most important artists of the decade.

New Year (1965) by first generation Abstract Expressionist Adolph Gottlieb typified much of the imagery that he had developed whilst working on his seminal "Burst" series; vibrant, characterised by simple shapes on a flat plane of color, Gottlieb's paintings evoked notions of a wider cosmos with its enigmatic use of circular motifs suspended in fields of color. Dramatic, yet deliberately open ended, Gottlieb's *New Year* opens itself to the interpretation of its viewer, inviting them to consider the wider implications of his images. In contrast, Helen Frankenthaler's work *Serenade* (1988) celebrated the luminosity and lightness of color across the canvas. Using her characteristic "soak-stain" technique, Frankenthaler's paintings obtain a misty, almost placid effect. Avoiding shapes, patterns, or distinctive forms, her works gained recognition for their expressive qualities through her compositional and painterly choices.

Greek-born painter Theodoros Stamos's work is also included in this exhibition. Known for immense, gestural abstract works, Stamos gained recognition as one of the forerunners of Abstract Expressionism. *Infinity Field* (1973), with its expanse of orange, flanked by stripes of color on the side, was part of a series inspired by Greece. Although serene and composed, Stamos's paintings retained their strength and intensity, reflecting a deep connection to the geography of his birthplace.

Other works on show include those by artists associated with the Pop art movement, including the American artists Robert Rauschenberg and Ed Ruscha. Shying away from non-representational art, Rauschenberg and Ruscha both grappled with the vocabulary of the vernacular. With a practice that aimed at elevating the ordinary to that of an art subject, Ruscha used everyday words, places and objects in his practice. In *Four Books on a Shelf* (2004), the slightly slapdash arrangement of four books become an imitation of an Abstract Expressionist composition: one of the books becomes a carefully placed stripe of blue in the far right of the canvas. Ruscha's painting toes the line between representational, abstract, seriousness and parody. Underscoring the use of popular, almost banal imagery in art-making, Rauschenberg's *Rap and Swell* (1999) showcases the layering of magazine-like photographs to create a coherent whole.

The latest work in the exhibition is Gilbert & George's photo-based work *Sex & Money (A London picture)* (2011). A turn away from the Abstract Expressionists, Gilbert & George's anti-elitist, almost political art foregrounds the dynamic, changing landscape of art and art-making in the present day. Acknowledged as an essential pair in contemporary art, the work provides a fitting endpoint to the exhibition.

Contemporary Masters runs from February 1 to February 28, 2014 at Antoine Helwaser Gallery, 511 West 25th Street, New York, New York 10001.

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