

bernard jacobson gallery

Sam Francis

A Survey of Graphic Work

27th November 2015 – 30th January 2016

Bernard Jacobson Gallery is delighted to announce an exhibition of limited edition prints by American Abstract Expressionist Sam Francis (1923-1994). The exhibition presents a survey of the artist's graphic output, spanning almost four decades of printmaking. It is part of our on-going programme of important surveys of works by major printmakers such as Robert Motherwell in 2012 and Ed Ruscha in 2013.

Sam Francis was an abstract artist whose artistic output covers different media from painting on canvas and paper, to drawings, ceramics and prints.

Like many other artists at the time, Francis became involved in printmaking in the 1960s and over the next thirty years established himself as one of the most prolific printmakers in America. His print oeuvre covers 500 prints including intaglios, lithographs, screenprints and monotypes. This exhibition covers all these aspects of his printmaking from his very first lithographs executed in 1960 such as "Footprint" to his late etchings which have very low edition sizes. Also included are many colour trial proofs that help visualize the artist's creative process.

An abstract artist from the beginning Francis started working with basic primary colours, which he extended over the next years to a much richer palette. He achieved this by over-printing colours, changing the sequence of over-printing and by experimenting with special ink, such as the metallic inks which he used in the 1970s. Francis said that opposing colours "give a real presence to the universe. That is what it is all about! Opposites are just the root, a kind of path, or a way to being more alive or conscious! White spaces still play a crucial role, as "the white space in them is the fullness of them...It is a celebration of the fertility of the white space."

Sources for his art can be found in Eastern Philosophy, in the writings of Carl Gustav Jung and in many artistic encounters all over the world. Having completed his studies of art and art history at the University of California in 1950, Sam Francis moved to Europe, stayed in Paris and Switzerland and travelled to Asia and lived in Japan for an extensive period.

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After his first successful commercial show in Paris in 1952, a museum show in Bern in 1955 and first recognition in America, Sam Francis came to printmaking when he was in his mid 30s and was offered the chance to make sixteen lithographs with the Zurich printmaker Emil Matthieu. This first group of prints, which includes the above mentioned "Footprint" as well as "Happy Death Stone" both presented in the exhibition, was shown and sold all over the world and helped to increase Sam Francis' reputation significantly. The process of drawing on a stone with its seemingly magical properties fascinated the artist.

After moving back to California in the early sixties the new printmaking studios Gemini and Tamarind Workshop opened and invited Sam Francis to make prints in their studios. Prints could now be done on a very large scale, lithographs such as "Spleen" created at Tamarind workshop, or screenprints at Gemini and etchings such as "Pioggia d'Oro" and "La Notte" at Stamperia 2RC in Rome.

Having worked with all of these important workshops Sam Francis established his own studio called The Litho-Shop in Santa Monica in 1970 to print and publish his prints. It enabled him to work with the same immediacy as in his paintings. He had two full-time master printers in his shop who were able to assist him at any time. They developed brilliant, lightfast and metallic inks for him, which gave his etchings a fantastic glow.

As he didn't have to schedule his printmaking activity anymore, he became more involved in creating monotypes. "When I am working with these prints, I am the paper, I am the paint, I am the machine...I am not trying to make something".

Beautiful examples of these as well as his lithographs and etchings will be on display at Bernard Jacobson Gallery until the end of January.

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