



Sam Francis (1923-1994) occupies a prominent position in post-war American painting.

A native and long-term resident of California, Sam Francis nevertheless travelled extensively, spending longer periods of his life in Paris and Tokyo. His art can be seen as a fusion of artistic tendencies: the gestural energy and vast spaces of American Abstract Expressionism of Pollock and Rothko; the great French tradition of colour and light exemplified in the works of Cezanne, Matisse and Monet; and the spiritual quality of Oriental art. Dripping, biomorphic shapes circulate freely around his canvases, reflecting his interest in ceaseless instability.

Francis began his artistic journey flat on his back in a San Francisco hospital. In 1944, following an accident during his training as a fighter pilot, he suffered the onset of spinal tuberculosis, rendering him immobile and near death. Francis was hospitalised for three years, bedridden and forced to lie prone in a full body cast. He took up art first as a form of therapy, but soon seriously as he found in it a way out of his illness. It was during this period of his life that his work began to gravitate towards non-objective painting.

Francis considered figuration as an obstacle to free expression: he wanted to create a world untouched by human hands, or far removed from everyday experience exemplified by his abstract aerial perspectives of land and seascapes, inspired by his experience as a pilot.

In the early 1950s he was drawn to Paris and quickly achieved critical acclaim. He was captured by the use of light in Monet's art and the use of pure and strong colours by the Fauves, particularly Matisse. In the late 1950s, his interest in Zen philosophy and oriental culture led him to Japan. Works of this period, with their thin paint texture and large void spaces, seem to be influenced by Oriental art. Whilst there, he also studied the properties of different kinds of paper - an important material for him throughout his career.

From the start, Francis loved working on paper, cherishing the intrinsic qualities of all types and using them as an inherent part of the artistic process. He valued his work on paper as much as his painting on canvas, and new ideas would first emerge on paper a year or more before they appeared on canvas.

Primarily interested in transforming different sensations of light onto canvas or paper, Francis returned to California and settled in Santa Monica in 1963, where he spent the last twenty years of his life. He was especially attracted by the quality of light there.

*"Los Angeles is the best for me for light in my work. New York light is hard. Paris light is a beautiful cerulean grey. But Los Angeles light is clear and bright even in haze."*