

EAST AND BEYOND: HELEN FRANKENTHALER AND HER CONTEMPORARIES

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John Brady Print Gallery

Des Moines Art Center

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE EXHIBITION

From time to time, the Des Moines Art Center organizes an exhibition that places a newly-acquisitioned work in conversation with objects in our permanent collections.¹ Not only do we think about the new work in the light of received art history, but we also look at it in relation to our own small universe. In doing so, we often gain fresh insight and understanding.

This exhibition welcomes **Helen Frankenthaler's** breakthrough color woodblock print, *East and Beyond*, 1973, (5) to the permanent collections. The exhibition includes her *Untitled 3*, 1968, (4) acrylic on paper from our permanent collections; as well as the color woodblock prints *Savage Breeze*, 1974, (6) and *Essence Mulberry*, 1977, (7) both generously loaned by the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation. Frankenthaler's three color woodblock prints form the heart of the exhibition. Prints and ceramics dating from the 1950s to the early 1980s by post-war American and Japanese artists accompany Frankenthaler's prints. On view elsewhere in the Art Center are Frankenthaler's large acrylic paintings *Sky Farm*, 1972, acrylic on canvas (in Blank Three) and *Chalk Zone*, 1988, acrylic on canvas (Middle Meier). The other American artists include **Willem de Kooning**, **Sam Francis**, **Joan Mitchell**, **Robert Motherwell**, **Carol Summers**, and **Ansei Uchima**, plus British artist **David Hockney**, active in those years in the U.S. **Gertrud and Otto Natzler**, **Glenn Nelson**, and **William Wyman** are the ceramists in the exhibition. Japanese artists include **Fumiaki Fukita**, **Hideo Hagiwara**, **Masuo Ikeda**, **Hoshi Joichi**, **Haku Maki**, **Tetsuya Noda**, **Koshiro Onchi**, **Takumi Shinagawa**, and **Hiroyuki Tajima**. In transcending their own cultures' pictorial traditions and adopting the styles, media, techniques, and practices of the other, *each* of these artists moved "beyond East" or "beyond West."

This essay examines aspects of culture and art that were of interest to the American and Japanese artists in the exhibition during the post-war period. It discusses Frankenthaler's collaborations with her printers and publishers in creating *East and Beyond*, *Savage Breeze*, and *Essence Mulberry*. It reviews the rapturous reception that these prints received at the time they were published and discusses their critical history. Finally, it suggests that all of these works emerged from East-West currents flowing in the post-war world.

2. AMERICAN ARTISTS LOOKING EAST

Each of the American painters and printmakers in the exhibition was inspired by one or more aspects of Japanese art and tradition. During the 1950s, many Abstract Expressionists became interested in Zen Buddhist practices. From 1952–57, hundreds of enthusiasts, including Motherwell, attended the lectures on Zen that religious scholar Daitetsu Teitaro Suzuki (1870–1966) presented at Columbia University

in New York. In San Francisco, many people attended Alan Watts' and Saburo Hasegawa's classes at the Academy of Asian Studies. Zen taught practitioners to seek liberation from struggle and attachment. Its principles of spontaneity and living in the moment appealed to artists, each of whom had arrived at his or her form of action painting and Abstract Expressionism through interests in Surrealism, automatism, and psychoanalysis. Zen calligraphy's spontaneous and gestural writing fit in well with their search for authenticity of expression. Lanier Graham wrote,

There were many degrees of Zen influence, some superficial, some deep. Some were only formal influences. Some did not go beyond a fascination with the artistic potential of spontaneous brush-strokes to uncover the philosophy which animates this kind of brushwork.²

Prints in the exhibition by Joan Mitchell (17) and Sam Francis (3), as well as in works of Japanese artists Tetsuya Noda (21) and Haku Maki (16), reveal this urgent liquid brushwork. Motherwell's *Oy/Yo*, 1975, (18) and Frankenthaler's *Untitled #3*, 1968, (4) are characterized by lightness, asymmetry, and diagonal movement. They call to mind the sparseness of Zen meditation rock gardens.

Many Abstract Expressionists were inspired by Japanese painters' use of un-sized, long-fibered, absorbent handmade papers; drawing, writing, painting, and printing with liquid inks and colors; flooding, staining, splashing, and flinging paint; and fully-loaded long brushes and sticks. During the 1960s, Frankenthaler's images began to vacate the center and cling to the edge, as seen in *Untitled 3*, 1968, as well as in later works such as *East and Beyond*. Prints by Sam Francis, Shoichi Ida, and Tetsuya Noda also are concerned with the edge and the void.

A number of the American artists in the exhibition went to Japan where they encountered traditional Japanese ways of working. From 1957 on, Sam Francis lived and worked on a regular basis in Japan where he learned about *haboku*, a free brush, flung-ink style of painting dating back to the 15th century. His *Spleen (Red)*, 1971, (3) epitomizes his way of working. It was not until 1970 that the action painter Willem de Kooning spent time living in Japan, where he became interested in sumi ink painting. The expressive tusche lithographs that de Kooning made with master printer Irving Hollander in New York, such as *Woman with Corset and Long Hair*, 1970, (1) reflect his new interest in *sumi* ink drawing. In 1983, Frankenthaler went to Kyoto to work with *ukiyo-e* printers—but that was a full decade after she created *East and Beyond*.

Many Japanese prints were designed in series, such as sets of portraits of famous actors and courtesans, the seasons, or views of famous places.³ In this exhibition, Ikeda Eisen's print of *The Kegon Falls*, 1846, (2) is from the series, "Three Waterfalls: Famous Places of Mt. Nikko." Japanese printing techniques and series inspired American artists and printers. David Hockney created *Snow* (10) and other lithographs in his six-print "Weather Series," 1973, with Ken Tyler at Gemini GEL in the same year that Frankenthaler made *East and Beyond* at ULAE. The blend roll (it is also known as a

“rainbow roll”) in the sky of *Snow* is similar to the gradations in *ukiyo-e* woodcuts (as, for example, in the water of Eisen’s *The Kagon Falls*). Tyler’s lithographic blend roll would reappear in Frankenthaler’s woodcut, *Essence Mulberry*, which Tyler also printed in 1977. The blend roll printing technique is described in more detail later in this essay.

Another area in which Japanese influence became paramount in the U.S. was ceramics. Following the Second World War, Japanese minimalist aesthetics of simplicity and poverty began to appeal to American ceramists. Inspired by the Japanese tea ceremony and its wares, American potters began to create vessels with hand-building and learned the low temperature raku firing process. The rough forms, gestural drawing, and spackled, textured glazes of Glenn Nelson’s bowl (20) and William Wyman’s slab platter (27)—both prize-winning pieces from early Iowa Artists exhibitions—show how this trend in ceramics reached Iowa. Trained at the University of Iowa during the late 1940s and early 50s, Nelson would become a revered teacher/author on ceramic techniques, and he was important collector of world ceramics. Professor of ceramics at Drake University during the 1950s, Wyman would eventually move away from Japanese influences to adopt a Pop and hard-edge aesthetic with the use of brilliant colored glazes. Austrian immigrants Gertrud and Otto Natzler worked as a team: she threw the clay bodies and he glazed them. The Natzlers’ celadon bowl, (19) with its simple poise and elegance, was inspired by a very different Japanese aesthetic than that of Nelson’s and Wyman’s works.

3. JAPANESE ARTISTS LOOKING WEST

Ever since the Meiji Restoration (1870s), Japanese had been able to leave Japan. Whether settling in Europe and the U.S. or traveling and then returning home, many Japanese artists began working in Western Modernist styles. At home, Japanese collectors began collecting modern European art. The *sosaku hanga* or creative print movement began around 1905 and flourished into the late 1950s. Japanese print artists such as Koshiro Onchi rejected the updated but still traditional Japanese subject matter and style known as *shin hanga*. Instead, Modernist-minded artists used both traditional Japanese printing techniques in which they were well grounded, and also lithography, etching, and mixed media to make personal, expressive prints. Japanese artists’ investigations into new ways of using color, paper, and printing opened up exciting possibilities for prints.

The prints in this exhibition by Japanese artists who worked after the Second World War reflect their involvement in the contemporary Western styles of their time: there are echoes of Abstract Expressionism and *Art Informel* (Masuo Ikeda, Hoshi Joichi, Tetsuya Noda, Koshiro Onchi, Hiroyuki Tajima); *Art Brut* (Hideo Hagiwara, Takumi Shinagawa); Pop Art (Tetsuya Noda); Op Art (Fumiaki Fukita); Minimalism; Photo-based imagery (Masuo Ikeda); and Conceptual Art (Tetsuya Noda).

Modernist Japanese artists also drew inspiration from traditions of calligraphy and other forms of writing. In his deeply embossed woodcuts, Haku Maki abstractly reinterpreted the

expressive gestures of Zen calligraphy (16). The lines in Takumi Shinagawa’s prints reflect ancient seal-style writing (23).

More than others in the exhibition, the American artist Ansei Uchima and the Japanese artist Shoichi Ida bridge East and West. Born in California, Uchima went to Japan at the age of 19 to study traditional printmaking techniques. Returning to the U.S., he created luminous and haunting abstract prints, such as *Misty Morn* (26), that recall Zen painting. Born in Kyoto, Ida lived in Paris and New York during the 1960s. His remarkable lithographs, in which images of river stones, fallen leaves, and water stains are printed on both sides of fibrous, translucent handmade paper, evoke the silence and empty spaces of Zen gardens (11, 12, 13). Image and paper are one and the same, much as in the way that Frankenthaler used color in her paintings on canvas and paper.

4. FRANKENTHALER AND HER CONTEMPORARIES— AND THEIR PRINTERS

Around 1959, a new breed of collaborative printmaking workshop arose in the U.S. Universal Limited Art Editions, Tamarind Lithography Workshop, Gemini GEL, Crown Point Press, and Tyler Graphics changed the face of 20th-century printmaking. Founded in 1959 in West Islip, N.Y. by Russian immigrants Tatyana and Maurice Grosman, ULAE printed lithographs and books by emerging avant-garde contemporary artists. Founded in 1960 in Los Angeles by artist June Wayne, the Tamarind lithography workshop specialized in training master printers in color printing, many of whom went on to establish and work in other workshops around the country. Founded as an etching workshop in 1962 in San Francisco by Kathan Brown, Crown Point Press began publishing prints in 1965. Ken Tyler founded Gemini GEL in Los Angeles in 1965, and Tyler Graphics in Bedford Village, N.Y., in 1973. Frankenthaler made prints in collaboration with printers at each of these workshops.

During the 1960s, ULAE published prints by Sam Francis, Frankenthaler, Jasper Johns, Barnett Newman, Robert Rauschenberg, Larry Rivers, Cy Twombly, and many others. In 1966, ULAE established an etching studio. One of ULAE’s printers, Donn Steward, was an Iowan who had studied etching at the University of Iowa and had trained as a lithography printer at Tamarind. At ULAE, Steward printed the four aquatints Frankenthaler made there. Steward also printed (Frankenthaler’s then-husband) Robert Motherwell’s *A la pittura*, 1968–72, a set of 21 aquatint etchings with Zen calligraphy-like brush strokes that is recognized as one of ULAE’s most important publications.

Not only were ULAE, Gemini GEL, and Tyler engines of creativity, they were also new business models for printmaking. Artists without experience in printmaking were brought together with artist-master printers. Publishers, galleries, and investors funded the projects, split the editions with the artists, and paid the printers in printer’s proofs. ULAE was particularly generous and patient, coaxing prints out of remarkable artists who had little or no prior hands-on experience in printmaking. Grosman made sure that they had positive experiences. Few artists working on their own without

financial backing could have afforded to produce such prints. Publishers' financial resources made this new breed of print possible.⁴ But because the costs of production increased so much, the prices of prints rose dramatically.

In 1961, Tatyana Grosman invited Helen Frankenthaler to make a lithograph at ULAE. Printmaking's indirect nature and reversal of images was antithetical to Frankenthaler's ways of thinking and painting. She tended to be a loner in her painting studio. Inspired in her working method by her friend Jackson Pollock, she preferred to paint by pouring, staining, and dripping onto un-sized, un-stretched canvas on the floor. She used color to create space and evoke complex meanings. Ultimately, however, she had good experiences at ULAE where she made poured, dripped, and flooded color lithographs and, later, aquatint etchings. Speaking about her collaboration with printers, Frankenthaler once explained,

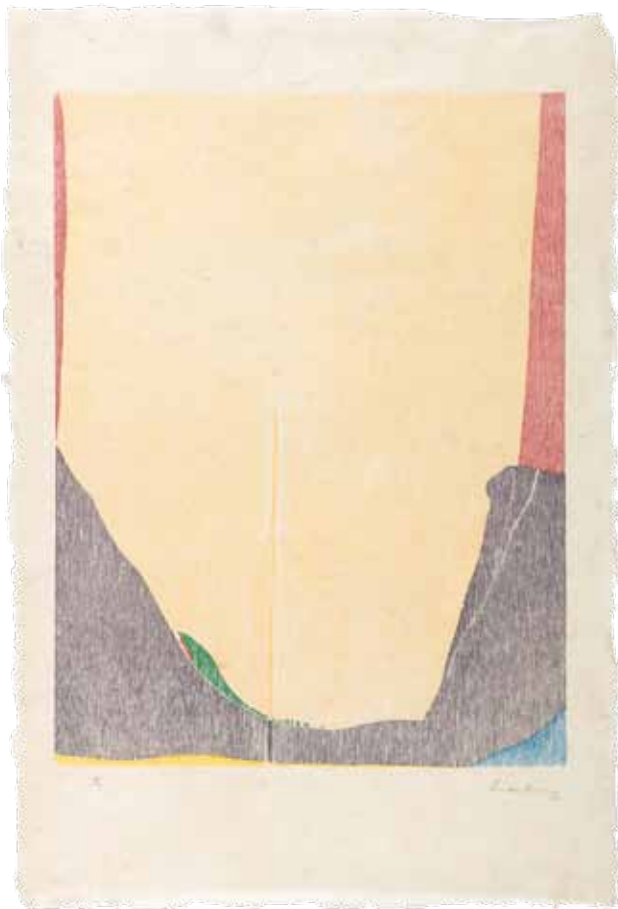
I want to draw my own images, mix my own colors, approve of registration marks, select paper—all the considerations and reconsiderations. Assuming that those who work in the workshop are all artists at what they do, I can then entrust the actual duplicating process to other hands that possess—hopefully—their kind of magic. Sharing and participating to the end.⁵

In 1973, Grosman asked Frankenthaler to make a woodcut. This was to be the artist's—as well as ULAE's—first woodcut, for none of its printers had printed relief prints before. The publisher's selection of Frankenthaler for this project may have seemed an improbable point of departure, but in retrospect Grosman's instincts were remarkable. Perhaps it was the workshop's atmosphere of fearlessness, its willingness to experiment and reinvent, and its permission to fail that made many ULAE prints so startling and groundbreaking. Frankenthaler's printers have talked about working with her, about how much time she took, the number of color changes, the cutting up of proofs, the changes of orientation of a stone, plate, or block. She never came into the printmaking process with a preconceived idea. John Yau wrote "...Frankenthaler wanted to discover the result during the making. She wanted to court the unexpected."⁶

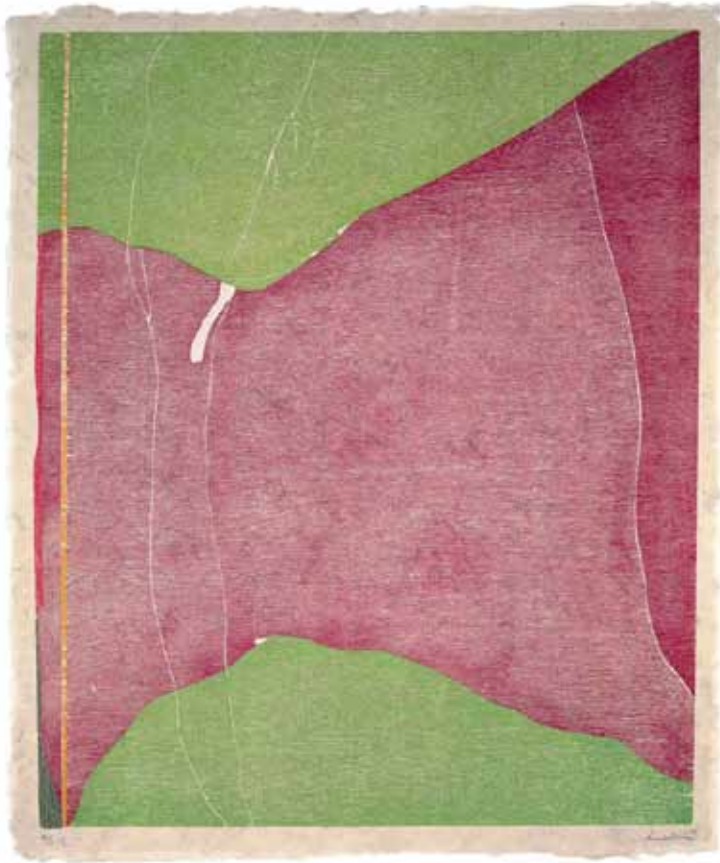
Frankenthaler began working on the woodcut with printers Bill Goldston, Juda Rosenberg, and James V. Smith. Together, they achieved what has been widely viewed as a breakthrough in image and technique. First, she tried cutting a woodblock with knives and gouges but eventually rejected these traditional tools in favor of cutting the *lauan* mahogany plywood blocks into shapes with a jigsaw, but with no relief cutting of an image. These shapes could be rolled with color and printed. Unlike woodcuts that the Norwegian Symbolist Edvard Munch had made in the 1980s with a jigsaw, *East and Beyond's* eight separate blocks inked with eight different colors were not fitted together like puzzle pieces and printed all at once. To avoid the appearance of white lines between the blocks such as appear in Munch's prints, the various blocks were printed successively in careful registration.

East and Beyond was printed on laminated handmade Nepalese paper with four deckled edges. It was published in

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5. Helen Frankenthaler
East and Beyond, 1973



6. Helen Frankenthaler (American, 1928–2011)
Savage Breeze, 1974



7. Helen Frankenthaler (American, 1928–2011)
Essence Mulberry, 1977



1. Willem de Kooning



2. Ikeda Eisen

Illustrations are not to relative scale.



8. Fumiaki Fukita



9. Hideo Hagiwara



10. David Hockney



11. Shoichi Ida



15. Hoshi Joichi



16. Haku Maki



17. Joan Mitchell



21. Tetsuya Noda



22. Koshiro Onchi



23. Takumi Shinagawa



24. Carol Summers



3. Sam Francis



4. Helen Frankenthaler



12. Shoichi Ida



13. Shoichi Ida



14. Masuo Ikeda



18. Robert Motherwell



19. Gertrud Natzler and Otto Natzler



20. Glenn Nelson



25. Hiroyuki Tajima



26. Ansei Uchima



27. William Wyman

an edition of 18, with six artist's proofs.

Although *East and Beyond* came into being after the artist's struggle with and mastery of seemingly intractable materials, there is no sense of struggle in this serene image in which color merges with the mahogany plywood's coarse grain and cracks.⁷ Richard Field praised

. . . the essential materialization of color that was Frankenthaler's incredible accomplishment. By bonding color to the forms of the sawed blocks, she endowed it with both shape and palpability, but by wedding color to the grain of the mahogany, she informed it with space and ineffableness. . . Color became both tangible form and filmy ground at one and the same time, just as Frankenthaler's stains merged with the structure of her un-sized canvases.⁸

Simultaneously pigment, wood, pressure, and paper, the print exemplifies the quintessentially modernist notion that an art work is not just an image or illusion. It is also an object made of pigment on paper.

What does Frankenthaler's title signify? What—or where—is beyond East? Does it imply a metaphorical journey for this artist-explorer? You suggested that

. . . the artist is calling attention to her frank desire to go beyond what she knows about Asian art and philosophy, and enter a territory all her own. . .

Just as she transferred techniques associated with watercolor and *sumi* ink drawing into painting, and made them new in the process, Frankenthaler wanted to transform the inherent qualities of Japanese woodblock printing, but not be constrained by them. Remarkable as it might seem, she achieved this goal with her very first woodcut.¹⁰

Energized by her discovery of a new way of creating prints Frankenthaler created *Savage Breeze* at ULAE with printers Goldston and Rosenberg the following year. Although she had arrived at the solution for *East and Beyond* relatively easily, the making of *Savage Breeze* proved frustrating. Her printers were unable to achieve the effect of color that the artist had in mind. The Nepalese paper was too absorbent and the colors went flat. She nearly gave up, but she and the printers realized that if they printed a layer of white ink first (like priming a canvas with gesso), the paper would be sealed and the white ink layer would reflect light back through the overprinted color. Like *East and Beyond*, it was printed from eight jigsaw-cut blocks and eight colors. *Savage Breeze* (6) was published in 1974 in an edition of 31, with four artist's proofs.

Compared to the stability, grandeur, and spaciousness of the earlier print, *Savage Breeze*'s diagonal composition seems unstable and claustrophobic. The coarse mahogany woodgrain is more evident. The large, central wind-blown shape chokes off space. White lines (the paper, revealed) skitter through the colored shapes. Had anyone ever made such a print as this before? Its title perplexes. Are breezes savage?

From 1961 until 1979, Frankenthaler created 37 prints at ULAE, including 22 lithographs, seven intaglios, one mixed

media, one monoprint, and seven highly praised, innovative color woodblock prints. But eventually, because of disagreements with Tatyana Grosman she stopped working there and began making prints elsewhere.

Master printer Kenneth E. Tyler (born 1931) had trained with lithographer Garo Antresian at the Herron School of Art in Indianapolis. In 1963, Tyler went to Tamarind in Los Angeles. He deepened his color printing skills with French master printer Marcel Durassier. Tyler served as technical director of Tamarind until 1965, when he founded Gemini Ltd. (later Gemini GEL) in Los Angeles. There he collaborated on innovative prints and multiples with Josef Albers, David Hockney, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, and many other contemporary artists. Tyler invited Frankenthaler to make prints at Gemini but she refused his invitation to "what must have looked to Frankenthaler like a business-oriented art factory or the shop did not fit her temperament."¹¹ But in 1973, Tyler moved east to Bedford Village, N.Y. where he established his more intimate Tyler Graphics Workshop. Finally agreeing to work with the printer, Frankenthaler eventually made over 50 prints with Tyler. Among these was *Essence Mulberry*, the color woodcut that many consider to be her most successful print.

In this astonishing print, bright lines, ragged shapes, and the textures of wood grain swim through secret layers and blended-color fields. Dripping like the juice of ripe mulberries, rich colors bleed past the two long edges of the full sheet of lustrous Japanese *gampi* (mulberry tree) fiber paper. Extending below the printed area, the long shape of tan paper is part of the total image. *Essence Mulberry* resembles a hanging Japanese watercolor scroll painting mounted on silk. But this image speaks a new language of color.

She had conceived the idea for the print after having seen an exhibition of hand-painted Renaissance prints at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, as well as after having eaten mulberries dripping with juice in the garden of Tyler's studio. The print went through many stages of development. At least 20 state proofs survive. The artist cut eight woodblocks, but she eventually discarded four of them.

Essence Mulberry was printed in an edition of 46, with 16 artist's proofs. Tyler and John Hutcheson printed the final version from eight colors inked on four blocks. Three of the four blocks were inked in a blend roll. In this technique for printing color transitions (developed and popularized by Tamarind printers for lithography) two or more colors of ink are laid down side by side on an ink slab. The printer rolls the roller over the ink to pick up color, then shifts the roller sideways and rolls again. The ink colors begin to blend on the roller. The color blend on the inking roller can then be rolled on to the litho stone.

It is interesting to see Frankenthaler and Tyler using this same color lithograph printing technique for the woodblocks of *Essence Mulberry*. Back in 1973, Tyler had printed Hockney's *Snow*, a lithograph in which the oil-based ink blend roll in the sky imitates the blended brushed-on watercolor of a Japanese woodcut.

Tyler once said that he learned in working with Frankenthaler, "not to invade the image-making act." Frankenthaler reinforced the lesson Tyler had to learn "that for

some artists collaboration involves knowing who can benefit from being pushed technically, and who cannot.”¹² One cannot help but wonder how much the printer’s technical suggestions contributed to final the outcome of *Essence Mulberry*. During the 1970s, a dazzling cross-fertilization of the techniques and the expansion of artistic possibilities occurred as printers and artists moved from studio to studio. *Essence Mulberry* is one of the happiest outcomes of the process of artists challenging printers and printers teaching artists.

Founded in 1962, Crown Point Press is a San Francisco press and publisher specializing in producing etchings. In 1972, Frankenthaler made an etching with them. In 1980, Crown Point initiated its new *ukiyo-e* woodcut project in Kyoto, in which artists selected by Crown Point would provide designs to Japanese block cutters and printers who would use their traditional skills and methods to produce the prints. Crown Point Press brought many artists to Japan, including—in 1983—Frankenthaler. Although making woodcuts in Japan might have seemed like a logical thing for her to do next, she ended up making only one color woodblock print with Crown Point Press. This was her first water-based woodcut, *Cedar Hill*. For, so to speak, Frankenthaler had already “gone East,” making her discoveries about the woodcut with ULAE and Tyler without needing to go to Japan. After her Kyoto experience, however, when she returned to making prints with Tyler her woodcuts became infinitely more complicated. *Madame Butterfly*, 2000, for example, was printed from 46 woodblocks inked with 102 colors.

5. “. . . A DEPARTURE SO PROFOUND . . .”

Her color woodblock prints stunned the art world.¹³ Critics recognized that although Frankenthaler’s woodblock prints might seem analogous to her stained, poured paintings, they did not simply reproduce her paintings. They were autonomous and original creations. In her struggles with improbable and un-painterly materials, Frankenthaler and her printers achieved what seemed to many writers and artists like a miraculous new way of working.¹⁴ They were declared to have helped reinvigorate and even re-launch printmaking in the last decades of the 20th century. In 1982, distinguished print historian Richard S. Field wrote,

The woodcut is back! Who could have imagined, just ten years ago, that serious art could be coaxed from such an obviously clumsy, totally antimodernist medium? Yet we are in the midst of a new experimentation with the earliest form of the printed image, the simple relief print whose European origins go back to the 14th century.

He continued,

But it is clear that the first of the new breed of woodcut to capture public attention must be identified as Helen Frankenthaler’s *East and Beyond* of 1973. . . . Printed at Universal Limited Art Editions, it marked a departure so profound that virtually all subsequent woodcuts incorporated the thinking it embodied.¹⁶

Writing on *East and Beyond* in her 1996 essay on

Frankenthaler as a maker of prints, Suzanne Boorsch recalled,

At that point, she had not yet realized the tremendous dimension she had added to her own printmaking *oeuvre*, and even less that she had launched a resurgence, in the last quarter of the 20th century, of the oldest of all the printmaking media—a medium that had been touched by very few artists of note since the German Expressionists, and had almost never been used for abstraction.

Many subsequent writers have quoted Field and Boorsch, so these judgments have become *de rigueur* for writing about *East and Beyond*. But not all agreed. For example, Pat Gilmour downplayed Frankenthaler’s achievement in woodcut at ULAE.

At ULAE, she had made a few beautiful woodcuts which simply juxtaposed areas of colour in a jig-saw fashion. When she came to make *Essence Mulberry* at Tyler’s workshop, however, she at last . . . began to realize her full graphic potential. . . . In this work, Tyler declared, Frankenthaler had at last decided that a print could be as good as a painting.¹⁷

Was *East and Beyond* really as radical and innovative as Field and Boorsch said it to be? Did it really relaunch the woodcut? The evidence provided by works in the present exhibition made us realize that it is time to revisit this issue.

Why did *East and Beyond* seem so different from other woodcuts? Ever since woodcut arrived from China in the late 14th century, European printmakers had cut designs into relief blocks with knives, gouges, punches, or engraving tools; had inked the blocks with black or colored oil-based inks, and printed the prints on presses. In Japan, printmakers made their prints through fine knife cutting, printing multiple blocks in register with water-based color by hand-rubbing. But in eschewing knife and gouge, Frankenthaler went counter to traditional practice. Her use of the jigsaw to cut shaped blocks, her unusual color palette, not to mention the sheer strength of her abstract images, made her prints seem extremely fresh to viewers in the 1970s.¹⁸

Frankenthaler and her printers did not invent the jigsaw print. During the 1890s, Edvard Munch had used the jigsaw technique for his color woodcuts. Since the late 1950s, widely-acclaimed American printmaker Carol Summers had been making his sumptuously color-saturated prints with jigsaw-cut woodblocks printed in close register. Nor was Frankenthaler the first prominent artist to make abstract color woodcuts. Josef Albers made abstract woodcuts in 1944. By 1965, Donald Judd had made Minimalist abstract woodcuts. Will Barnet, Seong Moy, and especially Ansei Uchima, worked in New York and showed their abstract woodcuts nationally.¹⁹ Uchima’s woodblock prints—with their diaphanous veils of color, abstract shapes, and woodgrain textures—were widely known, admired, and collected. (The Des Moines Art Center purchased Uchima’s print, *Misty Morn*, in 1965.) Even if Frankenthaler did not know these artists’ prints, surely her printers did.

Lithography and screen printing had so totally dominated avant-garde collaborative printmaking and publishing in the

1960s and early 70s that Frankenthaler's unusual approach to woodcut must have seemed startling and unexpected to many curators, dealers, collectors, other artists, and critics—even those like Field and Boorsch who were exceptionally knowledgeable about the history of prints and the contemporary scene. Were the writers who hailed Frankenthaler's innovative woodcuts aware of what else was happening in woodcut at the time? What about the subsequent writers who quoted them, or the artists who reportedly were inspired by Frankenthaler's prints to make woodcuts? Recently, I asked Richard S. Field to think back on this. He responded,

I don't think the issues were whether there were American or Japanese artists who used the medium, who used it for color, and/or who were influenced aesthetically or technically. For me the issue is what Frankenthaler did with it . . . she reified color something not unlike her other work. It was that notion of which I was most pleased, to be honest, not those other kinds of pronouncements. . . . This was something really original . . . it was optical, it floated in its own space, and it made an entirely new kind of contact with the viewer.²⁰

6. BEYOND WAR

For the Des Moines Art Center and many other museums, the term “post-war” or the year 1945 serves as a dividing line between Modern and Contemporary art. Although the term “post-war” is frequently just a convenience, in the case of this exhibition it is appropriate to think about the works as post-war. Following their nation's defeat in the Second World War, many Japanese artists rejected the nationalism that had led them to ruin, and they moved away from traditions representing the old Japan. Despite whatever feelings they may have had about Hiroshima and occupation, many Japanese artists nevertheless chose to work in the visual language of Western contemporary art. At the same time, however, many American artists discovered Japanese art. Zen's expressive ways of painting and writing calligraphy enriched Abstract Expressionism. American printmakers continued to learn from traditional Japanese printing techniques and subject matter, combining them with Western printmaking processes and visions.

Why is it that, frequently after a war, artists adopt the styles of art of their former enemies? Why do the victors embrace the art of those they defeated? Why do the defeated adopt the art of their occupiers and conquerors? Recall, for example the popularity of North African style in 19th-century France; or the vogue for Mughal Indian art in Regency-era and Victorian England. In looking at Helen Frankenthaler's color prints surrounded by the other works in the exhibition, we realize that the creation of *East and Beyond*, *Savage Breeze*, and *Essence Mulberry* happened at a time of incredibly fertile post-war East-West cultural interchange. Reconciliation was still taking place. Looking beyond old borders, and learning new ways of thinking and working, artists of the post-war period were trying to put the world right again.

NOTES

- 1 Our use of the word “conversation” is a nod to Suzanne Boorsch “Conversations with Prints,” in Pegram Harrison, *Frankenthaler: A Catalogue Raisonné, Prints, 1961-1994* [New York: Abrams, 1996], 11-44 (11). This essay on Frankenthaler's activity as a maker of prints quotes the artist of her feeling of the give-and-take she experienced when interacting with her materials and images. Boorsch suggested that, perhaps more than for other artists, this “conversation” defined Frankenthaler's working process.
- 2 *Zen in Modern Art: Echoes of Buddhism in Western Paintings and Prints* Lanier Graham, University Art Gallery, California State University, Hayward. <http://www.zenpaintings.com/modernart.htm>

“Trying to set aside the rational side of their minds and trust the power of their intuition, the artists attempted to go beyond their mind-enclosed “egos” and compose spontaneously from a deeper dimension of consciousness. . . They were not trying to imitate Zen art. Each of these artists took the idea of making spontaneous gestures in the direction of his or her own sensibility, as they searched for authentic being. . .

It was a struggle for some modern artists to become themselves, a great struggle. From a Freudian viewpoint, the “ego” and rationalizing mind does not give up control easily. The painting and calligraphy of Zen masters does not show signs of struggle, only pure spontaneity.”
- 3 The year after she made *East and Beyond*, Helen Frankenthaler acquired a copy of Hiroshige's *The Horse Market*, 1857 from his series “One Hundred Famous Views of Edo.”
- 4 Financial backers of print editions enjoyed tax sheltering of the value of their donations to museums. This helped fine print publication flourish. In 1989, however, the IRS disallowed this practice.
- 5 Helen Frankenthaler, *The Romance of Learning a New Medium*, in “The Print Collector's Newsletter,” 8 (July–August 1977), 66. Excerpt of a lecture given on May 3, 1977 to the Drawing and Print Club at the Detroit Institute of Arts.
- 6 John Yau, “On Her Own” in *Helen Frankenthaler: East and Beyond*. Exhibition catalogue. (New York: Knoedler Company, Jan 8–March 11, 2011), 4–28 (11).
- 7 The cracks in the plywood are reminiscent of Robert Rauschenberg's cracked stone lithograph, *Accident*, 1963, published by ULAE.
- 8 Field, Richard S. “On Recent Prints.” *The Print Collector's Newsletter* XIII, no. 1 (1982): 1-6 (2)
- 9 Yau, 10.
- 10 Yau, 10.
- 11 Pat Gilmour, *Ken Tyler, Master Printer and the American Print Renaissance*. (New York: Hudson Hills Press in association with the Australian National Gallery, 1986), 109.
- 12 Gilmour, 111.
- 13 In addition to Helen Frankenthaler's woodcuts, some of the most beautiful and revolutionary prints ever made by an American/European artist in response to Japanese *ukiyo-e* prints were Mary Cassatt's color aquatints of 1880s and 90s that made these in collaboration with French master printer, Auguste Clot.
- 14 See, for example, Riva Castleman, *American Impressions: Prints Since Pollock*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 101–102. “Her most important contribution to the development of printmaking in this period, however, was her work in woodcut. . . In *East and Beyond* (1973) and *Savage Breeze* (1974) she found the perfect way to emulate the ink-soaked cloth of her paintings by lightly inking and wiping large, textured sheets of wood. She cut through the wood and inserted pieces of harder wood to introduce the staccato interruption that she desired.”
- 15 Field, 2.
- 16 Boorsch, 27.
- 17 Gilmour, 111.
- 18 Sarah Kirk Hanley, “The Unabashedly Beautiful Prints of Helen Frankenthaler,” in *Ink: Notes on the Contemporary Print*, Jan 13, 2012. <http://blog.art21.org/2012/01/13/the-unabashedly-beautiful-prints-of-helen-frankenthaler/#.VcjWn3Gqqko>
- 19 Most Abstract Expressionist artists who made prints preferred print media other than the woodcut. See, for example, David Acton's authoritative survey, *The Stamp of Impulse, Abstract Expressionist Prints* (Worcester: Worcester Art Museum, 2001), which featured only 11 woodcuts out of 100 prints in the exhibition.
- 20 Personal email from Richard S. Field, received August 24, 2015.

CHECKLIST

1. Willem de Kooning (American, born Netherlands, 1904–1997)

Woman with Corset and Long Hair, 1970
Lithograph on paper

Sheet: 37 1/4 x 30 in. (94.6 x 76.2 cm.)

Image: 31 5/8 x 23 1/2 in. (80.3 x 59.7 cm.)

Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;

Gift of Messrs. Lee V. and John L. Eastman, 1975.38

© 2015 The Willem de Kooning Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

2. Ikeda Eisen (Japanese, 1790–1848)

The Kegon Falls, One of the Three Waterfalls

(*Kegon no taki, santaki no sono ikkei*), from the series,

"Famous Scenic Spots in the Mountains of Nikkō"

(*Nikkōsan meisho no uchi*), 1846

Color woodblock print on paper

Sheet: 13 7/8 x 9 5/8 in. (35.2 x 24.4 cm.)

Plate: 13 3/8 x 8 3/4 in. (34 x 22.2 cm.)

Des Moines Art Center; Gift of Dwight Kirsch to the John K. Kirsch Memorial Collection, 1976.80

3. Sam Francis (American, 1923–1994)

Spleen (Red), 1971

Lithograph on paper

Image: 35 1/8 x 79 in. (89.2 x 200.7 cm.)

Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;

Gift of Wells Fargo & Company, 2003.282

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4. Helen Frankenthaler (American, 1928–2011)

Untitled 3, 1968

Acrylic on paper

Sheet (/image): 29 15/16 x 22 in. (76 x 55.9 cm.)

Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;

Gift of Jan and Gardner Cowles, New York, 1976.96

5. Helen Frankenthaler (American, 1928–2011)

East and Beyond, 1973

Eight-color woodblock print

on buff laminated Nepalese handmade paper

Sheet: 31 3/4 x 21 in. (80.6 x 53.3 cm.)

Image: 23 1/2 x 18 in. (59.7 x 45.7 cm.)

Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;

Purchased with funds from Kirk and Sue Patrick; the

Estate of Peggy Patrick; the Behrendt Family; Gloria and

Robert Burnett; Andre DeLong; James and Barbara

Demetrian; Kay Carpenter Doyle; Jilene and

James Ferguson; Mr. and Mrs. William Friedman, Jr.;

Gibson, Dunn, & Crutcher LLP; Anna and Brent

Hoffman; Ellen and James W. Hubbell III; Dale J.

Jansen; Mary Josten; Krause Gentle Foundation,

Sharon and Kyle J. Krause; Lisa and Kevin McGlothlen;

Mr. and Mrs. Raymond A. Michel; John and Mary

Pappajohn; Anastasia Polydorán; Rosemary and

Timothy Rahm; Kimberly and Craig Shadur; Leslie

Schefski; John R. Taylor; Nancy Prizant and Ed Truslow;

Toni and Timothy Urban; Joan H. and John Wetherell;

Jean Williams; Rodney and Phyllis Williamson; Amy and

Thomas Worthen; Dennis and Diane E. Young; and

many other friends in memory of Peggy Patrick, 2014.75

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6. Helen Frankenthaler (American, 1928–2011)

Savage Breeze, 1974

Eight-color woodcut on buff laminated Nepalese

handmade paper

Image: 31 1/2 x 27 in. (80 x 68.6 cm.)

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Universal Limited Art Editions, West Islip, New York

7. Helen Frankenthaler (American, 1928–2011)

Essence Mulberry, 1977

Eight-color woodcut on buff Maniai Gampi handmade

paper

Image: 39 1/2 x 18 1/2 in. (100.3 x 47 cm.)

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Rights Society (ARS), New York

Tyler Graphics Ltd.

8. Fumiaki Fukita (Japanese, born 1926)

Super Constellation, 1966

Color woodblock print on paper

Sheet: 25 x 18 1/2 in. (63.5 x 47 cm.)

Image: 24 x 17 13/16 in. (61 x 45.2 cm.)

Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;

Bequest of Dr. Maurice H. Noun, 1968.48

9. Hideo Hagiwara (Japanese, 1913–2007)

A Man in Armor, 1963

Woodblock print and embossing on paper

Sheet: 39 1/8 x 25 5/8 in. (99.4 x 65.1 cm.)

Image: 33 1/2 x 23 1/2 in. (85.1 x 59.7 cm.)

Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;

Gift of Mrs. K. A. Chittick in memory of

William L. and Dora Hays Dunn, 1974.76

10. David Hockney (British, active in the United States, born 1937)

Snow, from "Weather" series, 1973

Lithograph and screenprint on paper

Sheet: 40 1/8 x 33 1/2 in. (101.9 x 85.1 cm.)

Image: 34 x 28 5/8 in. (86.4 x 72.7 cm.)

Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;

Gift of Wells Fargo & Company, 2003.253

11. Shoichi Ida (Japanese, 1941–2006)

Paper Between a Leaf and Water, No. 11, 1981

Two-sided lithograph on paper

Sheet: 21 3/4 x 15 1/2 in. (55.2 x 39.4 cm.)

Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;

Purchased with General Memorial Funds, 1982.10

12. Shoichi Ida (Japanese, 1941–2006)

Between Vertical and Horizon: Paper Between a Snowed Stone and Water Stain, 1981

Two-sided Lithograph on paper

Sheet: 21 1/2 x 31 in. (54.6 x 78.7 cm.)

Image: 21 1/8 x 31 in. (53.7 x 78.7 cm.)

Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;

Purchased with General Memorial Funds, 1982.11

13. Shoichi Ida (Japanese, 1941–2006)

Paper Between Two Sticks and Stain, 1981

Two-sided Lithograph on paper

Sheet: 21 3/4 x 15 1/2 in. (55.2 x 39.4 cm.)

Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;

Purchased by General Memorial Funds, 1982.12

14. Masuo Ikeda (Japanese, 1934–1977)

Some Town Without a Name—A, 1969–1970

Lithograph on paper

Sheet: 21 x 26 in. (53.3 x 66 cm.)

Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections; Gift of

Midwest Emery Freight System, 1976.16

15. Hoshi Joichi (Japanese, 1913–1979)

Night View, 1977

Color woodblock print on paper with silver leaf

Sheet: 6 7/16 x 8 15/16 in. (16.4 x 22.7 cm.)

Image: 4 7/8 x 7 1/4 in. (12.4 x 18.4 cm.)

Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;

Richard L. and Kay E. Ward Collection, 2009.25

16. Haku Maki (Japanese, 1924–2000)

Remembrance—E, ca. 1960

Color woodblock print on paper

Sheet: 18 3/4 x 23 7/8 in. (47.6 x 60.6 cm.)

Image: 18 x 16 1/4 in. (45.7 x 41.3 cm.)

Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;

Gift of Edythe Polster, Deming, NM, 1981.44

17. Joan Mitchell (American, 1925–1992)

Untitled, 1957–1958, from the special edition of John

Ashbery, "Poems," (New York: Tiber Press, 1960)

Screenprint on paper

Sheet: 11 11/16 x 14 1/4 in. (29.7 x 36.2 cm.)

Image: 9 3/16 x 13 3/4 in. (23.3 x 34.9 cm.)

Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;

Purchased with funds from the Kay Reynolds Stroud

Art Fund, 2003.367

18. Robert Motherwell (American, 1915–1991)

Oy/Yo, 1978

Aquatint, etching, and collage on paper

Sheet: 26 7/8 x 22 in. (68.3 x 55.9 cm.)

Image: 19 x 15 in. (48.3 x 38.1 cm.)

Des Moines Art Center; Paul and Anastasia Polydorán

Collection, 2002.2

19. Gertrud Natzler (Austrian, active United States, 1908–1971) CLAY BODY

Otto Natzler (Austrian, active United States,

1908–2007) GLAZE

Celadon Bowl, 1948

Ceramic

Overall: 2 5/8 x 5 in. (6.7 x 12.7 cm.)

Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;

Gift of Mrs. Eugene Mannheim, 1974.10

20. Glenn Nelson (American, 1913–2010)

Bowl, ca. 1954

Ceramic

Overall: 5 3/4 x 11 3/4 in. (14.6 x 29.8 cm.)

Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;

Yunker Purchase Award, 1955.8

21. Tetsuya Noda (Japanese, born 1940)

Diary: June 22 '75, 1975

Woodblock and screenprint on paper

Sheet: 24 1/2 x 19 1/4 in. (62.2 x 48.9 cm.)

Image: 18 7/8 x 14 15/16 in. (47.9 x 37.9 cm.)

Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;

Purchased with General Memorial Funds, 1976.68

22. Koshiro Onchi (Japanese, 1891–1955)

Poem Number 22: Leaf and Clouds, 1953

Woodblock print on paper

Sheet: 20 x 15 1/4 in. (50.8 x 38.7 cm.)

Image: 17 x 13 1/4 in. (43.2 x 33.7 cm.)

Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;

Gift of Mrs. K. A. Chittick, Indianapolis, in Memory of

William L. and Dora Hays Dunn, 1974.72

23. Takumi Shinagawa (Japanese, 1908–2009)

Samurai, ca. 1955.

Color woodcut on paper

Sheet: 19 9/16 x 15 in. (49.7 x 38.1 cm.)

Image: 14 9/16 x 9 13/16 in. (37 x 24.9 cm.)

Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;

Gift of Edythe Polster, 1981.63

24. Carol Summers (American, born 1925)

La Terra Trema (The Earth Trembles), 1963

Color woodblock print on paper

Sheet (/image): 36 1/8 x 37 in. (91.8 x 94 cm.)

Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;

Purchased with funds from Rose F. Rosenfield, 1965.40

25. Hiroyuki Tajima (Japanese, 1911–1984)

Matamata, 1969

Color woodblock print on paper

Sheet: 19 5/8 x 25 in. (49.8 x 63.5 cm.)

Image: 15 7/8 x 21 5/8 in. (40.3 x 54.9 cm.)

John C. Huseby Print Collection of the

Des Moines Art Center through Bequest, 1994.309

26. Ansei Uchima (American, 1921–2000)

Misty Morn, 1964

Color woodblock print on paper

Sheet: 24 1/16 x 18 3/16 in. (61.1 x 46.2 cm.)

Image: 20 1/2 x 16 in. (52.1 x 40.6 cm.)

Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;

Purchased with funds from Rose F. Rosenfield, 1965.41

27. William Wyman (American, 1922–1980)

Platter, ca. 1951

Ceramic

Overall: 11 5/8 x 15 5/8 in. (29.5 x 39.7 cm.)

Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;

Purchased with funds from the Edmundson Art Foundation, Inc., 1952.6

This gallery guide is published in conjunction with

East and Beyond: Helen Frankenthaler and Her Contemporaries.

The exhibition is on view in the John Brady Print Gallery of the Des Moines Art Center from September 29, 2015 to January 17, 2016.

Amy N. Worthen, Curator of Prints and Drawings, organized the exhibition and wrote this publication.

LENDER

Helen Frankenthaler Foundation

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EXHIBITION PROGRAMS

Gallery Talk
Amy N. Worthen
Curator of Prints and Drawings
Thursday, October 8, 2015 / 6:30 pm
John Brady Print Gallery

Lecture*
Suzanne Boorsch
The Robert L. Solley Curator of Prints, Drawings, and Photographs, Yale University Art Gallery
Thursday, January 14, 2016 / 6:30 pm
Levitt Auditorium
* Reservations required:
desmoinesartcenter.org

PEGGY PATRICK

Long on the Art Center's list of *desiderata*, *East and Beyond* was purchased with funds bequeathed by, and given in memory of, Peggy Patrick (1925-2013). Beginning her work at the Art Center when it first opened its doors in 1948, Peggy was a staff member for 34 years. She served as Assistant Director and, twice, as Acting Director. Many considered her to be "the heart and soul of the Art Center." This extraordinary woman was a trained architect who oversaw the construction of the Meier wing of the Art Center. She was a gifted teacher, a champion of Modern and contemporary art, and an inspirational role model. She participated in archaeological digs; served in retirement as a Peace Corps volunteer; and worked on Christo's Japan-U.S. project, *The Umbrellas*. She travelled to the East, West, and now—beyond.