





SAM Five Decades of Abstract Expressionism from California Collections **FRANCIS**

Pasadena Museum of California Art
Pasadena, California
August 11, 2013–January 5, 2014

Crocker Art Museum
Sacramento, California
January 26–April 20, 2014

Sam Francis Foundation

Debra Burchett-Lere
Peter Selz

This publication accompanies the exhibition *Sam Francis: Five Decades of Abstract Expressionism from California Collections* curated by Debra Burchett-Lere and Peter Selz. Co-published by the Pasadena Museum of California Art, Crocker Art Museum, and the Sam Francis Foundation.

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Directors' Foreword

Sam Francis is one of abstract expressionism's top practitioners and California's most accomplished artists. It is therefore both significant and appropriate that two California institutions, the Crocker Art Museum in Sacramento and the Pasadena Museum of California Art, should partner to present his work. Francis himself was a product of both halves of the state, with studios in Santa Monica, Venice, Palo Alto, San Leandro, and Point Reyes Station. The artist's time in Paris in the 1950s, as well as in Switzerland and Japan during the 1960s, brought his work before international audiences. In this exhibition and catalogue we justly claim Francis as one of California's most talented artists, though because of his travels, exhibitions, and broad artistic influence, his achievements truly belong to the world.

Francis was born in San Mateo, California, and studied psychology, botany, and medicine at the University of California, Berkeley. While serving in the United States Army Air Corps during World War II, he was injured in test-flight maneuvers and developed spinal tuberculosis. During his years of hospitalization from October 1943 to early 1947, he began to paint. After being released from the hospital, he returned to Berkeley to study art.

With the GI Bill offering financial support, it was an opportune time and place for a young artist with fresh ideas. The University of California had maintained a progressive art program since 1930, when it enlisted the German artist Hans Hofmann to teach courses. Bridging the gap between European modernism at the beginning of the century and abstract expressionism a generation later, Hofmann's "push-pull" theories of color and composition taught Californians that painting existed in two dimensions, rather than as an illusionistic window onto a three-dimensional world. While at Berkeley, Francis also associated with the students and staff across the Bay at the California School of Fine Arts (now the San Francisco Art Institute), further exposing him to the teachings of David Park, Mark Rothko, and Clyfford Still. Inspired by the freedom and intellectual theories behind abstract expressionism, Francis adopted it as his own visual language.

In 1950 Francis moved to Paris and while there associated with other American painters, including Al Held and Joan Mitchell. He also became connected to a group of artists exploring a European variant of abstract expressionism—or *art informel*. In 1962, after spending time in New York City, he returned to California and set up a studio in the Los Angeles area. The space and light of Southern California proved inspirational, just as it had been to generations of artists before him, and seemed manifest in his large, airy canvases with rich, colorful hues. These paintings are certainly well represented in public and private collections throughout California and form the core of this exhibition, *Sam Francis: Five Decades of Abstract Expressionism from California Collections*.

For the Pasadena Museum of California Art (PMCA), the impetus for this exhibition stemmed in part from much-loved works displayed in Pasadena public collections, such as Francis's enormous *Basel Mural I*, a painting of radiant colors and an almost translucent application of paint, which hangs at the Norton Simon Museum. *Free Floating Clouds*, another beautiful and monumental piece, was

unveiled in 2009 in the Huntington's Virginia Steele Scott Galleries of American Art. Other paintings and prints by Francis can be found in museum collections throughout the Los Angeles region, and there are numerous examples in museum collections in the northern part of the state, primarily in San Francisco. But Sacramento also represents Francis's achievements. At the Crocker, his *Untitled* (c. 1959) canvas hangs in a gallery devoted to California's abstract expressionists. Until recently, two of his large canvases graced the escalator corridors of Macy's Downtown Plaza, having been commissioned for that location in 1978 by what was then Weinstock's Department Store.

Despite Francis's creative output and his impact throughout the state, there has not been a major museum exhibition of the artist's work in California in the past decade. Naturally, the Crocker Art Museum and the PMCA are thrilled to have the opportunity to collaborate with the Sam Francis Foundation in bringing this exhibition before the public. Because of the strong California focus of both museums, it seems only appropriate that the exhibition be drawn entirely from collections within the state.

The exhibition and its catalogue were produced by Debra Burchett-Lere, Executive Director of the Sam Francis Foundation, and esteemed art historian Peter Selz, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus at the University of California, Berkeley. We are indebted to both of them for their scholarship and devotion to Francis's works, as we are to Beth Ann Williams at the Sam Francis Foundation for her commitment and enthusiastic collaboration on the exhibition and catalogue.

The support and generosity of many lovers and champions of Francis's art have made realizing this exhibition and its accompanying catalogue possible. We are especially grateful to those private collectors who have contributed one or more paintings to the exhibition. This exhibition certainly could not have been realized without their willingness to part with such wonderful works. Institutions were generous as well, and special thanks go to the following: the Cantor Arts Center at Stanford University; Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; Frederick R. Weisman Art Foundation; Hammer Museum; Laguna Art Museum; The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego; Oakland Museum of California; Palm Springs Art Museum; Sam Francis Foundation; San Jose Museum of Art; and University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive.

We are extremely grateful to Harry Montgomery, David Mayes, and their associates at Typecraft Wood and Jones for their efforts in printing the catalogue, as well as copy editors Sue Heinemann and Wendy K. Grady, and designer Amanda Sarley, for their extraordinary work on the text and design of this catalogue. We thank Jonathan Novak for facilitating several loans to the exhibition, as well as for his own generous support. In addition, special thanks to Robert Green, Leslie Sacks, and Martin Lawrence Galleries for their assistance and collaboration. We also thank the Pasadena Art Alliance, Pasadena Arts League, Bente and Gerald E. Buck, and Kathleen Peck for championing this project. Additionally, we acknowledge PMCA Board Chairman David Partridge and his wife Cathie, Vice Chairman Jim Crawford and his wife Susan, and Treasurer Chris Wilson and his

wife Brooke Abercrombie. We also thank board members Simon Chiu, Jeff Dutra, Gina Knox, and Penny Lusche. We thank the entire PMCA Board of Directors for their support and encouragement, as well as its staff, including Erin Aitali, Emmett Clements, Sergio Gomez, Emma Jacobson-Sive, Alexis Kaneshiro, Chandra Pok, and Brianna Smyk.

We acknowledge the Crocker Art Museum Association Board of Directors, especially Board President Steve Mills, as well as Crocker Co-Trustee, City of Sacramento Councilmember Jay Schenirer. We thank the Crocker's Associate Director and Chief Curator Scott A. Shields, Ph.D., who served as the Crocker's in-house curator for this project. As always, the Crocker staff, especially Andrew Blicharz, Mariah Briel, John Caswell, Diana L. Daniels, Mark Hebert, Matthew Isble, Justin Marsh, Rika Nelson, Kathy Severson, and Stacey Shelnut-Hendrick, contributed immensely.

Lastly, both the Crocker Art Museum and the Pasadena Museum of California Art thank the Sam Francis Foundation board members including Robert Buck, Paul Cummins, Loree Goffigon, Nancy Mozur, Lucille Polachek, Bruce Polichar, John Seed, Elena Serrano, Jessica Todd-Smith, recently retired members Donna Stein and President Emeritus J. Patrick Whaley, and the family advisory council including Kayo Francis Malik, Osamu Francis, Shingo Francis, Augustus Francis, and Margaret Francis for their generous support, for making the exhibition and catalogue possible, and for their tireless devotion to promoting the art of one of California's most compelling artists.

Jenkins Shannon
Executive Director
Pasadena Museum of California Art

Lial A. Jones
Mort and Marcy Friedman Director and CEO
Crocker Art Museum



Order to Chaos, Chaos to Order

A Conversation about Sam Francis between Debra Burchett-Lere and Peter Selz

This conversation between Peter Selz (in roman type) and Debra Burchett-Lere (*in italics*) took place in Selz's home in Berkeley, California, on three dates: August 18, 2012; February 3, 2013; and March 21, 2013. It was part of their preparation for the exhibition *Sam Francis: Five Decades of Abstract Expressionism from California Collections*, which they are co-curating at the Crocker Art Museum and the Pasadena Museum of California Art.

Peter, how and when did you actually meet Sam? Was it in New York, Paris, or at the Venice Biennale?

I first saw Sam at the Venice Biennale in 1960. I remember that there were these two very interesting, good-looking people, Sam and Teruko Yokoi [his third wife], walking across and somebody said, "There goes Sam Francis." He was already super-famous. But I didn't actually meet him until later. We had crossed paths earlier without knowing each other in Paris, where I attended the University of Paris and Ecole du Louvre in 1949–50. Francis was living there in 1950, and we knew a lot of the same people. I spent time with the French critic and curator Michel Tapié, who championed artists painting in a *tachist* style—the European equivalent of abstract expressionism. Through Tapié I met quite a number of other artists, including Alberto Giacometti (later I did a show of his), but interestingly I didn't meet Sam until sometime later.

Michel Tapié never introduced you to Sam? Did you know Georges Duthuit [the French art historian and son-in-law of Henri Matisse] and his son, Claude Duthuit?

No, I didn't meet them. I was just a graduate student really then and left before Sam became more involved in the Parisian circles. At the time, through my mentor, the museum curator and scholar Bernard Dorival, I met a number of the French painters of the new Paris School—Jean René Bazaine, Alfred Manessier, Jean Le Moal—but they were not so interesting to me. I also met Jean Dubuffet and was very interested in him. But Sam and I did not meet then, as he had arrived just as I was leaving.

So when you did finally meet Sam were you already at the Museum of Modern Art [MoMA] in New York?



fig. 1

I was at MoMA, where I started as curator of painting and sculpture in 1958, and I think I saw him at openings in New York here and there.

But it was really after *Documenta III* in Kassel, Germany, after experiencing Sam's *Basel Mural Triptych* [1956–58] there in 1964, that I sought him out. I was one of the members of the selection board for the inclusion of painting and sculpture by American artists in *Documenta III*, and I was enormously impressed with Francis's work. Then something happened that is not written about in my book *Sam Francis* [published by Abrams in 1975], but is of some interest. I came back to New York and I suggested that we do a Sam Francis mid-career show at MoMA.



fig. 2

That was before you left MoMA?

The policy of MoMA was that it was not the museum doing the show, it was a specific curator as the director of an exhibition. At that point I suggested doing a Sam Francis show, and my colleague Bill [William C.] Seitz suggested doing an Isamu Noguchi show. The first time I really met Sam I took him to lunch and we had a very formal discussion about the possibility of doing a show.

Was this 1964 in New York?

Yes, 1964. We were in a restaurant and I said, "Sam, I want to do a solo show of your work at MoMA." That was really the first—

Dialogue you had with him.

Yeah. So it was very much the museum curator talking to the artist about a forthcoming show at an important place.

He must have been very excited about that.

Oh yes.

And you were going to show '50s works and maybe a few of the early '60s works?

Yeah.

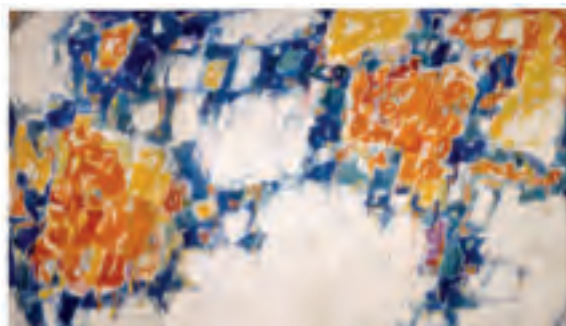


fig. 3

And so obviously from that first meeting you two connected somehow.

Oh sure. But then the MoMA shows were cancelled because their directors were no longer there.

That is how they ran things there—if the curator left, the show wasn't done?

I think it was a very good idea. For example, as the curator, I was the director of the Alberto Giacometti show, and Bill Seitz was the director of the Mark Tobey show.

You did the Mark Rothko show, so you were basically the director of that show. So you could take it with you—it was your [intellectual] property. When did you leave MoMA?

1965. So a few years later, maybe in 1967—and Sam frequently commented on this—he came to visit me. The MoMA show had been cancelled, and Sam came to visit me in Berkeley. He never complained about the show not taking place. We were sitting around the fireplace and everybody was smoking pot—very different from the first meeting in New York, where I was dressed in a suit and tie.

You were very East Coasty.

Sam frequently later on commented on this great change between Peter Selz at one point and three or four years later Peter Selz at another point.

You were transformed. You saw the California light, so to speak.

There's another thing I would like to tell you. In 1967 or so we talked about maybe asking Christo to wrap the museum and Sam getting an airplane and taking the wrap off the museum.

Oh, what a great idea. [laughter]

It was a wonderful idea. He was going to talk to the aeronautics people—we really talked about it. Of course Christo would have never done it, because Christo only wrapped things he decided to wrap, as I learned later when I got to know Christo and became project director of the *Running Fence* [1976]. But it would have been wonderful to have him wrap the museum and Sam unwrap it.

I've never heard that story. It sounds like a hair-brained Sam idea. And just like Sam—being sort of contrary. [laughter]

Like me, too.

You were both very similar in height, weren't you? You could have been brothers in a way.

I would like to think that.

Was this about the same time that Houston was doing its show on Sam, and weren't you going to bring that show to Berkeley?



fig. 4

It was around that time. Jim [James Johnson] Sweeney organized the show at the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston. It was the hundredth anniversary of the university, so I got extra money for a centennial show, and they suggested I do a show of Berkeley's art alumni. I looked around and decided there was only one great Berkeley alumnus, and then I did the Francis show in a temporary place—the Powerhouse [as the new museum building was not yet finished].

Right. I saw from the photos of the Berkeley show there were a lot of brick and wooden walls.

And I hung a painting from the ceiling. This was also when I recommended that Sam should be awarded an honorary doctorate from Cal Berkeley.

Yes, you hung a work from the ceiling, suspended in space, just as in the Houston show. Was this an idea that you all came up with, with Sam? I thought that was the most beautiful installation—hanging paintings from the ceiling and letting you see the backs of the paintings.

I don't know if Sweeney or Sam came up with the idea, but I picked it up.

I showed the pictures to Scott Shields at the Crocker and we talked about maybe doing that for our show. I guess we were worried about people running into the canvases with their cocktails at the opening.



fig. 5

Maybe you should do that. We hung them pretty high—if you hang them high enough. It depends on how good the cocktails are at the opening. [laughter]

I thought it was an interesting idea. It probably was Sam because, earlier, when he had a show at the Moderna Museet in Sweden in 1960, there were some paintings hanging suspended, floating in space as in the Houston installation in 1967.

That was the first time I worked with Sweeney. A good many years later, when I did the Eduardo Chillida book [in 1986], I asked Sweeney to write the introduction.

So you didn't know Sweeney that much in New York? He wasn't at the Guggenheim Museum then?

He left the Guggenheim soon after I arrived in New York. So we met but didn't know each other very well, although he was somebody I admired enormously.

He and Sam seemed to be close.

Oh, yeah, yeah.

I tried to interview his son, Sean, and we have talked a few times, but he moved to some remote place in Ireland, so it's been hard to reach him.

I wanted to ask you again about MoMA and the Jean Tinguely event you did there in 1960, where his sculpture Homage to New York destroyed itself. I know Sam and Tinguely were good friends. Was Sam there then for that event?

No. Sam was not there.

He'd left New York and returned to Paris already, I guess. I know that Tinguely did a big parade [of his machine sculptures] in Paris in the spring of 1960, and I know Sam was in Paris then. Do you know if he participated in that?

I don't know. I first saw Tinguely's work at the Paris Biennale in late 1959, when I was the commissioner for the Americans and two of the artists I curated got awards—the best sculpture award, “The Rodin Prize,” for Peter Voulkos and the painting prize for Helen Frankenthaler.

Congratulations!

Sam may have been there, but I didn't meet him. I met Tinguely, and at that point you could put a franc in one of his machines and an abstract expressionist painting came out.

Really? Oh my goodness.

Yeah, Tinguely did that. Somewhere downstairs I have it.

You do? That should be in the Tinguely museum. Did he make a lot of those?

A lot, yeah.

What a great thing. I have never seen these franc pieces.



fig. 6

Then later on, when I curated Tinguely's *Homage to New York*—it was one of the first things I did at MoMA—I was putting my job on the line.

I remember hearing about how you came in and ruffled some feathers there—which was good actually—because it was very much run by a certain group. I'm curious about your relationship to the curator Dorothy Miller. Did you get along with her?

Oh sure, we had very close offices. But she worked for the collection, and I was in charge of the changing exhibitions.

She brought Sam to MoMA with the purchase of Black in Red [1953], which became his first painting to enter a public collection in the U.S.

Yes. She also included Sam in a few important international group shows in the late 1950s, including *New American Painting* and *Twelve Americans*, which showed his work to a larger audience.

You didn't really work with her, though, as you were working in a different area?

With the Tinguely, Dorothy Miller told me, “Our job is to preserve not to destroy works of art.” Then I told her, “Well, my job is to exhibit works of art as I am in charge of the exhibitions program.”

That Tinguely happening is very well known. I think that is something you put on the map for the museum.

Besides Tinguely, over the years, there were so many friends Sam and I knew together, such as the Chinese painter Walasse Ting, who was one of Sam’s friends. One time I worked with Sam when he had the studio in the Ocean Park neighborhood in Santa Monica, California, right next to Richard Diebenkorn’s, and the three of us had lunch together.

You worked with Richard Diebenkorn?

Yes, he was in my first show, the *New Images of Man* [at MoMA in 1959].

What about Joan Mitchell and Jean-Paul Riopelle and Sam—did you know them at all together?

I did not know them in Paris.

And the artists Al Held and Norman Bluhm?

I knew Al Held and Norman Bluhm.

There were stories about Sam and Norman hating each other, with accusations of one copying the other’s work, and they fell apart as friends. They were sharing a studio, and they had a huge blow-up about this.

I doubt that . . .

You know it is not unusual if you are sharing studios to be feeding off of each other, so it is hard to say—they may have come up with their ideas simultaneously or it was in the air or whatever. The story is that they never spoke again . . . but we are still trying to research more about their relationship for our updated biography.

I wanted to talk at one time to Frank Lobdell about Sam in Paris, but Frank didn’t want to talk about Sam.

Maybe there were some jealousies. Frank is from the Bay Area too, right?

That's right. Frank is still around. And he's a much better painter than Norman Bluhm.

And Jay DeFeo was in the Bay Area also. I guess she and Sam were good friends.

Yes.

Oh, and there's somebody else—Larry Calcagno, who was from the Bay Area and who spent some time in Paris with Sam.

Hultberg.

Yes, John Hultberg and, like Sam, he was also involved with the Martha Jackson Gallery.

He has been overlooked. He was a very, very fine painter. Someone should do a Hultberg show.

That's interesting. You never did a show?

As you got to know Sam, did you spend time with him at his home and his studios?

I spent a lot of time with him at his house on West Channel Road [in Santa Monica]. I went there very, very frequently to work on the book and, once in a while, I was invited to stay over there. I spent a lot of time in his studio looking around. I rarely was able to watch him paint—he didn't want to do that—but I did once in a while. Whew!

You snuck a peek.

Yeah. We spent a lot of time together at his house, in his studio, and here in my house in Berkeley. Let me tell you about how I got this big painting *Iris* [1965/67], hanging here in the living room. It was during the time I was hoping to hire a modern architect, Donald Olsen, a student of Walter Gropius who was a professor of architecture at Berkeley and whose houses I liked very much. I bought this lot here and was planning to have Donald build the house, and then one time I went down to see Sam in Santa Monica, which I frequently did, and told Sam about the house and how I couldn't



fig. 7

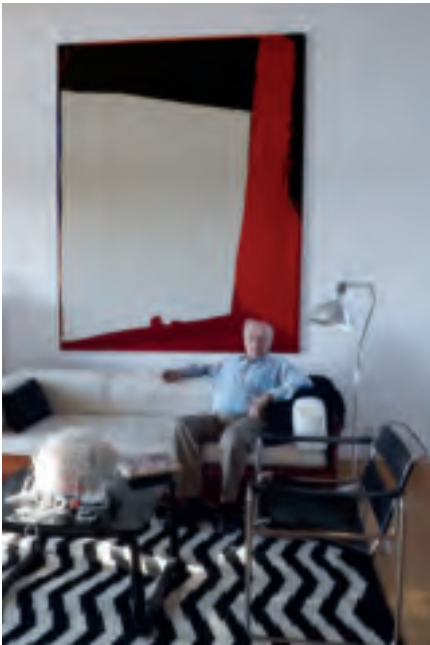


fig. 8

afford to build it. Sam asked if there would be a large wall. And I said, “Yeah, there is a large wall.” And Sam said, “Well, I will make it easier for you. If you decide to build the house, you can select a large painting to put on the wall.”

Many years ago, quite a few years later, Sam and I were sitting here at my newly built house, and the Edge painting I had picked out had to have a name for an exhibition. It was still called *Untitled* at the time. Sam looked at it for a while and then said, “Call it *Iris*, like the opening of the eye.” I’ve been looking at this painting on my living room wall for some forty years. I see it as a work of great potential energy, with the white area pushing forward with powerful force, only to be held in check by the dark strip on the painting’s left margin. In one of his aphorisms Sam wrote: “The space in the center is reserved for you.” Sam’s paintings, no matter how abstract, are not just “color fields.” They, like Rothko’s canvases, are endowed with emotional meaning.

Sam and I had lots of discussions. We talked for hours. He wanted to talk about Zen and also about Carl Jung. I had studied Jung myself. So we talked about many, many things. And we became very, very good friends as time went on.

In the Pasadena and Crocker exhibitions we are including some of the more austere Edge paintings, where the color hugs the edges, including Untitled [1965–66] from the Oakland Museum of California collection. You said he didn’t like anybody to watch him in the studio. Did you see him painting mostly at night or in the day?

Mostly in the day.

In Paul Karlstrom’s book about you—Peter Selz: Sketches of a Life in Art, published by UC Press—you mentioned that you first responded to Sam’s work because it was truly beautiful. You felt that his work was able to “provide the essence of the soul of color as well as the color of the soul.” I think that’s a beautiful quote.

I remember when I saw the *Basel Mural Triptych* in the *Documenta III* exhibition, I had been in Europe quite a long time and had seen some works by Sam here and there. But when I saw that triptych I was really flabbergasted—I mean the light, the air, the color. There simply was nobody who had that sense of color that Sam had. Nobody. And in our discussions of course we talked about it. I wanted to know what it came from, and we talked a lot about the great French colorists. One reason he went to Paris instead

of New York was because he wanted to look at the French painters, especially Claude Monet, Pierre Bonnard, and Henri Matisse.

You can clearly see that.

Yeah.

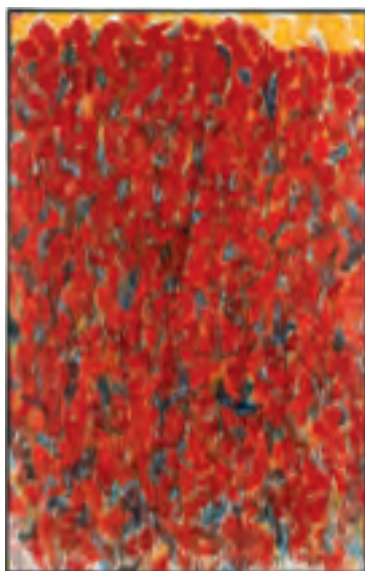


fig. 9

That he was really influenced by the French colorists, especially in his works of the 1950s. Remember he made that statement “I make the late Monet pure,” which was published in an exhibition catalogue [from 1967]? Is there a period in Sam’s work that you respond to most, or do you respond to different pieces regardless of era?

Different pieces, different periods. I like the all-over paintings, like the red canvas in MoMA’s collection in New York titled *Big Red* [1953], which I looked at a lot. They’re not showing it now, but they should be showing it all the time. And then the later, open paintings, and *Iris* here.

So, the Edges from the mid- to late 1960s. You like the Edges, too?

Well, I like this one [*Iris*] especially. When they’re all white, or almost all white, I don’t think those are his strongest works, because he was about color, and there is a minimum of color in those. But the color that is in this one is very, very strong.

Very dynamic.

It opens up.

*What about the later works, such as the really thick, lava-like, flowing works of the late 1980s and early 1990s? We have selected a few for the exhibition such as *Untitled* [1985] from a private collection and *Iron Forest* [1989] from the Katz Collection in Los Angeles. Don’t you feel these are explosions of light and color and intensely personal explorations—another type of landscape relating to the earth and matter? This period of his oeuvre brings out even more Sam’s*

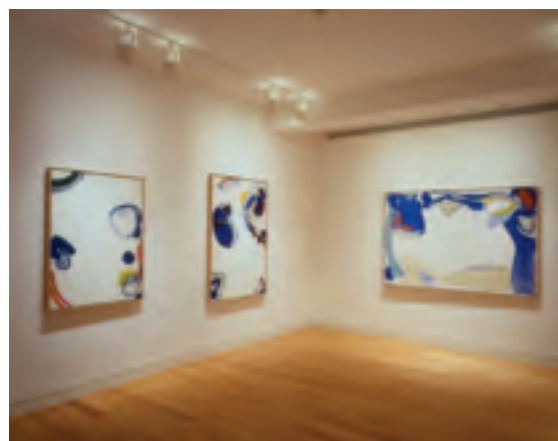


fig. 10

mercurial nature. The work can sometimes be viewed in such contrast to his body of work from the 1950s. Actually, the work from the late 1980s and early 1990s continues his dialogue with the early years and includes elements of alchemy and rebirth, concepts that enveloped his psyche throughout the years.

I especially love the Blue Balls series. That's why I did the Blue Balls show at Gagosian Gallery in New York in 1991. Let me quote something about this series of works I wrote in my 1975 monograph: "It is blue, as both Goethe and Kandinsky knew, which beckons into the infinite, and the more we look at these paintings with their ephemeral and transitory form, the more we feel that they are indeed metaphors of infinity." I also wrote: "They seem to resemble disembodied eyes, breasts, or apertures of the body. The shapes in this and other paintings of the Blue Balls series also recall vaginal and phallic shapes as well as primordial forms, such as spermatozoa, amoebae, and embryos surrounded by plasma." So much for my interpretation. Sam once told me: "I was flying off in all directions at the time and the Blue Balls series was a way to contain myself."

Yes, great show.

It was a wonderful show. And the art dealer Larry Gagosian really wanted to make a name for himself, because I told him there was virtually nothing for sale in that show—maybe one or two works. Everything else was borrowed from museums, mostly European and Japanese collections, and some American.

We have selected a variety of Blue Balls paintings for this exhibition, including two canvas works: Blue Balls VII [1961–62] from The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles [MOCA], and As for Appearance IX [1963–65] from the Curry Family Collection. There are also some works on paper, such as Blue, Black, Red and Green [1962] from Jonathan Novak Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.

So overall you respond to his earlier work more than to work from the later part of his career?

Yes, I respond more to his earlier works.

Did you ever talk to Sam about that? I know he was bothered by a lot of people not responding to his later period, and that's why he really appreciated the dealer André Emmerich and his galleries in New York and Zurich, as he primarily championed Sam's work created during the 1980s and developed a stronger collecting base for those works. There seems to be a division among Francis lovers between early, mid-career, and later.

Although I prefer the earlier work such as *Grey* [1951] from MOCA, *3 Blue* [1952] from the Berkeley Art Museum, *Abstraction* [1953] from the Buck Collection, and *Blue and Yellow* [1954–55] from the

Edythe and Eli Broad Collection, I also value the work of his later periods.

Like the Bright Ring works, such as Untitled No. 24 [1965] from the Curry Family Collection.

Also some of the Matrix compositions, like *Untitled* [1977] from Jonathan Novak Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, *Untitled* [1979] from the Palm Springs Art Museum, and *Untitled* [1980] from the Doris and Donald Fisher Collection, as well as the Fresh Air ones, such as *Untitled No. 11* [1972–73] from a private collection in Los Angeles and *Untitled* [1974] from the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego.

Two of the intensely gestural Matrix compositions that we will be exhibiting include Untitled [1974] from the Edwin and Cherie Silver Collection and Untitled [1979] from Leslie Sacks Fine Arts, Los Angeles.

It seems that for you, as for Sam, it doesn't really matter whether the work's on paper or canvas, right?

Yeah.

Both supports are equally important. I have noticed that many people who respond to Sam's paintings gravitate to certain styles, and some collect in depth within these periods, such as the Los Angeles dealer Jonathan Novak, who has acquired mostly Grid works from the mid- to late 1970s.

Yes, I know. When I was working on my 1975 book on Sam, I went to his studio and he brought out all these reproductions—a table full. I said, “When were these done?” “Oh,” he says, “I don’t know the exact date.” I said, “What’s the name of it?” “It has no name.” So I said, “Sam, I cannot work on this book if you show me all these reproductions of things that have no name and no date. [laughter] You better hire somebody to put it in order.” And that’s how he got—

Oh yes, Nancy Mozer. So you were the impetus for the wonderful Nancy?

That’s right. And then she helped put it all in shape. And in 1982 the second edition was published by Abrams.

Harry Abrams knew Sam in New York and Paris. Did he approach Sam to publish a book on his work?

Yeah.

Didn't the book ultimately help with Sam's New York presence?

Oh sure.

And with you as the author with your former curatorial position at MoMA and being at UC Berkeley, it was more scholarly and art history oriented.

I should mention that when Abrams wanted to publish a book on Sam, he didn't know many people in California. He knew the art critic of the *Los Angeles Times*, Henry Seldis, and suggested Seldis as the author. Sam came to me and said, "I would rather have you write about me than Henry Seldis." And that's how it came about.

Betty Freeman, a close collector friend who lived in Beverly Hills, was also working on a book, which never got published.

She finished part of it. I don't know what happened to it. I think it's in the archive. I've never seen it.

It only went to 1969.

It's probably good.

Yes, it is very personal in many ways, and there are some good stories. It never got the green light because it was too close to the Abrams publication date apparently.

I'd love to see that.

So through all the years did you ever know Sam's first two wives—Vera Miller and Muriel Goodwin?

No. I tried to meet them, but it never worked out. So I didn't know his first wife, didn't know his second wife. I really didn't know his third wife, Teruko Yokoi, either. But of course I knew Mako Idemitsu, his fourth wife, very well.

You had a strong friendship with her?

Yeah.

And then did you know Margaret Smith, his fifth wife and widow?

Oh sure.

Mark Whitney, a filmmaker who has done some films on Sam, is going to interview Teruko in Switzerland. She has agreed to talk to him and be filmed, which is exciting. And we've asked Mako to be interviewed for our oral history archives.

I liked her very much. I also met Sam's dealer in Japan one time, when I was one of the jurors of a major international show.

Oh, Kusuo Shimizu, who owned the Minami Gallery in Tokyo. His gallery was a leader in promoting contemporary art in Japan.

Shimizu, yeah, and he was very, very nice. He took me on an overnight trip to the central island in a different part of Japan, and we got along very well.

Yes. He was very close to Sam, too. They were very similar. They had the same stature and vision of how they approached the world.

They thought very much of each other.

As you know, Shimizu committed suicide, and it was just difficult for Sam to comprehend—it seemed out of character.

Yes.

Everybody who knew him, including his family, was in shock. I am in touch with one of his daughters, and she came from Japan for Sam's memorial service in 1995. Shimizu was also very close to Jasper Johns. Sam, Johns, and Shimizu used to spend time together. Did you also know the poet and writer Yoshiaki Tono, another close friend?

There is a section of poems in my monograph on Sam that includes Tono and five other poets. They understood his work. I think I did meet Tono, but—

He was married at one time to Mako's sister. Did you meet Sam's major Japanese patron, the oil industrialist Sazo Idemitsu?

I went to see him. He showed me this big collection of Japanese masterpieces on two floors of his building in Tokyo, and then Sam's paintings were on the top floor. That was before he knew his daughter Mako was going to marry Sam.



fig. 11

Were you able to speak to him again, or just the few times you went to visit?

No, that was all.

Although he is extremely important as a collector of Sam's work, his story still needs to be explored further in relation to Sam's history. He was a very private collector yet he created a public space to exhibit the works he acquired. The Idemitsu Museum still exists today and houses a vast selection of Japanese paintings, including ones by the monk Sengai as well as the French artist Georges Rouault, and it has one of the largest groups of privately owned works by Sam.

Let's talk about some others who have touched you and Sam. One of Sam's big supporters was Robert Buck, the director of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, who organized one of Sam's early surveys in 1972. Were you friends with him too?

Sure, yeah.

And did you know Pierre Matisse, who was an art dealer as well as the son of Henri Matisse?

Yes, indeed, because I did two big retrospectives of his artists, first Jean Dubuffet and then Alberto Giacometti. So I spent a lot of time with Pierre Matisse on those two artists. And then I was very happy when Sam went with the Pierre Matisse Gallery in New York, but that somehow didn't work. I don't know why.

It seems that gallery association may have been a problem for Sam at that time, because he left the Martha Jackson Gallery, a New York dealer, for a French gallery. Martha basically wrote to Sam after she found out he was planning to leave her gallery and warned him about doing this, saying, "It is a big mistake as far as your U.S.A. reputation goes." So possibly there was some sort of difficulty with the continued interest in his work after he left Martha's gallery. And for whatever reasons Pierre was unable to revive Sam's collecting base in New York. That's when the André Emmerich Gallery came into the picture to sort of—

Take over.

Take over for the New York connection. But I understand Sam's Blue Balls exhibition at Pierre Matisse was quite beautiful and well received.

Yeah, that was beautiful. Of course Sam never wanted to have one dealer. He wanted to do it all himself, working often with three or four international dealers at one time.

That's interesting. What about Eberhard Kornfeld of Galerie Kornfeld in Bern? Did you spend much time with him?

Oh yes. I spent time with Kornfeld. I liked him very, very much. He asked me twice to come to Bern and then I spent time with him.

He seemed to be close with Sam.

Very, very close.

Kornfeld helped guide him and was highly respected internationally.

He had all these friends: Franz Meyer, for example, who was an important collector and patron in Basel.

Oh, you knew Franz Meyer, too? And what about Sam's stepmother, Virginia Francis? Did you know Virginia at all?

No.

Apparently she was very close with Sam and his Palo Alto gallerist, Paula Kirkeby, so I thought maybe because you're close with Paula and Sam—

I might have seen her once at Paula's. Yeah, I think I did. But that's all.

What about Jay DeFeo and some of Sam's friends here? I believe later on Sam didn't really maintain many of his Bay Area friendships.

No, he really didn't.

Did he ever talk to you about why? Was it just he was moving on or—?

Yeah, it was that he was moving on.

And he moved more to Southern California for a while.

Yes, to Southern California. His closest connection there was to Paula Kirkeby, who was a friend of mine almost from the time I arrived here.

Oh, so you've known her for some time.

I've known her for a very long time and very, very well. We spent a lot of time together, sometimes with Sam as well. I still see Paula when I can. But she doesn't travel up here, and I don't travel much down there, so we don't see each other as much as we would like.

I know she used to have a lot of Thanksgiving holidays and other family gatherings with Sam and all their kids. Did you go to those too?

Oh yes. And she has a lot of Sam's work. Phillip, her husband, also had a lot of his work.

She was a very strong gallerist for Sam for a long time in the Bay Area.

Did you also know the artist Kiki Kogelnik?

Yeah, I knew Kiki. Everybody knew Kiki. [laughter]

What a beautiful lady.

Yes. I knew Kiki when she was still with the artist Hundertwasser.

Now why didn't Sam marry her? You could tell that they were sexually attracted to each other.

Absolutely. I don't know why it didn't go anywhere . . . it was intense. Very intense.

When Sam was in the hospital in Bern in 1961 for tuberculosis in his kidneys Kiki was there helping, for almost a year. It was complicated, obviously, as Sam was still married to, but separated from, Teruko. Kiki moved to an apartment to be close by. Toward the end of her life, when she was ill with cancer, Kiki contacted me with information, but I never really got to talk to her much, which is unfortunate. I would have liked to. Her husband, the doctor, sent us pictures of Sam and Kiki in the New York studio—some really fun pictures.

There's another person I was wondering about—you said you knew the painter Walasse Ting.

Not all that well. Sam and Ting were very good friends. And Sam was always pushing his work.

It was very different from Sam's work.

Yes. Then Sam did the 1¢ Life print portfolio book with him.

That's a fantastic project. We have a lot of Ting's poems and the letters he would write to Sam. I think as a writer and as a poet he was incredible, and I think maybe that was one of the things that Sam responded to. Let's look through your monograph on Sam and talk about Sam and his poems.

We started the monograph with a sound poem by Brion Gysin titled *This Is Sam Francis*. It reads: "this is Sam Francis/ is Sam Francis this/ Sam Francis this is/ Francis this is Sam . . ." Sam loved that poem.

Sam's poems were amazing and have been published over the years. I know he liked Ting's visual poems. I would love to do an exhibition of those.

That would be great.

Ting would do drawings around the poems, and they're so beautiful. My gut feeling is that Sam really responded to that part of Ting—they both thought so visually. Sam didn't relate so much to Ting's paintings, but more to how Ting thought poetically . . .

Yeah.

. . . how Ting was as a visual thinker. And maybe how he liked women too.

Right. So did I. We had a lot of fun.

Did you ever get to spend time with Sam's kids—Kayo, Osamu, Shingo, and Augustus?

Not very much, because when I was working with Sam on the book the boys [Osamu and Shingo] were always out surfing.

When you met with Sam, would you talk about books or films or music or art or what? I know he didn't like to talk about his art so much.

Yeah, we talked about all those things, but it's so long ago I don't remember. I know we talked about dreams. He related his dreams, and we talked about Jung and his interest in Zen. We were both very interested in Jung. For example, the Mandala paintings and the open center areas found in the Matrix

or Grid paintings show his interest in Jungian thought and the exploration of dreams. The paintings from 1973 to the late 1980s can be interpreted as visionary paintings and offer “open bridges into innumerable directions.” The square mandala stands for the four corners of the world and is primarily earthbound. The circle refers to the psyche. Some of these paintings include crosses, stars, metamorphosed heads, and self-portraits that reference archetypal imagery, but they are still rooted in the non-figurative tradition. As I wrote in my monograph, the works are developed through his intuitive process, what Sam would call “the burning energy of its own substance.”

Yes, I can understand that many collectors gravitate to this period of Sam’s oeuvre because of the simplicity of the imagery, which is brought to life with such an intensity of emotion.

We just talked about everything.

And he could talk about everything. That’s what was so compelling about him.

He was extremely well educated and knowledgeable.

Like a real Renaissance man.

He studied here at Berkeley. He got the last honorary art degree offered by Cal Berkeley. That was after we had the show at the Berkeley Art Museum in 1968.

I think he liked that too. Do you consider Sam a California artist, or American, or international?

Very, very international. Sam is probably the most international of all the American artists of his time. I mean Richard Diebenkorn is a well-known Californian who is collected internationally, and there are many others, but Sam goes far beyond that.

Right. Do you think he is one of the most important California artists ever?

Absolutely. He is the most important California artist ever.

That’s a very good statement. Because you don’t hear people say that often.

Certainly he is. He is the only artist who had a worldwide reputation. Diebenkorn was also very good and Ed Ruscha, but that is something totally different as he is more contemporary.

Getting back to the early days, I noticed that your wife Carole [Schemmerling Selz] knows Allan and Becky Temko.

That's how Carole and I met.

Did you know Sam was close to the Temkos in the early days?

I had no idea.

And Temko was a writer, wasn't he?

Yeah, he was an architectural critic and received a Pulitzer Prize for his architectural writing. He was writing a book on Notre Dame.

Right. Sam went on trips down to Menton or Côte d'Azur at the French Mediterranean coast with Allan and Becky along with his then-girlfriend, Muriel Goodwin. They would rent a house near the Temkos in Menton and travel around together.

I had no idea.

That's so funny, how there is another connection that you and Carole have with Sam that you never knew. When I read that Carole was friends with the Temkos, I just wondered if you had all talked about Sam together.

I don't think so.

So you and Sam also liked to go out and try new restaurants and food?

Yeah.

What were some of the favorite things that you guys would eat?

Japanese food. He knew the good Japanese restaurants.

So anytime you went to L.A. he would take you? Or vice versa, when he came up to Berkeley you'd have to take him?

Yeah.

I was curious about when you worked on exhibitions with him, like the show at Berkeley, would you go into the studio? Or would you show him images of paintings you liked and sort through them together to curate the show? Or would he say, “I’d like you to show this, this, and this”?

No, the Berkeley show was taken from Houston.

So you didn’t have any involvement in that.



fig. 12

Museum. The large *Berkeley* painting, I’m happy to say, Sam gave to the Berkeley Museum in honor of me. We better put that in the show.

We have it on the list and have requested it for the Crocker Art Museum portion, but it is too tall for the ceilings at the Pasadena Museum unless we hang it horizontally, as has been done before.

It is a major work, yes.

I loved what you wrote in your monograph about the Berkeley painting, that it reminded you of a Zen garden. It is such a perfect metaphor for that painting. And also for Berlin Red, which I went to Berlin to see last summer.

Oh, they had it up.

It was up for a little while at the Martin-Gropius-Bau Museum in Berlin as part of the Pacific Standard Time exhibition organized by the Getty Museum. After the show closed in June 2012, the mural was rolled back up and put in deep storage again. Apparently over the years, the curators in Berlin have had differences in opinion about showing it. I guess after the Berlin Wall came down, the

No, I just took what the museum in Houston sent me, and it was a fine selection. But later on we talked a lot when he did the *Berlin Red* [1970] mural for the museum in Berlin.

Yes.

I liked it, you know. I saw it in the museum there, and then he made the *Berkeley* [1970] painting, which was really a small version of *Berlin Red*, and donated it to Berkeley Art

more recent curators didn't like the loose political references, which is unfortunate, because it shouldn't matter. The painting is such a knockout with its incredible scale, almost 40 feet long and 26 feet high. It is a powerful work in so many ways.

Yes. I was impressed with how the streamlined modern environment of Mies van der Rohe's architecture embraced the joyous freedom of Sam's organic forms.

When I was last in Berlin I met with the current director of the Neue Nationalgalerie—Staatliche Museen (the original owners of the mural). The director expressed interest in rehanging the Berlin Red mural and mentioned they are possibly obtaining an adjunct building where it could be displayed more regularly. The original location as you enter the museum space where Sam installed it is now used for rotating temporary exhibitions, so they just don't have the open space they used to.

It was made to be on frequent display.

I know. So they're hoping to rectify that to a degree, but it's a shame the painting got taken down in the first place.

What about the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art mural that Sam did in 1986? They have not shown it since the former director Henry Hopkins left.

Right. I was going to ask: Have you heard what happened?

No, but I think you should push them to show it.

Well, it's very tall for their current location.

Yeah, it's too big.

And they have difficulty with that. Maybe when they remodel, they will have a location for it. I have been in dialogue with the curators at SFMOMA, and we have discussed ideas on how to show it again—maybe lend it long-term to another institution, because it's been sitting rolled up in storage. It was designed specifically as a five-panel mural to fit the dimensions of the Wattis Rotunda in the War Memorial Veterans Building, and the museum is no longer in that location.

It's a shame that his reputation is still not as prominent as, for example, that of Joan Mitchell, who is much more in the news now than Sam.

Because she has that New York connection, don't you think?

She lived in Paris longer than Sam did.

She still was part of that New York network for probably a longer period of time. Plus she had some prominent dealers in New York handling her work.

Yes, probably.

But it's taken her a while I think to move up the ladder in terms of the other, male artists of her generation.

And she's a terrific artist.

Yes. I think she's just now reaching the same market levels as de Kooning and Motherwell, for example. But, you know, that is a good question: Why was Sam not embraced by the New York critics?

Because he was not around.

He didn't go to the bars or hang with the critics like his contemporaries?

Because he wasn't around is really one of the main reasons. In those days New York was so totally self-centered. People who were not New York artists, such as the California artists or the Paris artists, just weren't around. I tried—Tom Messer [at the Guggenheim] and I were showing European artists. The rest didn't show European artists. Robert Motherwell had a show in Paris, and when we were at dinner together he was upset and wondered why the French artists didn't pay any attention to the show. He was very angry about that. I asked him, "Who are the contemporary French artists that you pay attention to?" He said, "There aren't any since Joan Miró." And that was the attitude.

I can see that prevailing attitude. New Yorkers did not rally for the European artists, and the Europeans did not want to rally for the New Yorkers. Obviously as a curator you were aware of this and saw that a lot.

I saw it a lot. It seems to me that American artists, especially the abstract expressionists, heirs to America's Puritan tradition, did not want to admit beauty for its own sake. Unlike the modern artists closest to Sam's sensitivity, Bonnard and Matisse, who kept their pictures from being decorative, the American artists could not accept the sensuous canvas as its own sufficient reason. In fact, in American art criticism during this critical period, the word "beauty" was banned from their vocabulary. Sam Francis, however, was able to use the fullness of color to create hedonistic paintings of joy.

Yes, I can see that, and I know Sam talked about that. He often mentioned to me that he wasn't embraced by the New York critics, and it did make him wonder a little if it had to do with his leaving the Martha Jackson Gallery in the 1960s.

Yeah.

But he did have friendships with many New York artists, such as Al Held and Alfred Leslie, and when he was living there on and off during 1957, 1959, and the early 1960s, he did socialize with Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman, Franz Kline, and the others. He did have studios in New York for years.

Sure.

And I believe he went to the Cedar Tavern with the guys.

Rarely.

I think he didn't drink as much due to his health.

He was an outsider.

I guess you are right. He was still regarded as an outsider, maybe because his career flourished first while he was in Paris. Even years later when he started showing more regularly in New York with the André Emmerich Gallery and the show you organized at Gagosian Gallery. There was a disconcerting review I remember in Artforum for the Blue Balls exhibition that bothered him, even though he pretended he didn't care. I understand more now why he appreciated the fact that you wrote this major monograph published by an important New York publisher, because it did propel him.

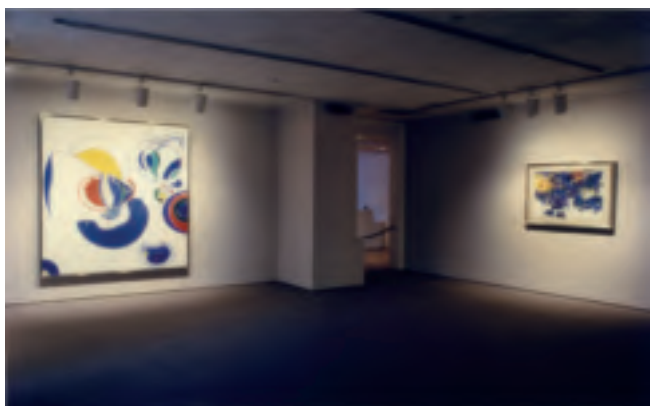


fig. 13

The Sam Francis: *Blue Balls* show at Gagosian Gallery didn't get very much attention.

Which is not unusual.

It was a beautiful show.

A lot of his New York shows, like the survey show at the Whitney Museum in 1972–73, didn't get much attention. Even the retrospective exhibit at the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston in 1967—a fantastic show,

especially exciting because of its unusual installation design—got no press. Still, he has an amazing international stature, right?

Yes.

You mentioned how he was criticized for being decorative or emotionally thin. What did you think about that?

It was bullshit. [laughter]

I think it's sort of naïve when people say his work is devoid of intensity and angst and intelligence and all of that.

I write about that in my monograph on Sam: “One question remains to be discussed: Why is it that Sam was acknowledged in Europe and Japan as one of the great painters of the present time and given comparatively little recognition in his own country and has at times been ignored?” And then I go on and talk about why I think this is.

Yes, you presented a poignant question in your monograph and continued to evaluate this: “Why do his canvases hang more prominently in the museums of Tokyo, Paris, Amsterdam, Stockholm, Basel, Dusseldorf, and Berlin than in American museums? Why is the artist who was certainly partly responsible for the ‘triumph of American painting’ not even mentioned in the book of this title by New York art critic Irving Sandler?”

So if you had to sum up what you miss about Sam—when you think of him, what is the first thing that comes to your mind about what you miss, besides the paintings?

I miss a really close personal friend, a person whom I could talk to about many things: my feelings, my dreams, his dreams, our thoughts. We did talk about art, our ideas about art, sometimes about art of the past. I remember talking at length about Pierre Bonnard one time. It was just a very close personal relationship between an artist and his critic. I miss him a lot.

Sam greatly admired Bonnard's sense of color and even wrote an essay, “Bonnard, or Be Kind to Yourself Human Being,” which was published in a Tokyo journal in the late 1960s.

Sam had a great laugh and a great smile. He liked to write poetry.

Yes. He had a very positive attitude to the world. We'd sit around his studio, around the pool sometimes, and it was just wonderful to talk to him about the news of the day.

Yeah, I can imagine that. He really embraced the day and wanted to learn and be exposed to new ideas. You can see that he never forgot how he started out with such pain and suffering as a young man [when he was hospitalized for several years]. And he continued to experience periods of illness all his life, so he appreciated the ability to be able to paint every day.

He was interested in me too.

That's a very important thing.

That's right.

Because you had a lot that he got from you, obviously.

That's nice.

I'm curious if you know much about all the secret love affairs he had.

Many of them were not so secret.

Yeah. Some of them were not. So how did he have time to paint? That's what I want to know. [laughter]

He had a lot of energy.

But he obviously loved women.

And they loved him. He was a very lovable man.

Maybe he had all that pent-up desire because he was in the hospital so long. In college you're supposed to be out having the time of your life. He couldn't because of his medical condition and almost being paralyzed. He wanted to experience love fully after his hospitalization. Many artists are inspired by their muses. And, as one of his friends once said, "Many women were his muses." Sam was also passionate about reading and writing, and that obviously fueled his creations and permeated his thoughts.

One of the things Sam and I talked about was how your monograph's written text is very poetic in nature.



fig. 14

Thank you.

And your text is visually compelling. For example, in your Abrams monograph you discuss Sam's Mandala works of the 1970s with such an emotive analysis: "Continuing to explore the elements of water, air, and fire, Francis has at the same time built a bridge into his unconscious, a bridge that liberates his instincts, extends ever further down into his inner being, and emerges with renewed harvest."

Because I was very moved by his work.

Yes. You can see that. I can sense that your relationship to his work is emotional, yet there is a very cerebral attachment. So his work can evoke both reactions. That's what I think is very compelling about his work. You have a gut reaction, but yet—

But yet, yeah.

There's a lot of depth. And that's why I think it's ironic that people thought of him as being decorative.

Well, in that sense he's very much like Matisse. The painter Matisse is a joy to look at. It may look decorative to most people, but he solved problems of space and composition in those paintings. And this combination of the luxuriant color and structure, center structure—I think Sam has a very, very close similarity there. I think that's why he liked Matisse so much.

It's interesting they both were ill when they were young and started painting because of their situation.

Yeah.

And they both died after completing their last series of works while confined to a wheelchair.

That's right.

So it is kind of a kismet coincidence. It's interesting too that Sam ended up being close to the Matisse family, with Henri Matisse's wife Amélie acquiring one of his first black paintings in the early 1950s. Do you think Sam would have become a painter if he hadn't had that accident and been in the hospital? It's hard to speculate. But Sam didn't seem to know he had that creative side to him until his hospitalization allowed him to focus on painting.

I don't know. He was a pre-med student. Who knows? But there's one thing more in the catalogue raisonné you did with UC Press in 2011—you reproduced the painting by Matisse, *The Red Studio* [1911].

Yes, Sam loved the feeling and all-over intensity of the red in that painting, and he remarked on it. He saw it in person at MoMA on his way to Paris in 1950, so it was influential early on.

And that is, interestingly enough, the painting that Mark Rothko was always talking about.

That makes perfect sense.

I did work with Rothko—we were good friends too—and that is the painting at MoMA that Mark was talking about all the time. The same Matisse.

I think that painting affected a lot of artists at the time. They all must have seen it.

Oh yes.

And they all must have—

Yeah, responded to it.

Well, it is an incredible painting. That red is unbelievable. Actually Sam wrote down a list of his favorite paintings, and a Matisse was number one on the list.

That painting?

Specifically the one called La musique [1910].

What else?

I have to remember. He had Jackson Pollock on his list and Brancusi.

I'd like to see that.

I wanted to ask you what you felt about the “Last Works” Sam did the summer of 1994, before he died.

Well, just before you came today I reread Bill [William C.] Agee's comments on that series of works, and he has good things to say about them. But I never responded to them so much. I think there's too much there.

It's too much?

Yeah.



fig. 15

Before he passed away, I was with him and Margaret often (maybe several times a week during the last year of his life), and he told us that his next group of paintings would encompass all his styles in a way. He was thinking that he wanted to bring everything together, so his “Last Works,” I think, started to explore this concept—all of his periods as one.

Interesting. I think you’re right.

He felt like he had to—

Put it all together.

Yes. And then it would have been interesting to see: What would be the next one?

Yes. He had so many shows. The Jeu de Paume show in Paris in 1995 was absolutely beautiful.

It was beautiful, focusing on his years of work in Paris from 1950 to 1960. I helped organize aspects of the show and the catalogue with their curatorial staff. Unfortunately, Sam didn’t get to see it, as he had already passed away.

Oh yes.

We were supposed to do a show earlier in 1993 with one of Sam’s oldest friends, the curator Pontus Hultén, and it would have gone to Paris in addition to MOCA Los Angeles and the Kunstmuseum in Bonn, Germany. Sam wanted to have a large show in Paris ever since he received his Commandeur de l’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres.

At one point wasn’t he supposed to do something in the Louvre?

Yes, that was in 1983. He was invited to create a painting for a ceiling in the Louvre, but the invitation fell through unfortunately. And actually, as we discussed his ties to Matisse, Sam also proposed a stained-glass window project for the Nevers Cathedral in France.

I didn’t know that.

It’s always interesting to me to hear people’s memories of events and colorful stories about Sam. Sam touched so many lives over the years and had such interesting experiences with everybody. Did you by chance hear the story about how Sam threatened to fly a plane into a building owned by Sazo Idemitsu? I think Walter Hopps mentioned it once. I’m not sure if it’s true or embellished history.



fig. 16

I didn't know he was flying planes anymore.

Did you ever fly in a plane with him?

No.

He did like flying, didn't he?

Yeah.

There are so many more stories to talk about. But let's talk a little about the organization of the current exhibition.

What I used to do when I curated exhibitions over the years was put the work out first chronologically and then I would change it around if it didn't make sense. It doesn't have to be a strict catalogue raisonné installation—for example, a 1971 could be next to 1975. Looser pairing within decades makes sense.

Yes, let's arrange the installation by "loose groupings of series," which might in some cases cross years but generally stay within chronological decades. I'd like to give a feeling of the studio with works on paper hung salon-style, as if Sam push-pinned them up all over the walls, and then include the canvas works next to them. I think it will provide more of a feeling of the moment of creation rather than adhering to a curatorial timeline—allowing for a sense of the ebb and flow of his creative process.

Yes, the works on paper should be mixed with canvas and shown together. They should not be separated, as Sam worked on them at the same time, so they should be shown side-by-side. We might even have a grouping called "chaos and order."

Actually, Pontus Hultén also talked about that. Indeed, the overall grouping for Sam's works might be chaos and order. Maybe that is what we should title our conversation, based on the Bonn 1993 Francis exhibition catalogue text: "Order to chaos, chaos to order . . ." in homage to Pontus and Sam.



fig. 17

Peter Selz, Professor Emeritus of the History of Art at the University of California, Berkeley, is renowned in the modern and contemporary art world for his exhibitions and published art historical texts. His lengthy career began at the Chicago Institute of Design and has included a stint in the 1960s as curator of painting and sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (where he mounted such seminal exhibitions as *New Images of Man* and Jean Tinguely's *Homage to New York*) and his development of the Berkeley Art Museum as its founding director. Selz is the author of definitive works on German expressionism, as well as scholarly texts on Mark Rothko, Jean Dubuffet, Alberto Giacometti, and two important monographs on Sam Francis (published by Harry N. Abrams, New York, in 1975 and 1982).

Debra Burchett-Lere first started working with Sam Francis in the mid-1980s when she was the director at Gemini G.E.L. (the renowned contemporary print publishing company in Los Angeles). In 1992 she became Francis's curator and co-director of his business and print studio, The Litho Shop, Inc. in Santa Monica, and upon his death in 1994 she became the director of the Sam Francis Estate and subsequently the Sam Francis Foundation (in 2004). The mission of the foundation is to research, document, protect, and perpetuate the creative legacy of Sam Francis by promoting awareness and knowledge about his art through education and information. The Sam Francis Foundation co-published *Sam Francis: Catalogue Raisonné of Canvas and Panel Paintings* in 2011 with University of California Press, which includes the most detailed chronology of the artist to date.





Paintings 1945–1994





Plate 1

Late Summer

1945

Watercolor on paper

14 x 20 in. (35.56 x 50.8 cm)

Sam Francis Foundation



Plate 2

Untitled

1945/46

Ink and watercolor on paper
18 x 24 in. (45.72 x 60.96 cm)

Sam Francis Foundation



Plate 3

Migrant Camp - Cal.

c. 1946

Watercolor on paper

21 x 25 in. (53.34 x 63.5 cm)

Cherie Kenville Trust



Plate 4

Untitled [Winter Flurry]

c. 1946

Watercolor on paper

11 x 15¼ in. (27.94 x 38.74 cm)

Francesca Coe de Bellis



Plate 5

Abstraction No. 2

c. 1946

Watercolor on paper

10 x 10 in. (25.4 x 25.4 cm)

Private Collection



Plate 6

The Secret Room

1946

Egg tempera on Masonite panel
22 x 28 in. (55.88 x 71.12 cm)

Sam Francis Foundation



Plate 7

After de Chirico

1946

Oil on canvas

36 x 24¼ in. (91.44 x 66.68 cm)

Sam Francis Foundation



Plate 8

Comp. no 7 - Night Scene

1946

Gouache and watercolor on paper

14¼ x 12¼ in. (36.2 x 31.12 cm)

Private Collection of Saralyn Lowenstein



Plate 9

Portrait (of a Lady)

1946/47

Oil on canvas

24 x 18 in. (60.96 x 45.72 cm)

University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific
Film Archive; Gift of the Sam Francis Foundation (2010.33.1)



Plate 10

Untitled

c. 1947–48

Oil on canvas

36 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 22 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (91.77 x 56.21 cm)

University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and
Pacific Film Archive; Gift of the Sam Francis
Foundation (2010.33.2)



Plate 11

Untitled

1948

Oil on canvas

18 x 16 in. (45.72 x 40.64 cm)

Patrick W. and Diana M. Hamil



Plate 12

Untitled (of Fred Martin) [Red and Black]

1950

Egg tempera on paper

14 x 10½ in. (35.56 x 26.67 cm)

Anthony E. Nicholas, Beverly Hills



Plate 13

Untitled (Paris)

1950

Ink and gouache on paper

26 x 19 in. (66.04 x 48.26 cm)

Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Gift of Robert Shapazian



Plate 14

Untitled

1951

Ink on paper

12⁵/₈ x 9⁵/₈ in. (32.07 x 24.45 cm)

William and Melinda Bentz



Plate 15

Grey

1951

Oil on canvas

90 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 68 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (228.93 x 174.96 cm)

The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles;
Gift of the artist and the Sam Francis Art Museum, Inc. (93.28)

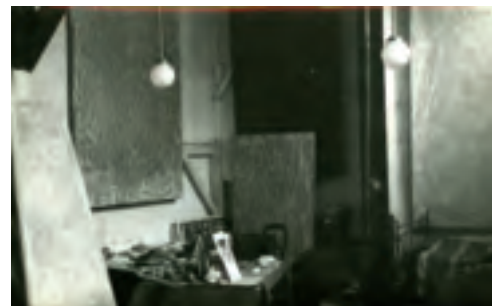


fig. 18



fig. 19



Plate 16

3 Blue

1952

Oil on canvas

38¼ x 57¼ in. (97.16 x 145.42 cm)

University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive;
Bequest of Marcia Simon Weisman Foundation (1995.51.4)



Plate 17

Red, Blue and Yellow

1953

Watercolor and ink on paper

19½ x 24¼ in. (49.53 x 61.6 cm)

The Buck Collection, Laguna Beach



Plate 18*

Côte d'Azur

1953

Watercolor on paper

30¼ x 22½ in. (76.84 x 57.15 cm)

The Eli and Edythe L. Broad Collection, Los Angeles



Plate 19

The Line [Untitled]

c. 1953

Watercolor and ink on paper

10⁵/₈ x 8⁵/₈ in. (26.99 x 21.91 cm)

James McGrath, Berkeley

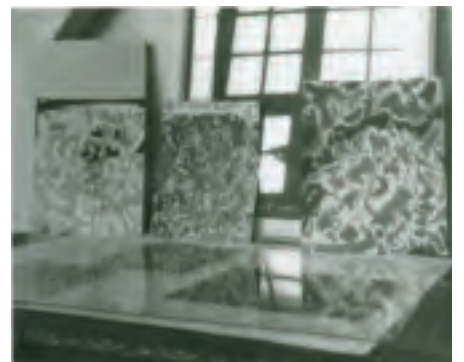


fig. 20



Plate 20

Untitled

1954

Gouache and watercolor on paper
23⁵/₈ x 22¹/₄ in. (60.01 x 56.52 cm)

The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles;
Bequest of Marcia Simon Weisman (96.114)



fig. 21



Plate 21*

Blue and Yellow

1954–55

Oil on canvas

76¾ x 51 in. (194.95 x 129.54 cm)

The Eli and Edythe L. Broad Collection, Los Angeles



Plate 22

Untitled

1955

Ink on paper

11 x 13½ in. (27.94 x 34.29 cm)

William and Melinda Bentz



fig. 22



Plate 23

Sketch for Chase Manhattan Bank Mural [Untitled Sketch]

1956–57/59

Gouache on paper

21 x 99¼ in. (53.34 x 252.1 cm)

The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles;

Gift of the artist and Sam Francis Art Museum, Inc. (93.29)



Plate 24

Untitled

1957

Gouache on paper mounted on Masonite

7¾ x 5¾ in. (19.69 x 14.61 cm)

Private Collection, Los Angeles



Plate 25

Untitled

1957

Watercolor on paper

22½ x 30 in. (57.15 x 76.2 cm)

The Curry Family Collection



Plate 26

Untitled

1957–58

Watercolor on paper

41½ x 29½ in. (105.41 x 74.93 cm)

Private Collection; Courtesy Leslie Sacks Fine Art, Los Angeles



Plate 27

Untitled

1957–58

Gouache and Flashe on paper

22¼ x 29⅞ in. (56.52 x 75.88 cm)

Private Collection



Plate 28

Untitled

1958

Gouache and watercolor on paper

22³/₁₆ x 30 in. (56.3 x 76.2 cm)

Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; Anonymous gift through
The American Federation of the Arts, New York (1966.77)



Plate 29

Untitled

1958

Gouache and watercolor on paper

8½ x 6¼ in. (21.59 x 15.88 cm)

Frederick R. Weisman Art Foundation, Los Angeles



Plate 30

Untitled

1958

Gouache on paper

20 x 27 in. (50.8 x 68.58 cm)

Private Collection

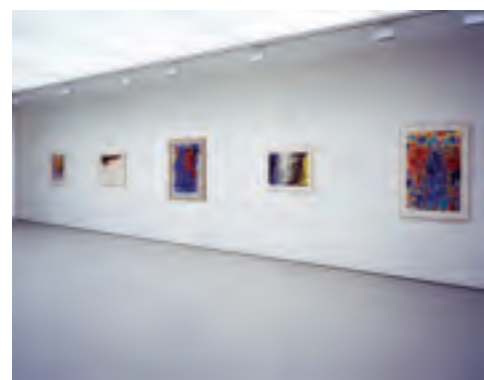


fig. 23



Plate 31

Untitled

1958–59

Egg tempera and gouache on rigid board
40 x 30 in. (101.6 x 76.2 cm)

Sam Francis Foundation



fig. 24



Plate 32

Untitled

c. 1959

Acrylic and oil on canvas

32¼ x 24 in. (81.92 x 60.96 cm)

Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento;
Gift of the Sam Francis Foundation Inc. (2009.13)



Plate 33

Middle Blue No. 5

1959–60

Watercolor on paper

26³/₄ x 40¹/₄ in. (67.95 x 102.24 cm)

University of California, Berkeley Art Museum
and Pacific Film Archive; Gift of Julian J. and
Joachim Jean Aberbach, New York (1965.38)



fig. 25

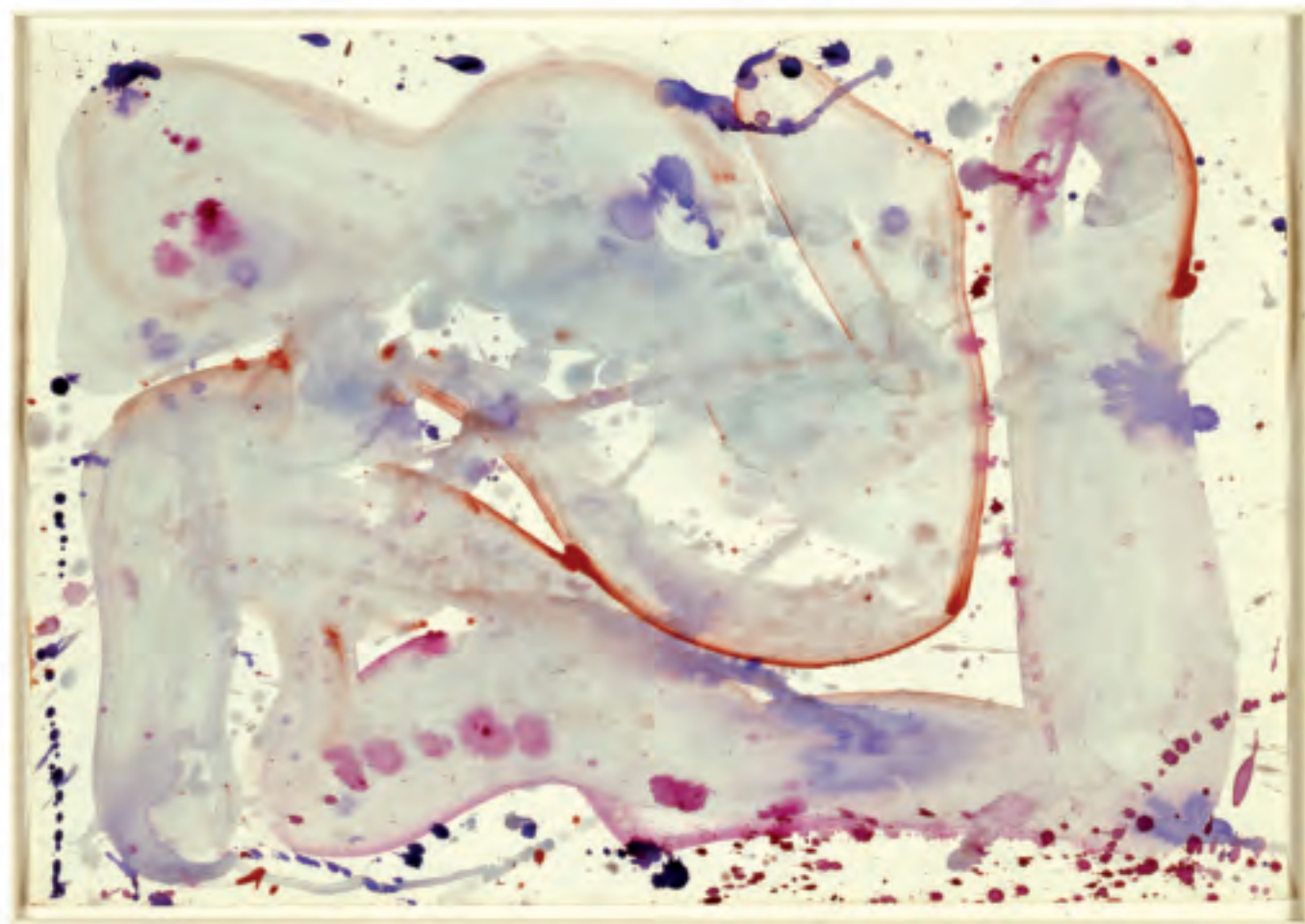


Plate 34

Untitled

1960

Egg tempera on paper

14 x 20¼ in. (35.56 x 51.44 cm)

Robert Green Fine Arts, Mill Valley



Plate 35

Mantis

c. 1960–1961

Oil on canvas

51¼ x 76¼ in. (130.18 x 193.68 cm)

The Museum of Contemporary Art,
Los Angeles; Gift of the artist and
Sam Francis Art Museum, Inc. (93.31)

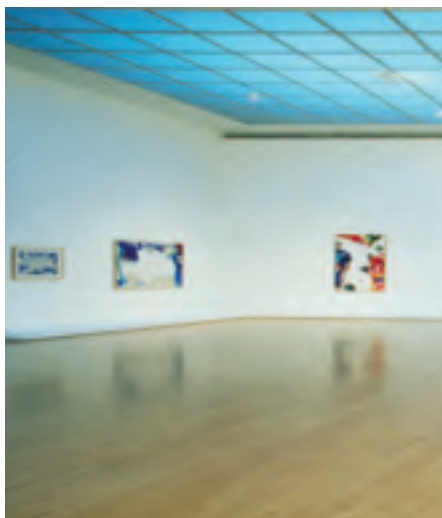


fig. 26



fig. 27



Plate 36*

Untitled

1960

Gouache and watercolor on paper

12 x 16 in. (30.48 x 40.64 cm)

Collection of the Kirkeby Family Trust



Plate 37

Blue Balls

1960–61

Gouache on paper mounted on canvas

38³/₈ x 23³/₈ in. (97.47 x 59.37 cm)

Collection Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego;
Gift of Ruth and Murray Gribin (1998.70)

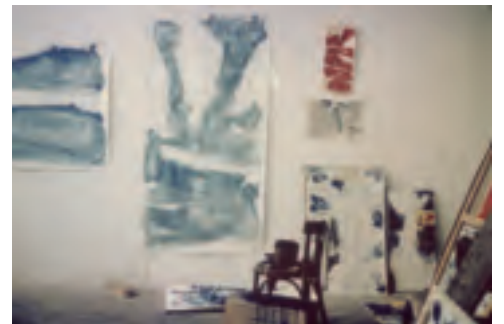


fig. 28



fig. 29



Plate 38

Upper Left Red

1960–61

Gouache and watercolor on paper

15½ x 12½ in. (39.37 x 31.75 cm)

Melissa and Gary Lipton



Plate 39

Multi-Color Gouache

1961

Gouache on paper

17³/₄ x 22¹/₄ in. (45.09 x 56.52 cm)

Melissa and Gary Lipton



Plate 40

Also Violet

1961

Gouache and watercolor on paper

13³/₄ x 19³/₄ in. (34.92 x 50.17 cm)

Jonathan Novak Contemporary Art, Los Angeles



Plate 41

Including Yellow

1961

Gouache and watercolor on paper

14⁵/₈ x 14⁷/₈ in. (37.15 x 37.78 cm)

Frederick R. Weisman Art Foundation, Los Angeles



Plate 42

Untitled (Blue Balls)

1961

Gouache on paper

15¼ x 10½ in. (38.74 x 26.67 cm)

Carole and Dr. Peter Selz



Plate 43

Violet Ball

1961

Gouache and watercolor on paper
10 x 3 in. (25.4 x 7.62 cm)

Robert Green Fine Arts, Mill Valley

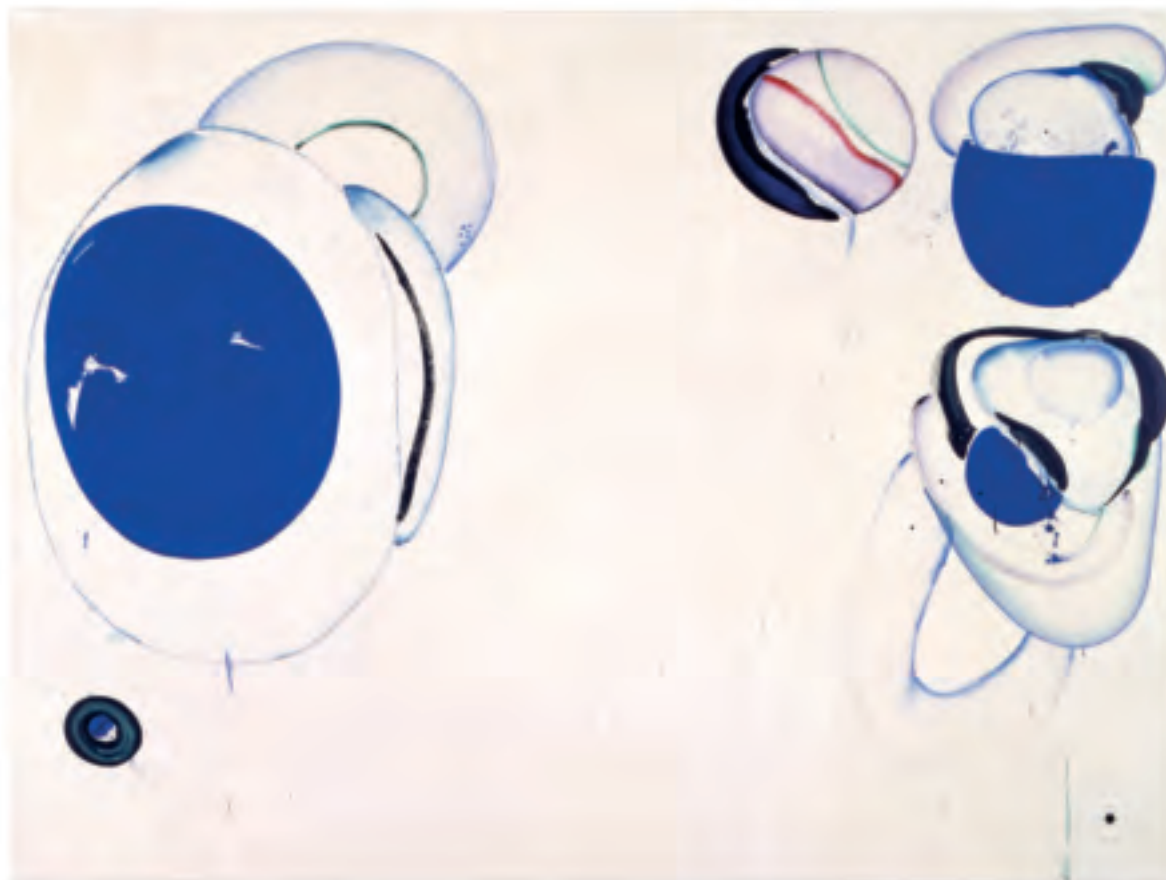


Plate 44

Blue Balls VIII

1961–62

Acrylic and oil on canvas

72 x 96¼ in. (182.88 x 244.48 cm)

The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles;
Bequest of Marcia Simon Weisman (99.24)



fig. 30



fig. 31



Plate 45

Untitled

1962

Acrylic and oil on canvas board
13 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (33.35 x 24.13 cm)

Lois and Richard Neiter