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SAM FRANCIS

1923 San Mateo (California) – Santa Monica 1994

Untitled

Acrylic on canvas; executed 1994.

Dated on the verso: 7-12-94. With the estate stamp.

38.1 x 45.7 cm

PROVENANCE: Estate of the Artist, California – Galleri Faurschou, Copenhagen – Kaare Berntsen, Oslo – Private collection – Private collection, New York.

LITERATURE: *Sam Francis: The Last Works*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, 1995, exhib. cat. (repr.) – *The Complete (152) Paintings from the Last Studio of Sam Francis*, Galleri Faurschou at Art Basel 28, Copenhagen, 1997, exhib. cat. (repr.) – *Sam Francis: The Last Works*, Galleri Faurschou, Copenhagen, 1999, exhib. cat., pp. 12–13, and 64–65 (repr.) – *Sam Francis: Color, the Last Paintings*, 7 April–31 May 2011, Heiberg Cummings Art, New York; exhibit. cat. (repr.) – *Sam Francis: Catalogue Raisonné of Canvas and Panel Paintings 1946–1994*, Debra Burchett-Lere (ed.), Los Angeles 2011, no. SFF. 1704.

EXHIBITIONS: *Sam Francis: The Last Works*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, 25 May - 17 September 1995 – *The Complete (152) Paintings from the Last Studio of Sam Francis*, 11 - 18 June 1997, Galleri Faurschou at Art Basel 28, Basel – *Sam Francis: The Last Works*, 18 March - 5 June 1999, Galleri Faurschou, Copenhagen – *Sam Francis: Color. The Last Paintings*, 7 April - 31 May 2011, Heiberg Cummings Art, New York – *Bonheur de Vivre*, 18 March - 27 May 2016, Bernard Jacobson Gallery, London.

In 1989 Francis had to confront his own mortality, for he was then diagnosed with prostate cancer. In the face of death, his world out of control and in chaos, Francis reacted with fury and rage. He attacked the canvas with massive formations of some of the most powerful and intense color he had ever used. His paint pooled and flowed as if it were molten lava or primal matter. The reds and yellows and greens became at points like physical entities built up in strata of low relief that spilled over the edges, just as his emotions could no longer be contained.

By the late summer of 1994, work had all but ceased, and it was clear that the end was near. In the late summer, Francis rallied and found once more in his art – if only briefly – a way out, a way back to life. The result was a series of 152 small paintings (now known as *The Last Works*) that filled three walls of his West Channel Road studio in Santa Monica [Fig.1]. He had lost the use of his right arm, which forced him to work with his left, and his illness was such that he had to rely great on his assistants. Francis's art was, throughout his long career, an affirmation of the power of abstract color painting to embody the authentic, deeply personal experience and to convey this in immediate and profound terms. His means were light and color, the animating forces of life itself.¹

¹ William C. Agee: 'Sam Francis: A Painter's Dialogue with Color, Light, and Space', in Debra Burchett-Lere (ed.), *Sam Francis. Catalogue raisonné of Canvas and Panel Paintings. 1946–1994*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 2011, p. 115 ff.

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View of Francis's last works in progress, West Channel Road studio, Santa Monica