



SAM FRANCIS

(San Mateo 1923–1994 Santa Monica)

Drift II. 1976.

Watercolour, gouache and acrylic on paper.

Signed on the reverse: Sam Francis, also inscribed with the archive number: SF76-026.

58 x 82 cm

This work is identified with the interim identification number of SF76-026 in consideration for the forthcoming Sam Francis: Catalogue Raisonné of Unique Works on Paper. This information is subject to change as scholarship continues by the Sam Francis Foundation. Provenance: - Purchased in 1986 from Galerie Kornfeld, Bern, by the former owner. - By descent to the present owner, private collection Switzerland.
"With hardly an 'abstract' painter

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is the relation to reality as suggestive as with Sam Francis. Each of his paintings is filled to bursting point with optical experiences, with visual exposure, is seeped with the visibility of the world.” (Wieland Schmied: Notizen zu Sam Francis, in: Exh. Cat. Kestner-Gesellschaft, Hannover. Sam Francis, 1963, p. 12.) Samuel Lewis Francis, called Sam, born 1923 in San Mateo, decides to become an artist only after a traumatic experience. His inclination towards the natural sciences leads him to study medicine and psychology at the University of Berkeley from 1941. From 1943 until 1945 Francis serves in the U.S. Army as a pilot. His impressions won here of the far-reaching landscapes, which from a bird’s eye perspective form abstract colour and form variations, leave traces in his paintings. When his plane crashes in the Californian desert, he is left with severe back injuries that confine him to the hospital bed for a long time. Here he begins to paint and decides to follow an artistic path. From 1945-50 he studies art in California and leaves for Paris immediately after his graduation. Here he is in contact with the active art scene and feels especially connected to the Canadian artist Jean-Paul Riopelle. Striking about Francis’ work, as seen in the pieces offered here, is the impression of it being only an excerpt. The image borders don’t seem to offer any boundaries to his abstract compositions, they seem to unfold into the infinite. The idea of the excerpt applies in many ways: the image as excerpt of life, the lengthening of the moment (of painting) into the infinity of time, an excerpt of the inner world (of feelings) into the phenomenon’s of the visible cosmos. The amorphous, organic shapes recall microorganisms, with which Francis probably grappled during his studies of medicine. Yet the painted remains abstract. This superb early work clearly shows his process of work and formation: Francis paints it by placing the sheet on the floor. First he outlines the geometric ‘fence’ filled with merging watercolours. Then he pours, drips and splashes thick colours onto the background, as he stands crouched over the work. Remarkable about this technique is that it is very spontaneous and dynamic, but also a reflection of the artist and his action. Francis’ understanding of colour is strongly influenced by post-impressionism and the Italian masters of the early Renaissance, but his gestural brushwork

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on the other hand, is based on his time spent in Japan in 1957, where he came into contact with the ink-brush technique haboku. The resulting luminosity of each colour, accentuated by the deep black, imparts the work offered here with a liveliness and lightness, that displays the whole energy of his talent as a prominent exponent of the lyrically oriented abstract expressionism. "Color is light on fire. Each color is the result of burning, for each substance burns with a particular color." (cit. Sam Francis, in Exh. Cat.: Sam Francis, Los Angeles, 1980, p. 10)

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