

bernard jacobson gallery

Sam Francis

5th June – 29th August 2014

Bernard Jacobson Gallery is delighted to announce our forthcoming exhibition of 'Sam Francis'; a collection of works by the renowned American artist. Francis was born in 1923 in San Mateo, California and began to paint as occupational therapy whilst recovering from severe back injuries sustained in a plane accident during Army Air Corps flight training in 1943. Hospitalized for several years, Francis first took up painting in 1945 while lying prone in bed. He made studies of the shifting light of the passing day falling across the neutral confines of his wards - bringing life to the immaterial passage of light in a manner that can be traced right through to his final works. By the time he was discharged it was to begin a degree in painting, rather than complete his war-interrupted studies in Botany, Medicine and Psychology, at the University of California, Berkley. We can see his interest in botany and organic forms in earlier works such as 'Untitled SF50-062' (1950) and 'Composition', (1953).

In 1950, spurred on by his complementary studies of Art History, Francis decided to go to Paris and enroll at Fernand Léger's private academy. Over the next ten years he split his time between Paris, New York and Japan, absorbing influences from the New York School, Monet, Matisse, Bonnard, French Tachistes and Zen calligraphers. His work, however, remains singular in its ability to fuse these influences with an approach to light and colour, structure and composition, which is uniquely his own, typified in works such as 'Study for the Chase Bank Mural' (1959) and later in his Blue Balls series. If this has made Francis difficult to place neatly within the narratives of West Coast American Art, New York or Parisian Schools, it has also led to the exhilarating experiential pleasure when encountering his work.

Whilst Francis made many works on canvas, it is arguably on paper - with its direct luminosity and partial absorbance of pigment - that his work really comes into its own. Here, against the plain white ground as seen in 'is To Mako' (1965) the interplay of gesture and colour, pigment and light, take on a dynamic relation, at once exuberant and elemental, theatrical and poetic. This not only allows but demands that the viewer enter the works and partake in their material flow. The works in this exhibition also convey Francis' preoccupation with the notion of instability, as explored in Buddhist teachings. Works such as 'Untitled' (1964), illustrated above, and 'Untitled (#2 Pri-Rain) (SF64-592)' (1964) contain fleeting, energetic brushstrokes,

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and 'Untitled' (1964) from his series of Edge paintings explores the Japanese philosophical idea of negative space.

Sam Francis has exhibited widely in the UK and abroad and his work can be found in major international museum collections, including those of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and MOMA, New York; Kunstmuseum, Basel; and the Centre Pompidou, Paris.

A fully illustrated publication with an extensive essay by renowned New York based poet and art critic John Yau will accompany the exhibition.