

## **Art Masterpiece: Blue Atmosphere, 1963 by Helen Frankenthaler**



**Pronunciation:** Helen Frankenthaler (Frank-en-tall-er)

**Keywords:** Shapes, Abstract Expressionism, Non Objective

**Shape** - an element of art. The outline, edge or flat surface of a form such as a circle or a square

**Non Objective** - not representing a natural or actual object, figure, or scene

**Abstract Expressionism** - An American art movement that was popularized in New York in the 1940's and 1950's, which comprised diverse styles and techniques, emphasizing an artist's liberty to convey subjective emotional expression with particular emphasis on the creative spontaneous act.

**Grade:** 1st

**Activity:** Tissue Paper Abstract

### **Meet The Artist: (5 min)**

- Born, 1928 in New York City.
- Frankenthaler had wealthy parents and the opportunity to go to good schools. In high school she was able to travel and she took some of her classes in Mexico.

- As a young woman she met famous artist, Jackson Pollock, who was very inspirational to her. His style of painting was to splatter paint on a canvas that was on the floor (show example of Pollock's work if possible). Helen didn't copy Pollock's style but she did develop her own.
- She was thought of as a pioneer and the first artist to use "soak and stain" method. Helen thinned her paint, and used a non-primed canvas, which let the color soak in. She would pour the paint onto the canvas instead of using a brush and leave the splatter marks and drips to show the process of her work.
- Her and Pollock's work are considered **Abstract Expressionism**. Abstract means there are no recognizable, natural shapes in the artwork and Expressionism means that the artist was trying to "express" his or her feelings by the way that they painted.
- Helen experimented in other forms of art like sculpture and illustrations for books. She also taught art at universities like, Harvard, Princeton, and Yale.
- Frankenthaler Received a Lifetime Achievement Award 10 years ago and has had countless one-woman exhibitions.

**Abstract Expressionism** (also known as "action painting") contain these aspects:

- Artists apply paint to usually large canvases rapidly with force and using big gestures
- Artists try to transfer their feelings and emotions onto the canvas-by the way they paint (Example: action painting like Pollock or soak and stain like Frankenthaler) and through the use of color. Example: ask students, if you wanted to paint LOVE without using an object like a heart what color would you use? How about ANGER? HAPPINESS? SADNESS? NERVOUSNESS? EMBARRASSMENT, GUILT, SHYNESS, PRIDE ETC.
- **non-objective-abstract art with no objects or even geometric shapes**
- Artwork appears to look accidental but is really planned out by the artist
- The expressive manner in which the artist painted the artwork was often considered as important as the painting itself.

### **Discussion: (10 min)**

- What do you see? Color, **shapes** (Outlines with space inside creates **shapes**)
- Do the shapes look like anything (clouds)?
- Does it look like the artist used a brush - why or why not?
- How do you think she did it?
- Do you think she planned where she poured the paint or just did it with no planning?
- What colors do you see?
- Do these certain colors make you feel one way or another?
- Do you see shapes on top of one another? painted and dried then painted on top
- Does this change the color?
- Does the painting make you feel a certain way?
- Why do you think she called it Blue Atmosphere?

**Project:**

Tissue paper abstract - students create their own non-objective, abstract expressionism piece.

**Supplies needed:**

10 X 15- white construction paper (1 per student)  
12 x 17 black construction paper for mounting (1 per student)  
sheets of tissue paper to be cut or torn  
scissors (class set)  
paintbrushes (1 per student)  
Water cups (1 for every 2 students)  
Glue-6-8 bottles for mounting work

**Advance Preparation:**

Cut large tissue sheets into smaller squares of tissue (approximately 4"x4" squares). Cut white 12 x 18 paper to 10x15. Cut black 12x18 paper to 12x17.

**Mini Lesson: (5min)**

Discuss the connection between emotions and warm and cool colors. What are examples of warm colors (red, orange, yellow) what are examples of cool colors (green, blue, purple). Warm colors usually communicate the emotions happy, excited, mad, while cool colors make us feel emotions calm and sad. Have the kids take a moment to think about what emotions they want their art to communicate and think about the colors associated with those emotions.

**Process: (30-40min)**

- Have each student select an abstract idea or emotion. **Examples:** energy, freedom, confusion, confinement, happiness, anger, anxiety etc. For younger students, stick with easier ideas like happy, sad, mad etc. Remind them of the mini lesson—what colors will they use?
- Students should try to depict their idea in an **abstract manner** using only color and composition. This is hard for them to understand, many will try to create a picture of something concrete. You may have to go over the instructions several times.
- Select colors of tissue that reflect the emotion of your piece. Carefully plan out the shapes and lay cut or torn tissue pieces out on their desk or the paper.
- Paint an area of the paper with water. Lay tissue on the wet paper and brush over it with water.
- Continue laying other sheets of tissue on the paper and continue to fill most of the paper.
- Encourage overlapping of colors to create new colors.
- Remind students that some areas can be left void of color to help create their design.

- Study your abstract. Does it need more color? Repeat process till the desired affect, emotion, is created.
- If possible, let the piece dry before removing the tissue. The colors should have bled and mixed on the paper. If time does not permit, tissue can be removed wet but it is a messy endeavor!
- When they are done, have them title their piece and mount it to the black paper (this can be done before the tissue is completely dry).
- Artwork will need to be thoroughly dry before it's placed in portfolios.

**Clean Up:** Thoroughly wash brushes and store brushes upright. Collect usable dry tissue scraps and place them back into the tissue bag for other classes to use.