

HOLLIS TAGGART

Where Color Begins: Works on Paper by Sam Francis

On view at Hollis Taggart June 18 – July 18, 2025

Opening Reception Friday, June 20, from 6-8PM

June 5, 2025 – Hollis Taggart is pleased to present *Where Color Begins: Works on Paper by Sam Francis*, a focused exhibition of 13 gouache and watercolor paintings by the influential postwar abstractionist. On view in the gallery's first floor Annex space, the exhibition presents a curated group of works that reflect Francis's deep engagement with color, gesture, and light. These works on paper—fluid, immediate, and often experimental—embody the distinctive vitality he discovered in the medium.

Where Color Begins explores how Francis embraced paper not merely as a support, but as a dynamic field where ideas could unfold with spontaneity. It became a space for testing the limits of chromatic energy, where intuitive movement met deliberate attention to negative space, and where process itself often emerged as the point.

Born in San Mateo, California, in 1923, Francis came to painting through unlikely circumstances. After a serious spinal injury in his early twenties, he spent several years in recovery, much of it bedridden. It was during this period that he began painting, studying with Bay Area artist David Park. Park's emphasis on intuitive, gestural mark-making left a lasting imprint. "Painting," Francis later reflected, "was my way back to life." Once recovered, he enrolled at the University of California, Berkeley, eventually leaving behind his medical studies to fully commit to art.

In 1950, Sam Francis moved to Paris, just as New York was becoming the epicenter of the art world. Rather than follow the gravitational pull of the New York School, he charted an independent path, immersing himself in the legacy of French modernism—particularly the work of Matisse, Bonnard, and Monet, whose use of color, light, and spatial openness deeply informed his sensibility. Though he maintained a physical and philosophical distance from New York, Francis remained central to the discourse of Abstract Expressionism, with his early inclusion in MoMA's landmark *Twelve Americans* exhibition (1956) and relationships with key New York dealers like Martha Jackson and André Emmerich. Over the decades, Francis's practice unfolded across studios in Paris, Tokyo, Bern, Los Angeles, and Santa Monica, where he developed a luminous, improvisational style that infused Abstract Expressionism with a distinctly cross-cultural perspective. His works on paper—widely regarded as among the most exceptional in his celebrated oeuvre—embody the global reach of his vision and his role as a vital link between American abstraction and international modernism.

The works in this exhibition, created between the 1960s and 1990s, distill many of the essential elements of Francis's visual vocabulary. Swirls of pigment, cascading drips, and radiant washes hover around blank or lightly stained voids—or coalesce into dense, atmospheric fields. The oscillation between negative space and chromatic saturation reveals Francis's enduring preoccupation: where emptiness ends, and where color begins. These works pulse with motion, tension, and breath—what art historian Peter Selz once described as Francis's signature sense of "suspension and levitation," a marked contrast to the grounded intensity of Abstract Expressionism.

Francis held a particular affinity for working on paper, once noting, "Paper is much more beautiful than canvas... I like the way the paint flows into the fiber." His works on paper were not side projects or studies, but complete, self-contained compositions. The format enabled a kind of immediacy and risk-taking that was essential to his process. Many of his most inventive explorations of color and form took shape here, in works that feel at once deliberate and open to chance.

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About Hollis Taggart

Founded in 1979, Hollis Taggart presents significant works of American art, showcasing the trajectory of American art movements from the Hudson River School to American Modernism and the Post-War and Contemporary eras. Its program is characterized by a deep commitment to scholarship and bringing to the fore the work of under-recognized artists. The gallery has sponsored several catalogue raisonné projects, most recently for the American Surrealist artist Kay Sage, and has been instrumental in advancing knowledge of such artists as Alfred Maurer, Arthur B. Carles, and more recently, Theodoros Stamos, Marjorie Strider, and Michael (Corinne) West. In the summer of 2019, the gallery announced the formal expansion of its primary market business and focus on the presentation of contemporary work. It continues to expand its roster of contemporary artists, focusing on emerging and mid-career talents. With more than 40 years of experience, Hollis Taggart is widely recognized by collectors and curators for its leadership, expertise, and openness, on matters of art history, market trends and opportunities.

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