

NORTON SIMON MUSEUM FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

411 West Colorado Boulevard, Pasadena, California 91105 www.nortonsimon.org

Public Affairs Department 626.844.6941 media@nortonsimon.org

January 2016

Media Contacts:

Leslie C. Denk | ldenk@nortonsimon.org | (626) 844-6941

Emma Jacobson-Sive | emma@ejs-media.com | (323) 842-2064

Drawing, Dreaming and Desire: Works on Paper by Sam Francis

April 8–July 25, 2016

Pasadena, CA—The Norton Simon Museum presents *Drawing, Dreaming and Desire: Works on Paper by Sam Francis*, an exhibition that features the artist's drawings of erotica and the female nude, many on view for the first time. While Francis is renowned for abstract, atmospheric and vigorously colored paintings on a grand scale, these intimate drawings—meditations made visible—in pen and ink, acrylic and watercolor, show viewers a rarely-seen figurative aspect of his oeuvre. Dynamic but little known, this body of work ranges from line drawings of the 1950s to gestural brushstrokes of the 1980s and resonates with significant moments in the artist's life.



Untitled, 1961
Sam Francis (American, 1923–1994)
Ink on paper
10-7/8 x 9-3/4 in. (27.6 x 24.7 cm)
Norton Simon Museum, Gift of the Sam Francis Foundation, P.2012.1.10

A native of California, Sam Francis (1923–1994) was drafted into the military in 1943 while still a student at UC Berkeley. During Army Air Corp training, he suffered a severe injury that led to a four-year hospitalization. In the midst of his confinement, Francis took up painting and quickly realized he had a passion and a talent for it. In 1950, he departed for Paris, ready to experience life to the fullest, in a new culture, while finding his way as an artist. The vibrant, sensual colors of French art, palpable in the work of Monet and Matisse, stimulated his own predilection for bright, intense colors. A youthful vitality emanates from these erotic drawings of the mid-1950s. The figures, shown in sexual embrace, float in the space of the paper, akin to the islands of color that occupy his paintings. Evident from the works' calligraphic character is Francis's early interest in Japanese art and aesthetics, specifically *makura-e*, or "pillow pictures," which he is known to have collected.

By the end of the decade, Francis had become the first American postwar painter to win serious acclaim in Europe. Courted by major dealers, collectors and museum curators, he was exhibiting his work on two continents and in four countries. In 1958, he completed the monumental triptych known as the *Basel Mural* for the Kunsthalle in Basel, Switzerland (one panel and two fragments from a second panel are part of the Simon collections). But illness struck Francis in 1961, necessitating another hospitalization for most of the year in Bern,

Switzerland. Perhaps the amorous couples that Francis drew while he was bedridden suggest the weight of this new setback. In contrast to the nimble figures of his work in the 1950s, the massive forms in these works hover between abstraction and figuration and swell to the edges of the paper as though struggling against its bonds.

The colossal energy that suffused the artist's abstract paintings informed his frank, and sometimes provocative, depictions of the female nude from the 1980s. During these productive years in California (where he would marry his fifth wife and welcome a son), he employed the brush with a strength and vigor matched by his new passion for creating monotypes. The pigment trickles and twists across the paper. Splashes of paint confirm the physicality of the artist wielding his brush. The generative, sensual impulse found in his paintings invigorates these drawings and offers reason enough for their existence.

Francis once said that "*each painting is like my body print, taken at different moments of my life.*" This sentiment is germane to the works displayed in *Drawing, Dreaming and Desire*, which, because of their intimate nature, provide insight into his psyche. His sustained attention to line, its descriptive and decorative power, offered a counterbalance to his abstractions, an aesthetic release for an artist whose public acclaim centered on the diffused surfaces of his bold abstractions.

Drawing, Dreaming and Desire: Works on Paper by Sam Francis is organized by Curator Gloria Williams Sander. The seventeen works presented in the exhibition are part of a larger donation of the artist's drawings by the Sam Francis Foundation in 2012, and this exhibition is the first opportunity for the public to see them. It is on view in the Museum's small rotating gallery on the main level from Friday, April 8 through Monday, July 25, 2016.

About the Norton Simon Museum

The Norton Simon Museum is known around the world as one of the most remarkable private art collections ever assembled. Over a 30-year period, industrialist Norton Simon (1907–1993) amassed an astonishing collection of European art from the Renaissance to the 20th century, and a stellar collection of South and Southeast Asian art spanning 2,000 years. Modern and Contemporary Art from Europe and the United States, acquired by the former Pasadena Art Museum, also occupies an important place in the Museum's collections. The Museum houses more than 12,000 objects, roughly 1,000 of which are on view in the galleries and gardens. Two temporary exhibition spaces feature rotating installations of artworks not on permanent display.

Location: The Norton Simon Museum is located at 411 W. Colorado Blvd. at Orange Grove Boulevard in Pasadena, Calif., at the intersection of the Foothill (210) and Ventura (134) freeways. For general Museum information, please call (626) 449-6840 or visit www.nortonsimon.org. **Hours:** The Museum is open Monday, Wednesday and Thursday from noon to 5 p.m., Friday and Saturday from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. It is closed on Tuesday. **Admission:** General admission is \$12 for adults and \$9 for seniors. Members, students with I.D., and patrons age 18 and under are admitted free of charge. Admission is free for everyone on the first Friday of every month from 5 to 8 p.m. All public programs, unless stated otherwise, are free with admission. The Museum is wheelchair accessible. **Parking:** Parking is free, and no reservations are necessary. **Public Transportation:** Pasadena Transit stops directly in front of the Museum. Please visit <http://pasadenatransit.net> for schedules. The MTA bus line #180/181 stops in front of the Museum. The Memorial Park Station on the MTA Gold Line, the closest Metro Rail station to the Museum, is located at 125 E. Holly St. at Arroyo Parkway. Please visit www.metro.net for schedules.