

Artist Resources – Sam Francis (American, 1923–1994)

[Sam Francis Foundation](#)

[Francis at Martin Lawrence Gallery](#)

A 1999 display of works on paper at [Van Doren Waxter, New York](#) presented a series of early paintings and drawings from the 1950s in the first in a series of exhibitions celebrating the progression of Francis’ career [decade](#) by [decade](#).

Friend and fellow artist Jeffery Perkins produced an intimate documentary in 2008. Forty years in production, [The Painter Sam Francis](#) traced the artist’s ingenuity from childhood to post-war Paris, Japan, and back to California with clips from an interview Perkins conducted with Francis in 1973 and framed by insights from Francis’ contemporaries.

[Sam Francis: Rapid Fluid Indivisible Vision](#) opened at the Bechtler Museum of Modern Art in North Carolina in 2015, placed Francis in proximity to artists he influenced, gained inspiration from, and collaborated with.



Francis at work in Santa Monica studio, 1983
Photography: Jerry Sohn

The Tate Modern published an [in-depth analysis and history](#) of Francis’ painting [Around the Blues](#), which was painted as the artist traveled the world and provides insight into his relationship with international abstraction and the influence of cultures he experienced.

[Jonathan Novak gallery](#) in Los Angeles honored the pictorial and conceptual innovations of Francis during the 1970s in 2020, exploring the artist’s restless creativity and constant work in transition through twenty one paint-splattered canvases. Critic [Richard Speer offered insight](#) in an elegant video with close-up views of works in the gallery.

[LACMA will bring 60 works together](#) in 2021 in the first exhibition to explore the interaction and influence of Eastern art on Francis’ career, beginning with his first trip to Japan in 1957. In particular, the show delves into his use of negative space, engaging with the Japanese concept of “ma,” the dynamic between form and non-form, which Richard Speer delves into in his 2020 book, [The Effusion of Space: Sam Francis in Japan](#).

Beginning in 2022, the 18th Street Art Center and the Sam Francis Foundation will inaugurate [Call to Dream: The Sam Francis Fellowship](#), an artist residency exchange program between Los Angeles, Tokyo, Mexico City, and Paris. The collaboration will foster relationships between the diverse cultures of each city, and an international cohort of artists, as well as further research into archival material of Francis’ career and his California connections. USC graduate, filmmaker, and archivist [Tiana Williams will be the first fellow in the program](#).



Francis in Paris, 1955
Photography: Pierre Boulat

Sam Francis (American, 1923-94)

Blue Composition, ca. 1952

Oil on canvas

Private Collection; L2020:127.1

When California native Sam Francis moved to Paris in 1950, color vanished from his canvases. But the abstract painter's exploration of the nuances in black, white, and grey tones came to an end when he encountered Claude Monet's *Nymphaes (Waterlilies)* cycle at the Musée de L'Orangerie. Reinvigorated by Monet's vivid tones, Francis's practice took on new life as he tested the possibilities of saturating the full surface of a canvas with color. The amorphous patchwork of blues in **Blue Composition**, a stunning example from this period, receives depth and movement from the subtle addition of pinks and purples staining the perimeter of the canvas. One of the most prominent painters and printmakers at the center of post-war abstraction in the United States, Francis took a different path than his east-coast contemporaries at the nexus of Abstract Expressionism. Turning frequently to external influences—in particular the cultures and aesthetic histories of Japan, Mexico, and France—the UC Berkley graduate persisted in a lifelong search for spiritual purpose through visual wanderlust, curiosity, and artistic autonomy.

On view January 4 – April 11, 2021

