

PIPPY HOULDSWORTH GALLERY

Press Release

HELEN FRANKENTHALER | AIMÉE PARROTT

Soaked, Not Resting

23 January – 21 February 2015



Aimée Parrott, *First Hand, Second Hand*, 2014
watercolour and acrylic medium on bleach treated canvas, 160.7 x 120.5 cm

Before [Fall of 1952], I had always painted on sized and primed canvas – but my paint was becoming thinner and more fluid and cried out to be soaked, not resting.

– Helen Frankenthaler

Soaked, Not Resting will examine the different ways in which celebrated Color Field painter Helen Frankenthaler and emerging artist Aimée Parrott negotiate the picture plane, looking in particular at both artists' deployment of staining.

An exponent of Color Field painting, Frankenthaler is renowned for pouring thinned paint directly onto raw, unprimed canvas to create stained pools of vibrant colour. Developing Pollock's pouring technique, Frankenthaler initiated a new way of working with paint. Using squeegees, sponges and household brushes to manoeuvre the paint horizontally across the canvas, the resultant 'soak-stain' effect serves to emphasise the physicality of the surface. As Professor Mona Hadler explains: 'the stained image appears to be neither in front of nor illusionistically behind the picture plane. It is literally *one* with the canvas.'

Frankenthaler's early works are characterised by airy, luminous compositions which give over to pure colour, with figure and ground merging into one. By the 1980s, her work gradually became calmer; Frankenthaler's mark making occurred in more muted tones, and though still concerned with the relationship between shape and space, her gestures were more considered. *Quattrocento* (1984) exemplifies this shift. Deep mauves blend into turquoise greens, bleeding across the canvas from left to right. Demarcated by black striations, this expanse of colour is offset by a border of lush pink.

Combining methods of painting and printmaking, Aimée Parrott uses staining to a similar end. Her large watercolour paintings are made using an open screenprinting technique where pigment is transferred directly onto the canvas through a polyester mesh. Like Frankenthaler, gestural washes are embedded into the fabric weave of her paintings. However, whilst Frankenthaler emphasises the flatness of the canvas, Parrott instead plays with pictorial depth by building up veil-like layers of colour that coalesce into amorphous forms.

Describing how these pieces are made, Parrott explains: 'the transfer of the pigment from screen to canvas creates a disjunction, a stutter between the original gesture and the surface on which it sits. Specifically, I want to create different spaces within the work; using raw or stained canvas holds the viewer on the surface of the piece, forcing them to consider the texture, the weave, whilst gestural marks push beyond the physical object into an illusory or imaginary space.' This sense of depth is further intensified by the use of bleach, which breaks the homogeneity of the canvas in order to create an uneven ground for the print to sit on.

Where the pigment is pushed through the screen, ghostly traces of the original squeegee marks remain floating on, and behind, the surface, serving to disrupt the original application of watercolour. Whilst strangely familiar, these amoeba-like shapes evade recognition by constantly shifting in and out of focus. In effect, Parrott's mark making triggers deeper, sensory memories. Playing with our perception, her approach calls to mind the way in which we process external stimuli, both visual and physical, in order to understand the world around us. Treating the canvas surface like a layer of skin, the artist simulates how the world imprints itself on our bodies. Significantly, Frankenthaler also cited the influence of such external stimuli within her work, often translating the natural landscape into abstract compositions. In 1957, she commented, 'if I am forced to associate, I think of my pictures as explosive landscapes, worlds, and distances held on a flat surface.'

Continuing Parrott's exploration of different surfaces, the exhibition also features her distinctive 'overlap' works. Sitting somewhere between painting and sculpture, these pieces feature an extra layer of fabric hanging from the top of the canvas which mimic the composition beneath. This reproduction is a flatter, more homogenised image that partially obscures the underlying canvas, sanitised and removed from the surface of its original counterpart.

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Whilst Frankenthaler's works on canvas are characteristically flat, her works on paper play with layering in a similar way to Parrott's overlap paintings. Built with multiple coats of oil and overlaid marks, painting on paper enabled Frankenthaler to experiment with the interplay between surface and deep space. For instance, in *Blue on One Side* (1962), patches of opaque blue assert the flatness of the picture plane. However, where these blocks of paint bleed into the fibres of the paper, the colour begins to withdraw backwards.

Helen Frankenthaler was born in New York City, 1928, and died in Darien, CT, 2011. Following her first solo show in 1951 at age 22, Frankenthaler's work has been exhibited at Whitechapel Gallery, London; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Museum of Modern Art, Mexico and Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, amongst numerous others. Her estate is represented by Gagosian Gallery, New York.

Frankenthaler's work is in the collections of the V&A, London; Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo; Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; Brooklyn Museum, New York; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; Cincinnati Art Museum; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; National Gallery of Art, Washington DC; Tate, London; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, amongst many other public and private collections worldwide. Her work is currently the subject of a major solo exhibition at Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo.

Born in England, 1987, Aimée Parrott graduated from the University College Falmouth in 2009 with a BA in Fine Art and in 2014 received a Post Graduate Diploma from the Royal Academy Schools, London. Her work has been shown at Breese Little, London; Ink-d Gallery, Brighton; Simmons and Simmons, London; Tintype Gallery, London; Matt Roberts Gallery, London; Minerva Theatre, Chichester and A.P.T. Gallery, London. Parrott has completed residencies with the Artists League of New York and Angelika Studios, and is the recipient of the Archie Sherman Scholarship and the Ford Award.

With thanks to the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation and Gagosian Gallery.

Upcoming: 27 February – 11 April 2015

Tania Kovats

Watermark, Main Gallery

Shezad Dawood

The Box