



SAM FRANCIS

(San Mateo 1923–1994 Santa Monica)

Untitled. 1994.

Acrylic on canvas.

With the estate stamp on the reverse: The Sam Francis Estate, as well as with the archive number (twice) on the overlap: SFP94-80, and the inscribed date by the studio's assistant: 7-25-94.

35.6 × 45.8 cm.

Provenance: - Estate of the Artist, California (1994). - Galleri Faurschou, Copenhagen (1996). - Kaare Berntsen Collection, Oslo. - Hollis Taggart, New York (verso with the label). - Galerie von Vertes, Zurich (verso with the label). Exhibitions: - Los Angeles 1995, Sam Francis: The Last Works. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 25 May – 1 September (with colour

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ill.). - Basel 1997, The Complete Paintings (152) from the Last Studio of Sam Francis. Galleri Faurschou 11 – 18 June (Art Basel) (with colour ill.). - Copenhagen 1999, Sam Francis: The Last Works. Galleri Faurschou, 18 March – 5 June (with colour ill.). - Oslo 2005, Sam Francis-de siste arbeider. Kaare Berntsen Galleri, 12 – 27 February (with colour ill.). Literature: - Burchett-Lere, Debra (Ed.): Sam Francis: Catalogue Raisonné of Canvas and Panel Paintings, 1923–1994, Berkeley 2011; cat. no. 1756, DVD I (colour illus.). - Exh. cat.: Agee, William C.: Sam Francis. Paintings 1947–1990, Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles, 1999, no. 51 (illus.). - Exh. cat.: Sam Francis, Museo d'Arte Mendrisio, 1997, pp. 20–21 (illus.) and exh. brochure (illus.). - Exh. cat.: Sam Francis. Les années parisiennes 1950–1961, Galerie nationale du Jeu de Paume, Paris 1995, p. 39 (illus). Painted in the last months of his life, Sam Francis' present work is part of the "Last Works" series, all of which reflect a fierce demonstration of his artistic will to create and are characterised by the artist's typically masterful use of colour. In 1994 Francis went through an involuntary creative break. His cancer caused paralysis of his right hand and confined him to a wheelchair for several months. Since he had been in the habit of painting with both hands, he initially found it very unpleasant to only use his left hand. During this time, when his illness took hold, the artist produced around 170 paintings on canvas and paper, 152 of which are preserved today ("The Last Works"). Each of them is accorded a special significance in the artist's late work, with an individual date of completion on the reverse. The present work gives no hint of Francis' physical and psychological weakness, yet in his usual manner it allows us to participate in a visual drama of primal power. Against an almost snow-white background, opulent overlapping lines of oceanic blue are laid out, contrasting with energetic splashes of deep red that take over the entire composition. Francis' work embodies contrast in two respects: the two primary colours used here, red and blue, are engaged in a conflict between order and disorder, structure and chaos. For while the blue lines embody structure and unity on the canvas, the confused reds create an unruly spectacle on the surface of the work. With the present work, Sam Francis created one of the last pre-eminent

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arrangements of colour and form that seem to fight against the white surface like the artist against his incurable disease, leaving his mark on the canvas with unmistakable vibrancy.

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