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WITH AN ESSAY ON HIS PRINTS
BY SUSAN EINSTEIN

Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, New York

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Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Selz, Peter Howard, 1919—
Sam Francis.
1. Francis, Sam, 1923—
ND237.F67S44 759.13 74-16096
ISBN 0-8109-0265-6

The lines quoted from *The Spirit of Zen* by Alan Watts,
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Library of Congress Catalogue Card Number: 74-16096
Published by Harry N. Abrams, Incorporated, New York, 1975
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Printed and bound in Japan.

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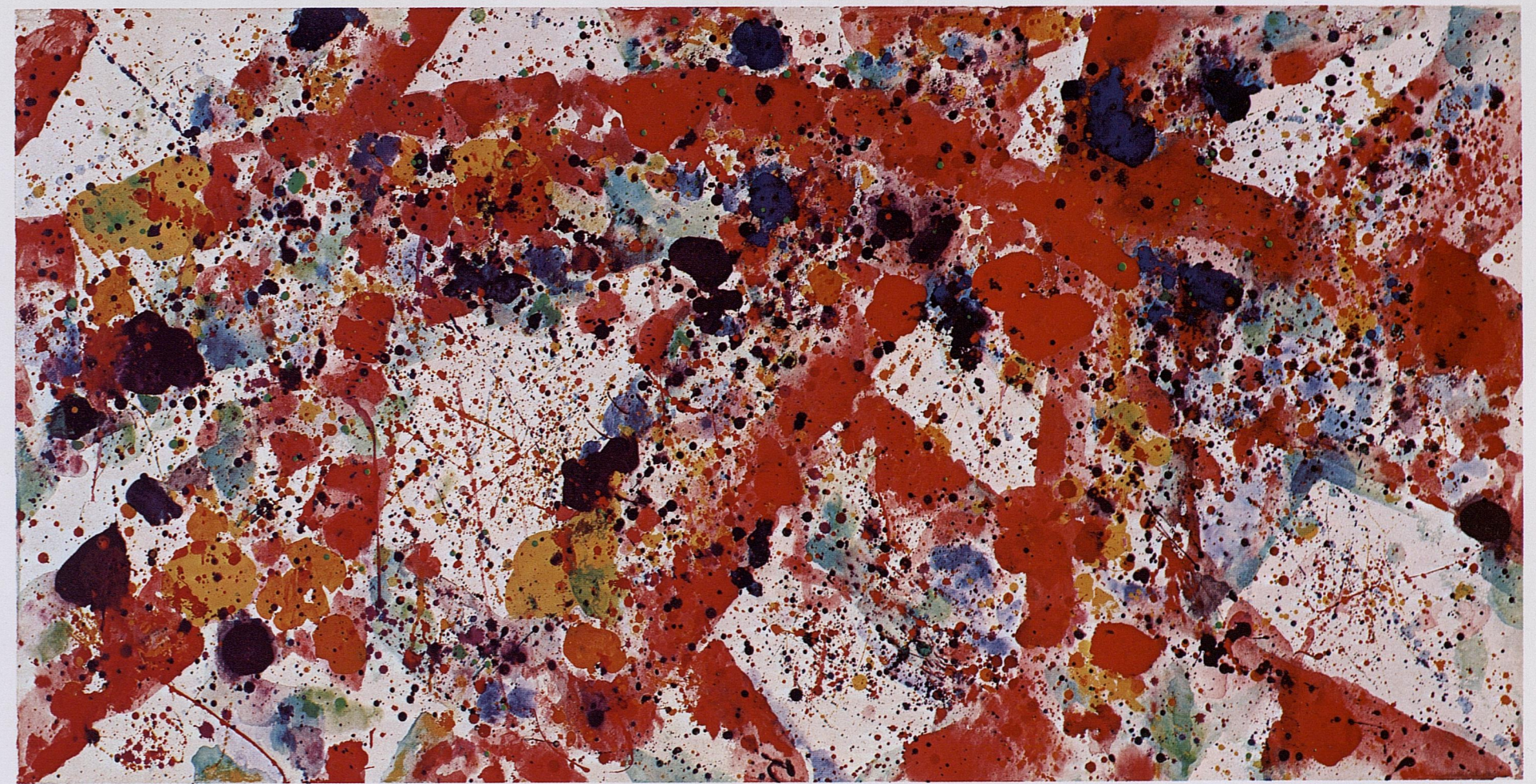
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PHOTO BY SUSAN EINSTEIN, LOS ANGELES

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SAM FRANCIS is one of the youngest American Abstract Expressionists, and his art may be summarized as a celebration of life, an affirmation of organic unity in defiance of illness and fragmented experience. In the words of James Johnson Sweeney, "Sam Francis is a hedonist who loves life, an intuitive who loves to paint. He enjoys every moment of his work and his work communicates his enjoyment. He is a master decorator in the highest sense of the phrase as were the great decorators of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance."⁶

Born in San Mateo, California, in 1923, Francis started painting while slowly recovering from the effects of an airplane crash that occurred in 1943 while he was training in the Army Air Corps. Soon he was immersed in studying the interplay of light, space, and color.

In 1950 Francis moved to Paris, where he began producing monochromatic paintings stained in whites and grays, evocative of the transient light of the city's winter skies. Gradually, these austere, contemplative works of the early Paris period give way to vibrant, pulsating paintings in which color reaches an almost hypnotic intensity. In 1957 Francis made his first trip to Japan, where he was influenced by Eastern art and its concern for asymmetry and open, flowing space. By this time he had won international acclaim as an artist.

Peter Selz, the author, served as Curator of the Department of Painting and Sculpture Exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art for seven years, and for the past ten years has taught art history at the University of California at Berkeley; until recently, he was also the director of its Art Museum, which he initiated. He has written extensively on the art of the twentieth century, and in the present volume offers a sensitive and illuminating evaluation of Francis's *oeuvre*, from the artist's earliest paintings, filled with cellular forms, to the monumental works of the late fifties, in which free-flowing, joyous colors radiate through huge white expanses, to his recent Mandala paintings with their compelling aura of mysticism. A separate section devoted to Sam Francis as printmaker is provided by Susan Einstein (who worked in Francis's printshop, and who is currently associated with the Museum of Cultural History at U.C.L.A.); another is given over to a collection of poems written about Sam Francis by artists and poets who are close to him. A chronology, a bibliography, and an index are also included in this volume, which will undoubtedly become the definitive reference on this major twentieth-century artist.

⁶Quoted in *Sam Francis* (Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1967; exhibition catalogue), p. 21.

185 illustrations, including 45 in full color

Printed in Japan
8109-0265-6