Helen Frankenthaler
Abstract Landscapes

"Flood" (1967)

Meet the Artist

Helen Frankenthaler

1928-2011

"There are no rules. That is how art is born, how breakthroughs happen. Go against the rules or ignore the rules. That is what invention is about."

-Helen Frankenthaler

Helen Frankenthaler was born in 1928 in New York City, the daughter of a NY Supreme Court Justice. After graduating college in Vermont, she returned to New York City to paint and was influenced by **ABSTRACT** painters such as Jackson Pollack. Two years later, in 1951, Frankenthaler had her first one-woman show.

While her work was considered to be in the style of abstract expressionist's, she used thinned down oil paints that soaked into the unprimed canvas, to create a "stain" effect rather than thick oil paints like most of her contemporaries. Although not always abstractions of nature, many of her paintings, embody a strong feeling of landscape. Frankenthaler's work spanned over six decades and she is considered to be one of the great American artists of the twentieth century.

Helen Frankenthaler's abstract paintings were very large, often times taking up a whole wall!

DID YOU KNOW?

Abstract paintings that have large areas of color are also called **COLOR FIELD PAINTINGS**. This term refers to the application of large areas, or "fields", of a single color to the canvas.

Look closely at the 2 paintings below and imagine them as **LANDSCAPES**. A landscape is an artwork that depicts natural scenery such as mountains, valleys, trees, rivers, and forests, especially where the main subject is a **WIDE VIEW**.

1. Using the **LANDFORMS** chart on the next page, describe the landforms that you can imagine.

2. What **TIME** of day would it be?

3. What **SEASON** do you think it is?

4. How has the artist uses **COLOR** to portray **MOOD** in these abstract paintings?

Nature Abhors a Vacuum, 1973
acrylic wash press painting
103 1/2" x 112"

Morning's Weather, 1982,
acrylic on canvas
88.4" x 112.4"

WATER AND LANDFORMS

FOREST land that is covered with trees and underbrush.

PLAIN a very large flat area of grassy land.

LAKE a large body of water surrounded by land.

PENINSULA a body of land that is surrounded by water on three sides.

CAVE a hallow space in the ground or mountain with an opening to enter.

RIVER a natural flow of water which runs towards an ocean, lake, or sea.

BAY a body of water that is partly enclosed by land.

ISTHMUS a narrow strip of land with water on both sides that connects two larger bodies of land.

CANYON a deep narrow valley with high steep walls usually formed by a river.

FJORD a narrow body of sea water between high banks or cliffs created by glaciers.

DELTA a triangular deposit of sediment at the end of a river or stream.

GLACIER a large body of ice that moves across the earth's surface.

GEYSER an opening in the ground that ejects hot water and steam.

HILL a raised part of land with sloping sides.

ICEBERG a large floating piece of ice that was part of a glacier.

ISLAND an area of land surrounded on all sides by water.

JUNGLE a forest in a tropical place with large numbers of trees and plants.

DESERT a dry area of land with plants and little water.

MARSH a wetland with grasses and little or no trees.

MOUNTAIN a tall rocky area of land that is much higher than the surrounding area.

OCEAN a large body of salt water that surrounds a continent.

PLATEAU an area of land flat on top with steep sides that is higher than the surrounding land.

WATERFALL a place where a river or stream flows over a steep region or cliff.

VALLEY low land between hills or mountains.

VOLCANO a mountain formed when lava rises through the earth's crust.

**SWAMP** a low, wet area of land that supports grass and trees.

ARCHIPELAGO a group of many islands.

CRATER a large hole in the ground that was formed by an impact (like a meteorite).

VERY VISUAL DESIGNS

As we consider Frankenthaler's abstract paintings, we can imagine ourselves in a **landscape** with ocean views, forest views, mountain views as well as the time of day that an artist might be looking at these views, which will create the mood of the painting. Imagine the **colors** an artist would use to paint the sunset, vs the middle of the day, vs dusk or early evening. As the light source changes, the colors will change, as well.

Today you will create your own abstract landscape inspired by a **REGION** in SC, by identifying the **LANDFORMS** found in that region, and choosing what **TIME OF DAY** you'd like your painting to depict. Choose 1 of the following regions to depict.

Blue Ridge

Piedmont

Sandhills

Inner Coastal Plain

Outer Coastal Plain
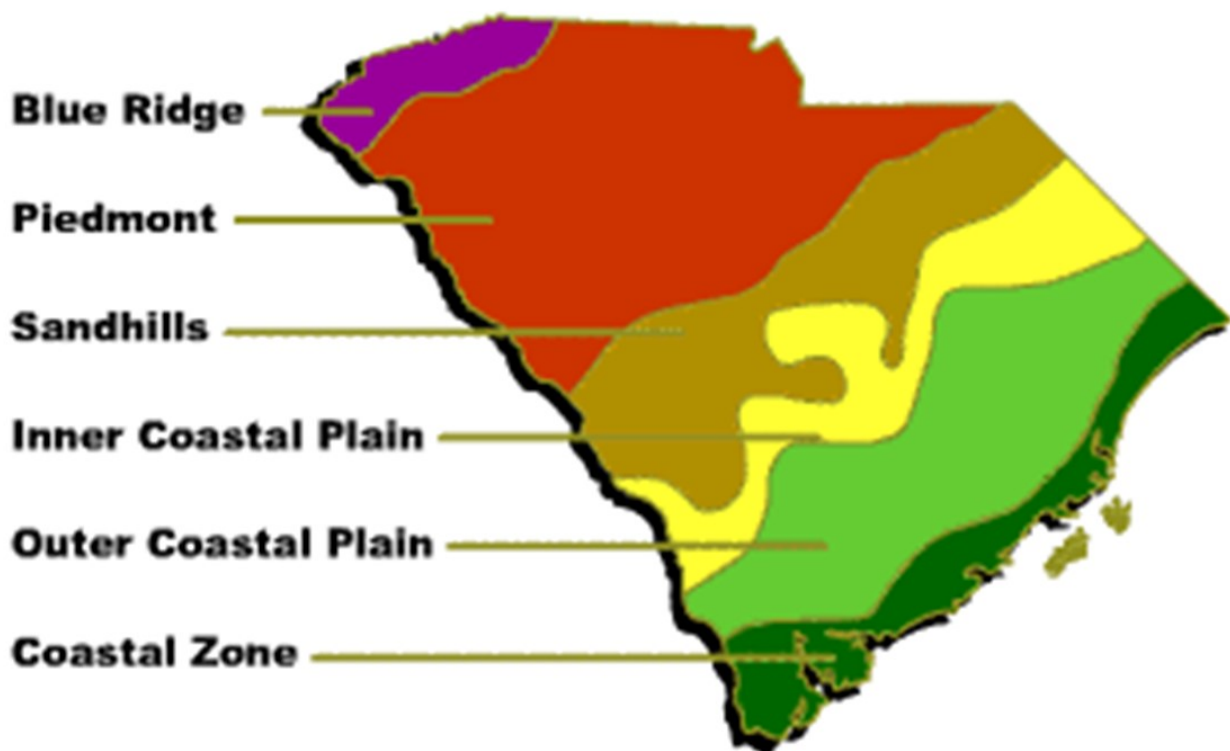
Coastal Zone

Blue Ridge Zone (Mountains)

Piedmont Region

(Greenville, Monadnocks)
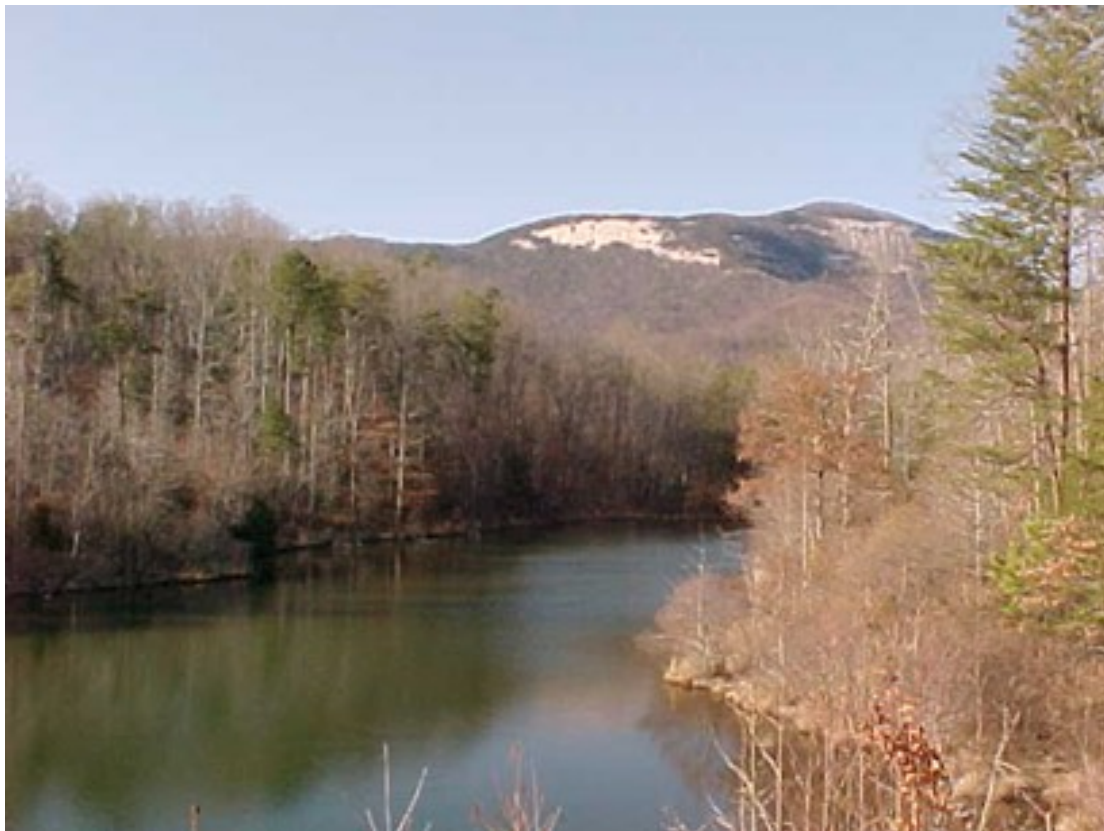
Sand Hill Region

(also called Midlands, ancient shoreline,

large layered sandstone rock formations)

Inner Coastal Plain

(Rolling hills and swamps, Lake Moultrie, Lake Marion)

Outer Coastal Region
(Farming/timber, swamps)

Coastal Zone Region

(Marshes, beaches, islands)

MATERIALS:

2 pieces of art paper, pencil, water-based markers, squirt bottle filled with water, paper towels, images of landforms found in different South Carolina regions.

Usually in a landscape we can see a point where the sky meets the ground. We call that the **HORIZON LINE**. The area that is far away in a landscape is called the **BACKGROUND**. The **MIDDLE GROUND** comes next, and the **FOREGROUND** is the part closest to us. Here is another landscape example:
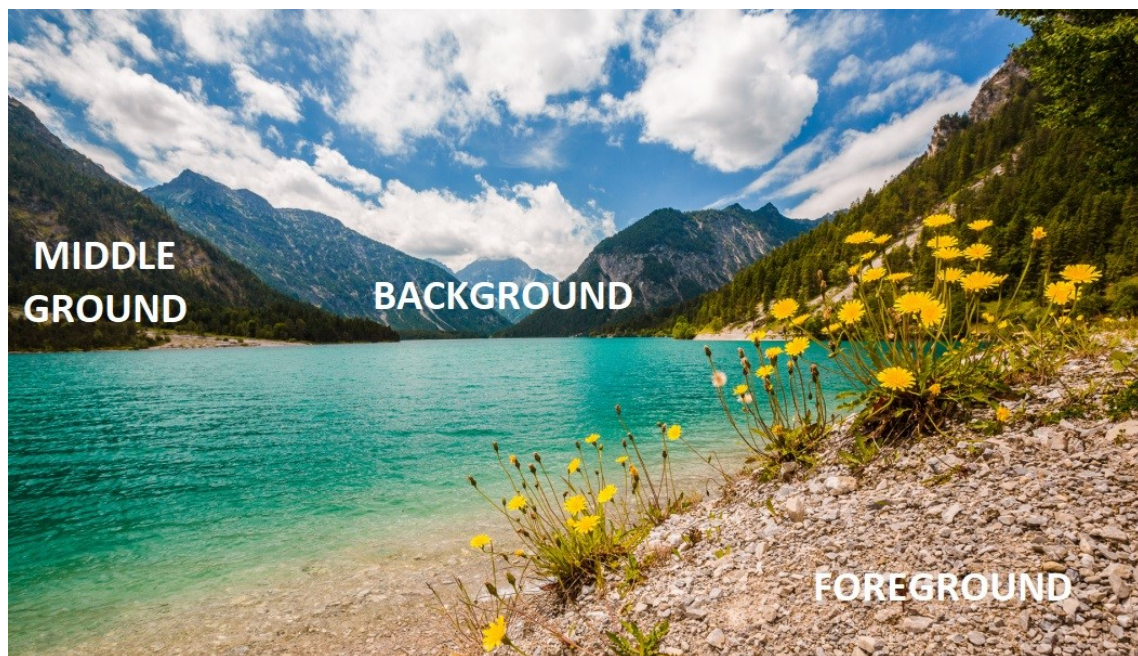

In this lesson, we are going to create our own **LANDSCAPE** that will have a background, middle ground, and foreground, and will depict **LANDFORMS** found in SC. We will use a printing technique called "press painting" that is similar to a technique Helen Frankenthaler used.

PROCEDURES:

1. Begin by selecting a photo-graph that depicts landforms found in a particular region of SC.

2. Next, identify the horizon line in the photo and lightly sketch that in.
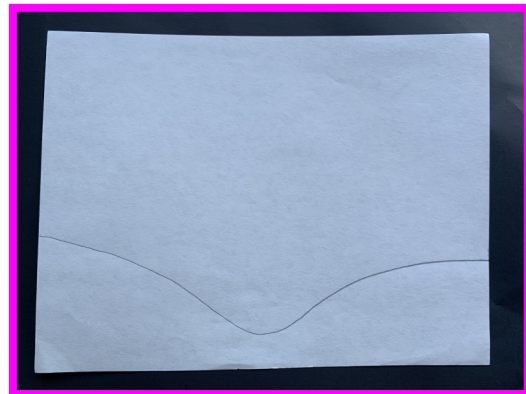
3. Now pay close attention to areas where colors change from light to dark, and color in your first broad band or shape of col-or with your marker. We are starting with the middle ground, the darker blue shade in the photo.
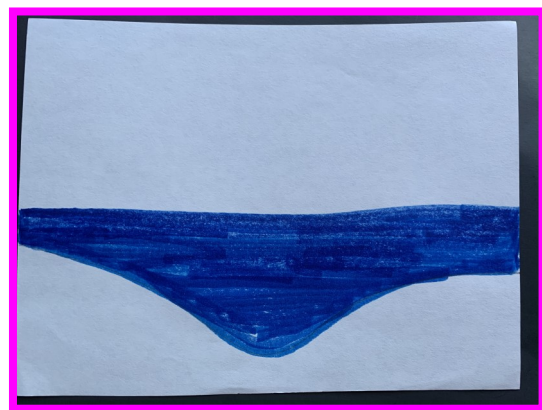
4. Before the marker dries, quickly squirt the painted paper with a few squirts of water, then put the second white piece of paper down on top of the first.

5. Using a marker laying on its side, burnish the paper, rubbing it well in order to transfer the wet marker to the second paper.

6. Lift the paper up and you will have a reverse print of the first piece of paper!

NOTE* If you would like the color to be a little darker you can re-peat the squirt and burnish stage.

7. Next, we will work on the foreground, or the part of the picture that is closest to the viewer. In this case it is the green area. The foreground is usually at the bottom of the page.

Using a different color marker, paint that area in with broad strokes.

8. Repeat steps 4 and 5 to print this new layer of color.
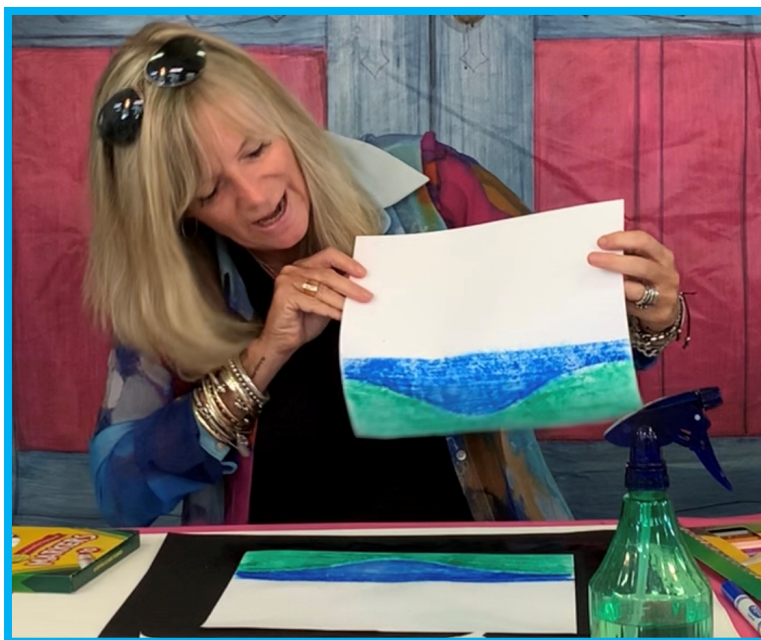
9. Now work on the background and any other landforms you see in the picture such as mountains, lakes, rivers, islands, plateaus, etc.
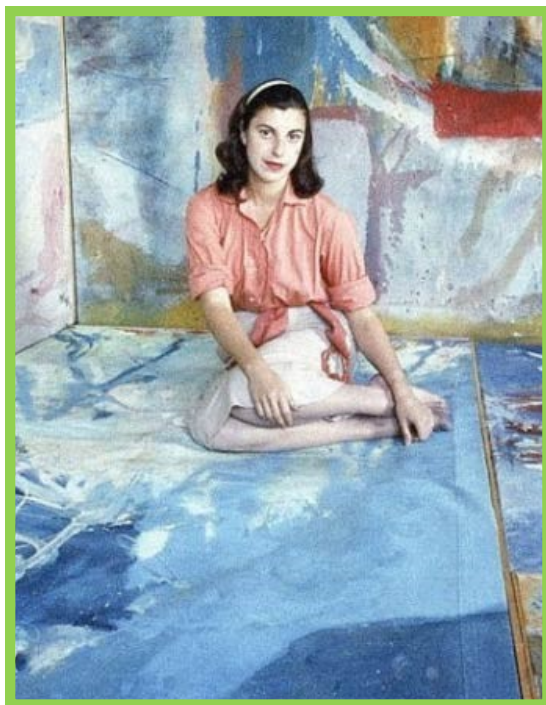
10. When you are finished you will have 2 artworks! One original and one "press painting" like Helen Frankenthaler! See if a classmate can identify what region in SC you were inspired by!

Watch a free video of this lesson on

![YouTube]

Search for "Arts Center of Coastal Carolina"

This program is sponsored by

ARTS CENTER
OF COASTAL CAROLINA