

# bernard jacobson gallery

## Sam Francis

20<sup>th</sup> April – 27<sup>th</sup> May 2017

Bernard Jacobson Gallery is delighted to announce a new exhibition of masterworks by the renowned Californian artist, Sam Francis, widely considered one of the most important artists of the post-war era. The exhibition presents an opportunity to admire work from the beginning of his artistic career in the early 50s through to his death in the early 90s, including both large-scale works on canvas and more intimate works on paper.

The gallery has enjoyed a long working association with Francis, beginning with a friendship between Francis and Jacobson dating back to the 1980s. This close working relationship has resulted in significant exhibitions by Francis with the gallery over the subsequent years and Bernard is considered a leading expert on the artist's work.

One of the essential life-long themes in Francis' work is immediately obvious in the 1960 painting, *Composition White on Blue*, blue was to be his lodestone, a hue which he referred to as celestial and his 'Mother liquid', with cognitive powers unmatched by any other colour. The 1960s marked a particularly prolific blue phase in his work and this work, which has remained in private hands for more than 50 years, is a particularly important example, successfully balancing the dynamism of Francis' mark-making with a sense of serenity and infinite calm.

Multiple influences, from Matisse and Monet - to the art of Japanese Zen calligraphers - are identifiable in the 1958 work, *Untitled (SP58-247)*. In this luminous painting, conjured from washes of blue, red and yellow gouache laid down on white paper, we see the beginnings of the artist's fascination with the 'Empty Centre'; a window-like white space at the heart of this work through which we might begin to glimpse infinity. Francis was highly influenced by Zen philosophy for the entirety of his artistic life and for him, the act of making and looking at art was a form of meditation through which we might both embrace the vastness of the universe and accept the transitory nature of our own existence.

Whilst Francis sits within the canon of leading American Abstract artists, such as Pollock and Rothko who have stamped a lasting imprint on the visual language of Modern Art in the 20th century, his work perhaps uniquely deserves to be viewed as standing in its own aesthetic time- frame. His painting introduces a way of seeing and experiencing art which launches us beyond the classicism of the west and speaks with a universality which is startlingly fresh and contemporary, more than 50 years on.