Helen Frankenthaler frequently uses _je ne sais quoi_, the French expression meaning “I know not what,” to indicate a distinctive yet elusive quality she consistently seeks to achieve in her work. A member of the mid-twentieth-century circle of New York artists known as abstract expressionists, she relies upon subjective impressions, memories, and emotions to create gestural, evocative images. Her signature paintings celebrate the serendipitous results of saturating a surface with rich, liquid colors and allowing them to bleed into blank spaces and layer upon one another.

Frankenthaler was inspired by the drip paintings of her fellow abstract expressionist Jackson Pollock. But instead of dripping paint to produce art, she poured diluted pigments from coffee cans onto unprimed canvases.

Frankenthaler’s initial foray into printmaking was tentative, because she was skeptical about how that technically demanding, labor-intensive process would suit her unconventional, immediate approach. Much to her surprise, she found that printmaking, in its various manifestations, offered myriad options for experimentation and allowed her to create artworks that were as lyrical and expressive as her paintings. Since making her first lithograph in 1960, she has published more than two hundred prints and is now recognized as much for these works on paper as for her works on canvas.

_Wind Directions_ is part of the artist’s 1970 print series Four Pochoirs. Frankenthaler used large sponges to apply acrylic paint through a stencil (or _pochoir_, in French) directly onto the paper. While the finished prints appear identical, each impression holds the unique color modulations that result from her hand application. While creating _Wind Directions_, she simultaneously laid the groundwork for a subsequent print edition. Each time she applied the colors through the stencil, she carried them beyond the edge of the paper and onto a second sheet beneath it. A year later, she printed on each of those second sheets an etching of thin black lines that radiate out from the blank center to the colored edges. As befits an artist who champions spontaneity and eschews traditional methods, Frankenthaler titled that subsequent print _Free Wheeling_.

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Art of Our Time
Selections from the Ulrich Museum of Art
Wichita State University

Patricia McDonnell and Emily Stamey

With contributions by
Toby Kamps, Laura Moriarty,
Antonya Nelson, Timothy R. Rodgers,
and Robert Silberman

Photo-essay by Larry Schwarm

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