

# helen frankenthaler

Knoedler & Company

New York

Although painted in liquid acrylic on paper, the fourteen works in this show could not have appeared less like conventional watercolors, the medium through which the terms of painting on paper have largely been defined. In watercolors, what remains after the translucent paints are applied is the luminous effect of the paper's white ground showing through. Frankenthaler's acrylic paintings on paper emerge from a process that is, in a way, the reverse. In the works in this show, she used generally dark colored paper as a base on which to lay largely opaque areas of paint. The ground showed through the washes, not as a source of light obscured, say, by mists or clouds, but as a gloomy undertone over which the patches of color took on a tenebrous air. Like a subdued murmur heard within a bright conversation, the chromatic ground suggested not effulgence, but rather something unfathomable buried within layered applications of paint. And if traditional watercolors are often defined by their intimate dimensions and spontaneity, the grand scale of Frankenthaler's paintings and their worked-over surfaces rivaled that of works on canvas.

Although abstract, these works bore an affinity with the sea, its reflected light, atmosphere, and distant horizon line. Yet these were not seascapes so much as compositions that used, as in a painting by J. M. W. Turner, the sea's unbounded potential as an arena for realizing the possibilities of color and natural light. That light, as in the case of the brooding, nearly opaque hues of *Lighthouse series XII*, with its nocturnal greys and blues, was often intentionally obscured.

The horizontal lines and bands of color of *XIV*, in which a dusklike shroud of raw umber hung over a receding twilight pink, evoked both a limpid watery surface and a distant encroaching storm. The large field of densely layered violet-grey of *I* suggested an enveloping storm-cloud murkiness. And while the vegetal oxide greens of *X*, in broad thin washes and thicker blobs, intimated a silent and subdued underwater world, the intense, glowing reds and oranges scumbled on the paper in *VIII* created a kind of a pictorial conflagration: all smoke, fire, and flying ash, exploding on the surface of the sea.

Jonathan Gilmore



Helen Frankenthaler *Lighthouse Series IX*, 1999, acrylic on paper, 65.7 x 105.4 cm.

Kristin Oppenheim *Untitled Erin*, "Summer with Alesandra" (*The Eyes*), 2001, C-print.

# kristin oppenheim

303 Gallery

New York

In comparison to the swinging melancholy of her earlier *Hey Joe* or Rodney Graham's encyclopedic and joyous tripping, Kristin Oppenheim's *Black Sabbath* (2001) seems like a trip gone bad. Yet what else could be expected from digging up the eponymous 1970 classic by a famous heavy-metal band preoccupied by death, the occult, and demons, and then setting it to a light and sound installation? (Or rather a dark and sound installation) "What is this that stands before me?/Figure in black which points at me" the Dolby surround speakers tremble out their vision of archetypal drives, creating the illusion of a Hard Rock Cafe at closing time, when the room is empty, the companions and drinks gone. The song is a gothic allegory about evil and its projection onto human desire. Perhaps this is why a dozen bright, white, ceiling-mounted spotlights navigated the dark space, cranking up the drama to hysteric, *Doctor Caligari*-like heights before relaxing back into a somewhat gloomy chill-out. Despite the karaoke principle, Oppenheim's practice is charged with psychic expression and

explorations of the elusive, ever-present irrational, quite different from the DJ's method of selection and sampling. The artist's color photographs of children, on display in another room, as well as her *Sleepwalker* drawings clearly exemplified this tendency. With this piece Oppenheim acts as a sort of mediator, rereading the language of the traditionally male-dominated hard-rock industry in a feminist voice, fueling the music with her own psychic vibrancy. The installation suggested that she is aiming for an art in which the main goal is experience. Since the sensations of pain, fear, and desire usually provoke a feeling of encounter with the real, her hi-fi installation managed to approach a certain mytho-religious quality.

Raimundas Malasauskas

