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English III

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Art's Cosmic Connection

In “Art Is a Different Kind of Cosmic Order,” Brian Greene, a theoretical physicist, discusses the significant roles that art and math play in helping us understand our universe. He first acknowledges the consistent and factual patterns found within mathematics. Then, Greene contrasts this with the subjective patterns present in art that encapsulate human experiences. To further demonstrate the subjectiveness and emotional aspect that art holds, he suggests that aliens would most likely be able to grasp our mathematical inclinations; however, our artistic pursuits would remain incomprehensible. Greene claims that art serves as a way to capture and express our personal human emotions and experiences. In other words, “The patterns of art matter because they speak to qualities of reality that exist within us” (Greene, “Art is a Different Kind of Cosmic Order”). To conclude, Greene argues that while the patterns displayed in math and sciences are important and reflect more to ‘external’ things, the patterns in art can represent more internal (emotional, mental) aspects of human experience.

The arguments presented by Greene find solid support in numerous pieces by Helen Frankenthaler, such as *Flirt* (c. 1995), *Mary, Mary* (c. 1987), and *Interior* (c. 1957). More specifically, Greene's argument that art encompasses subjective experience and celebrates our human responses to the world clearly reflects Frankenthaler's emphasis on patterns and elements which evoke different emotional responses in each viewer.



Fig. 1. Frankenthaler, Helen. *Flirt*. (c. 1995). *Caviar 20*
<https://www.caviar20.com/products/helen-frankenthaler-flirt-screenprint-1991>

In *Flirt* (see fig. 1), Helen Frankenthaler uses soft pastels to evoke feelings of serenity and playfulness, showcasing the element of color. The subtle overlap of these colors suggests a delicate intertwining of emotions and themes. The shapes lack rigid definition and take on a more fluid form. This fluidity creates depth and movement which might be indicative of changing perceptions. Frankenthaler utilizes contrast, not just in color but in the contrast of densely painted areas with more open spaces. This invites viewers to ponder the tension between fullness and emptiness in the piece. The meaning of this piece is not limited but rather open to interpretation where viewers engage with the piece and derive personal meaning based on their experiences, emotions, and perspectives.



Fig. 2. Frankenthaler, Helen. *Mary, Mary*. (c. 1987) *WikiArt*
<https://www.wikiart.org/en/helen-frankenthaler/mary-mary-1987>

Building upon the exploration of emotional depth through color and form in "Flirt," the analysis extends to "Mary, Mary" (see fig. 2) by Helen Frankenthaler. Here, the interplay of bold and muted colors, along with the potential symbolism of the name "Mary," echoes the emotional expressions seen in the previous artwork. The contrast between densely stained areas and emptier spaces, a theme introduced in "Flirt," persists, inviting viewers to interpret this intricate balance in "Mary, Mary" based on their unique perspectives. In *Mary, Mary* (see fig. 1), Frankenthaler utilizes a variety of colors, some bold and others muted, which can symbolize a spectrum of emotions or experiences. The name Mary might refer to someone close to the artist, or perhaps an historical or biblical figure. She fills the background and empty space with solid red which suggests intensity and passion. To counterpoint, she uses cooler hues, creating an interplay between densely stained areas and emptier areas which may represent both tension and balance. There are a variety of shapes used, however, the black circular ring at the top draws the most attention. Circles often represent unity and wholeness.

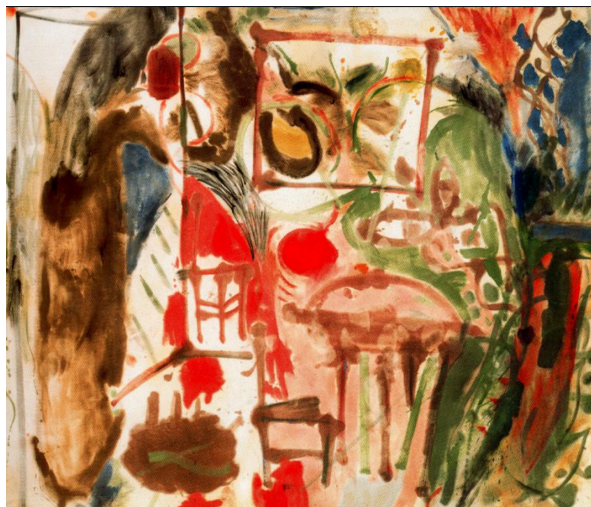


Fig. 3. Frankenthaler, Helen. *Interior*. (c. 1957) *WikiArt*
<https://www.wikiart.org/en/helen-frankenthaler/interior-1957>

Compared to the other paintings from above, the majority are primarily two-dimensional, however, in *Interior* (see fig 3.), the color and shape can suggest a sense of depth or three-dimensionality, like one of a dining room. The overlapping of primarily warm colors (red, orange, yellow, and green) and the contrast of different shapes creates fluidity which suggests depth, intertwining feelings, or memories. Within the abstraction, she includes slightly more defined lines which hint at the edges of a table, the legs of a chair, or the corners of a room. In addition to that, within the “first”/deepest layer of the painting, there seems to be a painting hung on the wall with a subtle frame on its perimeter. The scene with the picture hung in the back, and the distortion of color and shape hints at a sense of reality which can suggest a troubled mind or soul.

This sample of Frankenthaler’s work demonstrates her unique painting technique and her ability to convey emotional experiences. Frankenthaler's work, like many abstract expressionists, does not depict a single objective reality, but instead channels emotions, moods, and personal experiences. Each viewer might interpret her work differently which aligns with Greene's idea

that art provides a platform for personal and subjective responses. Greene describes art as a unique reflection of human interaction with the world. Frankenthaler's artwork embodies this idea, allowing viewers to create intimate connections and delve into their own feelings and perceptions to create their own interpretations.

Works Cited

Greene, Brian. "Art Is a Different Kind of Cosmic Order." *The New York Times*, 20 May 2020,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/20/opinion/art-physics-brian-greene.html>

Accessed 15 September 2023.

Note on the use of generative AI:

I used ChatGPT in the process of writing this paper

- Using specifically the elements of art, analyze the painting "Flirt" by Helen Frankenthaler
- Using specifically the elements of art, analyze the painting "Interior" by Helen Frankenthaler
- Using specifically the elements of art, analyze the painting "Mary, Mary" by Helen Frankenthaler