

Marlborough

PRESS RELEASE

For press inquiries please contact
Marissa Moxley at (212) 541-4900
or moxley@marlboroughgallery.com

The Directors of Marlborough Gallery are pleased to present *LEGENDS*, an exhibition encompassing a group of four artists who played a crucial role in defining the Abstract Expressionist movement of the twentieth century. Presenting the work of Sam Francis, Helen Frankenthaler, Robert Motherwell, and Beverly Pepper, Marlborough is revisiting a legacy which began over sixty years ago during the initial expansion of the gallery to New York.

Abstract Expressionism, at its core, began as a critical enterprise given to both defining and solving problems, based on the assumption that through the application of intellect, hard work, and diligence, the problems of the past could be swept away and replaced by objective, rational humanism. Postwar American Ab-Ex art came with the full endorsement of the U.S. Government, a practice which celebrated the independence of the inventive individual and romanticized willful, often unorthodox creativity. Quickly, new modern works of art became signifiers of a community or company's modern character, just as the artist became both icon and iconoclast, hero and anti-hero, a courageous creator forging the conditions and terms of the new world.

Into this mix of dynamic social, economic, and cultural conditions, a new generation of artists including Sam Francis, Helen Frankenthaler, Robert Motherwell, and Beverly Pepper garnered the necessary support and resources to work at a physical scale that gave their painting and sculpture a unique architectural presence and authority that would in part define the direction of their work for over a half century.

Regarded as one of the most masterful colorists of the Abstract Expressionist movement, **Sam Francis** (1923–1994) developed a distinctly vibrant and gestural style of painting. Francis's paintings are remarkable for the stark contrasts between luminous whites, dark blacks, and exuberant splashes of color on the canvas. A lifelong peripatetic, Francis developed a visual language which culled inspiration from a multitude of sources. Francis was drawn to influences ranging from the French Impressionists to Chinese and Japanese ink paintings to American contemporaries such as Jackson Pollock. Presented here will be two of his meticulously refined large-scale "Matrix" paintings from 1978, as well as a major 1959 work on paper, *New York New York*, which references his earliest cycle of works from his years in Paris.

Second generation Abstract Expressionist **Helen Frankenthaler** (1928–2011) expanded the possibilities of line and color through subtle, ambiguous references to landscape and figuration. Frankenthaler applied turpentine-thinned paint directly on unprimed canvas laid on the floor, inspired by her predecessor Jackson Pollock. Her use of this technique is widely credited for playing a pivotal role in the transition from Abstract Expressionism to Color Field painting, a movement characterized by large fields of flat, solid color spread across the picture plane.

Taking notable inspiration from the Surrealist movement, **Robert Motherwell** (1915–1991) was an American painter who led the first-generation Abstract Expressionists to pioneer the New York School and an entirely new type of abstraction. With a background in philosophy, Motherwell employed a theoretical approach to his works, engaging with themes of politics, philosophy, and literature. Motherwell is regarded as one of the most articulate of the Ab-Ex painters, and continued as an avid writer, poet, and theorist throughout his career. Deeply committed to educating audiences, Motherwell founded the Dedalus Foundation ten years before his death to nurture public understanding on principles of modernism.

MARLBOROUGH GALLERY, INC.

545 West 25th Street
New York, NY 10001
t. (212) 541-4900 / f. (212) 541-4948
www.marlboroughnewyork.com

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LEGENDS

SEPTEMBER 21 - NOVEMBER 12, 2021



Sam Francis, *New York New York*, 1959, acrylic, gouache, and egg tempera on gessoed French paper, 40 x 27 in. | 101.6 x 68.6 cm. © 2021 Sam Francis Foundation, California/ Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

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Beverly Pepper, *Helena*, 2014-2018, Cor-Ten steel, edition of 4, 80 5/8 x 83 3/8 x 50 3/4 in. | 205 x 212 x 129 cm. © The Estate of Beverly Pepper.

Beverly Pepper (1922-2020), the significant American sculptor and 2003 recipient of Pratt Institute's Legends Award, frequently remarked that "it is not the art, but the viewer that unlocks the whim" in her work. Because of the multisensory quality of the metals employed, Pepper's larger-than-life sculptures radiate an expressionistic sensibility through the artist's acute attention to surface and texture. "Ever mindful of history," Pepper's sculptures, as noted by Rosalind Krauss, "may be read as timeless references that nevertheless maintain a vital dialogue between past and present." Independent from any art movement of her time, Pepper's legacy will continue to live on for her work's monumental scale, site-specificity, and integration with the landscape. Presented in this exhibition will be several monumental works from her *Moline Marker* series, realized as an experiment in 1981 at the invitation of the John Deere Foundry utilizing a new material, cast ductile iron, which she would pioneer as an artistic material. These experiments with markers and sentinels can be considered antecedents to her towering forty-foot Cor-Ten steel *Manhattan Sentinels*, installed in New York's Federal Plaza from 1993-96. Presented here for the first time will be a series of fourteen-foot Cor-Ten models for the *Todi Columns* which were installed in the Beverly Pepper Sculpture Park in the artist's adopted hometown of Todi, Italy in 2018.

We extend our sincerest thanks the following organizations for their assistance in making this selection of works possible:

Sam Francis Foundation
Helen Frankenthaler Foundation
Dedalus Foundation
The Estate of Beverly Pepper

Effective August 17, 2021, Marlborough requires all staff and visitors over the age of 12 to show proof of at least one dose of a COVID-19 Vaccine for entry. Masks are required for all visitors. Proof of vaccination may include CDC Vaccination Card (or photo), NYC COVID Safe App, New York State Excelsior Pass, NYC Vaccination Record, or an official immunization record from outside NYC or the U.S.

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