

Pearl Lam Galleries

Hong Kong Pedder Building

Colour in Space:

SAM FRANCIS 1923–1994

Exhibition Dates 10 September–12 November, 2016 Monday–Saturday, 10am–7pm
Venue Pearl Lam Galleries, 6/F, Pedder Building, 12 Pedder Street, Central, Hong Kong

Hong Kong–Pearl Lam Galleries is delighted to present a solo exhibition of works by American painter Sam Francis (1923–1994). This exhibition is part of the Galleries' series that sees the work of a distinguished Modern artist presented at its Pedder Building space in Hong Kong each September. With the gallery's long-standing interest in presenting abstract art and its disparate international origins, it is a privilege to bring a solo exhibition by Sam Francis to Hong Kong for the first time.

Born in 1923 in California, Francis, originally committed to a career in medicine, began to paint as part of his occupational therapy while recovering from back injuries sustained in a plane crash during Army Air Corps training in 1943. In 1950, Francis moved to Paris and enrolled at Fernand Léger's private academy. Francis called Paris the "Mother of my own psyche"; he was captivated by the changing light and immersed himself in the study of Monet's *Water Lilies*, Matisse, and Bonnard. This period spent in Paris was transformative for Francis, who is regarded as a leading interpreter of colour and light.

A true internationalist, Francis travelled extensively and was a resident of France and Japan for nearly a decade. He was fluent in the languages of both countries. Eclectic in his influences, his work holds multiple references, including to French impressionism, abstract expressionism, colour field painting, Chinese and Japanese calligraphy, and his own Californian roots. Francis had an insatiable appetite for life with many and varied interests, including Jungian analysis and Eastern philosophy. It was these interests that partly led to his use of negative space; he saw this blankness as a silent place of Zen for the viewer. Furthermore, this device is frequently used by Chinese and Japanese artists and Francis would have been influenced by this.

Dedicated to his fourth wife, *is To Mako*, 1965 is one of six *Edge* paintings in the exhibition. In this series, the colour is forced to the edge of the painting, compelling the viewer to contemplate the whiteness and indeed one's own self.

Francis worked in various media, including on canvas, paper and print, but it is arguably on paper where he excelled. He worked prolifically and experimentally, employing the natural properties of the paper, the absorbency and luminosity of which allowed him with energetic gestures or considered mark-making to exploit the riot of colour so characteristic of his work. He is quoted as saying that "colour is light on fire". Francis rarely employed black in his work.

The *Blue Balls* series is a central part of Francis's oeuvre; it consists of deeply personal works, an exploration of intense colour, space, and organic forms stemming from his suffering from a painful medical condition. Although throughout his life he suffered from many painful illnesses, he retained an enormous joie de vivre. The oil on paper work *Untitled (For Sigi from Sam) (SF62-128)*, 1962 is a stellar example from this series. Haloed biomorphic objects hover in a white space inhabited by rhythmic splashes of paint.

During the twilight of his life, Francis displayed a magnificent burst of creativity, heroically painting 150+ small paintings with his left hand since his right hand was disabled during a fall. A survey and celebration of these final works, *The Last Paintings of Sam Francis*, opened at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1995, a year after Francis's death.

Francis was married five times and was the father of four children. His first marriage was to a high school girlfriend; he next married Californian painter Muriel Goodwin, followed by Japanese painter Teruko Yokoi, and then Mako Idemitsu. He married his last wife, the painter Margaret Smith, in a Shinto ceremony in Japan in 1985. He died in California in 1994.

Francis has exhibited widely 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.

Modern Artists at Pearl Lam Galleries

This exhibition is part of a Pearl Lam Galleries initiative to showcase the work of an internationally recognised Modern artist at its Pedder Building gallery space each September, and follows the success of a solo exhibition of work by American Abstract Expressionist painter Robert Motherwell (1915–1991) held in 2015.

About Pearl Lam Galleries

Founded by Pearl Lam, Pearl Lam Galleries is a driving force within Asia's contemporary art scene. With over 20 years of experience exhibiting Asian and Western art and design, it is one of the leading and most established contemporary art galleries to be launched out of China.

Playing a vital role in stimulating international dialogue on Chinese and Asian contemporary art, the Galleries is dedicated to championing artists who re-evaluate and challenge perceptions of cultural practice from the region. The Galleries in Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Singapore collaborate with renowned curators, each presenting distinct programming from major solo exhibitions, special projects, and installations to conceptually rigorous group shows. Based on the philosophy of Chinese Literati where art forms have no hierarchy, Pearl Lam Galleries is dedicated to breaking down boundaries between different disciplines, with a unique gallery model committed to encouraging cross-cultural exchange.

The four branches of Pearl Lam Galleries in Hong Kong, Shanghai and Singapore represent an increasingly influential roster of contemporary artists. Chinese artists Zhu Jinshi and Su Xiaobai, who synthesise Chinese sensibilities with an international visual language, are presented internationally with work now included in major private and public collections worldwide. The Galleries has also introduced leading international artists, such as Jenny Holzer, Leonardo Drew, Carlos Rolón/Dzine and Yinka Shonibare MBE, to markets in the region, providing opportunities for new audiences in Asia to encounter their work. Pearl Lam Galleries encourages international artists to create new work which engages specifically with the region, collaborating to produce thought-provoking, culturally relevant work.

Press Enquiries

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