



Artists Documentation Program (ADP) Interview Video Index

Artist: Sam Francis/Dan Cytron
Date: October 7, 1999
Location: The Menil Collection, Houston
Interviewer: Carol Mancusi-Ungaro
Video/Edit: Laurie McDonald
Total Run Time: 01:36:22

Abstract:

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro interviews William Agee and Daniel Cytron on the occasion of the exhibition "Sam Francis: Paintings 1947-1990" at the Menil Collection. The discussion primarily focuses on the materials and methods used by Abstract Expressionist painter Sam Francis to create his work. Dan Cytron describes working as Sam Francis' studio assistant and colorist, and provides insight into Francis' use of color and his views toward conservation of his work.

Controlled Access Headings (Library of Congress):

Corporate Name(s)

Andrew W. Mellon Foundation
Artists Documentation Program
Center for the Technical Study of Modern Art, Harvard Art Museums
Menil Collection (Houston, Tex.)
Whitney Museum of American Art

Genre(s)

Interviews
Oral histories

Personal Name(s)

Agee, William C.
Cytron, Daniel
Francis, Sam
Ungaro, Carol Mancusi-

Subject(s)

Art--Conservation and restoration
Art, Modern--20th century
Artists' materials
Art--Technique
Abstract Expressionism--20th century
Painting

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Indexed by: Megan Peck, May, 2024

Video: adp1999a_001va.mp4 / Interview #: VI2000-020.1999a / Interview date: 10/07/1999

Exhibitions/Works:

Names of exhibitions and works referenced during this interview appear below in gray cells.

Controlled Vocabulary:

Except where indicated, all keywords employ Getty vocabularies (AAT/ULAN/TGN). Those marked with (*) employ Library of Congress Authorities. Those marked with (**) employ local terms.

Time	Contents	Subject Keywords
00:00:02	Opening Credits	
00:00:52	Introduction William Agee, Dan Cytron, Carol Mancusi-Ungaro	
00:01:09	Historical Anecdote Dan Cytron relates the story of how he met Sam Francis and came to be his assistant.	artist studios (work spaces) Diebenkorn, Richard gesso Santa Monica Canyon (valley) stretching
00:02:56	(Artwork Reference) Richard Diebenkorn Ocean Park Series, 1967-1993	
00:04:51	Technical Specifications and Process of Creation Dan Cytron discusses the canvases used by Sam Francis. He details where he sourced them and how he prepared them, and specifically mentions the large canvases made for the Berlin Mural commission. Cytron also describes Francis tinting his gesso green or pink rather than leaving it pure white.	canvas (textile material) duck (textile) gesso linen (material) Lucius Hudson, Inc.** priming (coating process) stretcher bars stretchers (framing and mounting equipment)
00:05:43	(Artwork Reference) Sam Francis Mural Commission, 1969-71 Nationalgalerie, Berlin	
00:06:25	(Image) Sam Francis <i>Untitled</i> , 1967 The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles Gift of the artist and Sam Francis Art Museum, Inc.	
00:07:09	(Image) Sam Francis <i>Untitled</i> , 1967 – Detail The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles	

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	Gift of the artist and Sam Francis Art Museum, Inc.	
00:07:32	<p>Process of Creation and Technical Specification Dan Cytron describes the materials and techniques used by Sam Francis to create <i>Untitled, 1967</i>, specifically addressing the color bleed around the border. He also discusses the chemistry of the pigments and emulsions used by Francis.</p>	cadmium yellow (color) cadmium yellow (pigment) carbazole violet** Celanese Corporation* dispersion (material) dispersion (process) ethylene glycol monoethyl ether Kodak Photo-Flo Solution** Nova Color Paint** phthalocyanine blue phthalocyanine green pigments Rhoplex resin™
00:09:18	<p>(Image) Sam Francis <i>Untitled, 1967</i> – Detail of bleed along edge The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles Gift of the artist and Sam Francis Art Museum, Inc.</p>	
00:14:09	<p>(Image) Sam Francis <i>Untitled, 1967</i> – Detail The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles Gift of the artist and Sam Francis Art Museum, Inc.</p>	
00:14:11	<p>Nature of Work Dan Cytron and William Agee discuss Sam Francis’ interest in the flow and movement of paint, and how that manifested in the fluidity present throughout his works.</p>	Cézanne, Paul watercolor (paint)
00:14:43	<p>(Image) Sam Francis <i>Circular Blue, 1953</i> The Museum of Modern Art, Shiga, Japan</p>	
00:15:40	<p>Nature of Work Dan Cytron discusses Sam Francis’ sense of immediacy influencing his choices of materials and processes. He explains Francis’ reasons for why he did not edit his work.</p>	artists’ materials gesso Japan (nation) paper (fiber product) Joyce, James Smith, David (American sculptor, 1906-1965) works on paper
00:22:10	<p>Process of Creation Dan Cytron describes Sam Francis’ works as drawings and explains how he was always drawing. He also discusses Francis’ extensive</p>	brush strokes Flavin, Dan mops (artists’ brushes)

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	paintbrush collection and the evolution of his painting technique from using mops to rollers.	paint rollers paintbrushes painting (image making) squirrel hair brush**
00:26:00	Process of Creation Dan Cytron discusses the creation of the <i>Grey</i> paintings. He explains that the ethereal looking surface was a result of Sam Francis rationing his paint due to economics.	Lefebvre, Lucien Paris (inhabited place)
00:26:15	(Image) Sam Francis <i>Grey</i> , 1951 The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles Gift of the artist and Sam Francis Art Museum, Inc.	
00:29:01	Process of Creation Dan Cytron answers Carol Mancusi-Ungaro’s questions about Sam Francis’ use of stretcher bars and picture frames. He specifically discusses Francis’ use of thinner stretcher bars and his preferences regarding frames.	frames (ornament areas) Lefebvre, Lucien stretcher bars stretchers (framing and mounting equipment)
00:30:17	Conservation Issues William Agee and Dan Cytron discuss Sam Francis’ <i>Basel Murals</i> , 1956-58. Their conversation includes damage sustained by the murals during shipping and Francis’ feelings and treatment of the damaged canvas. Cytron also shares an anecdote about Francis’ dog leaving paw prints on works in the studio.	Amsterdam, Nederland. Stedelijk Museum (art museum, fl. 1962) damage (condition) mural paintings (visual works) Norton Simon Museum (American repository, Pasadena, contemporary) reproductions (derivative objects) Rüdlinger, Arnold, 1919-1967* shipping water damage
00:30:32	(Artwork Reference) Sam Francis <i>Basel Murals</i> , 1956-58 Three panels made for Kunsthalle Basel, Switzerland	
00:33:23	(Image) Sam Francis <i>Three Paintings for the Stairwell of the Kunsthalle Basel (Basel Murals I-III)</i> , 1956-58 Exhibition view during “The New American Painting,” Kunsthalle Basel, 1958	

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00:34:47	(Artwork Reference) Claude Monet <i>Les Nymphéas (Water Lilies Murals)</i> , 1920-26 Musée de l'Orangerie, Paris	
00:34:59	(Artwork Reference) Frescoes in St. Francis, Upper Church, Assisi, Italy	
00:35:15	Process of Creation Dan Cytron describes Sam Francis' painting techniques, especially for his large murals. He provides insight into the evolution of Francis working flat on tables or the floor due to his deteriorating physical condition. Cytron also explains Francis' process for painting flat and then hanging the canvases on the wall to evaluate them.	drip painting illness physical disabilities verticality
00:35:41	(Image) Sam Francis <i>Untitled</i> , 1956 Louisiana Museum of Modern Art Humlebaek, Denmark	
00:38:26	Process of Creation and Conservation issues Dan Cytron confirms that Sam Francis did not varnish his paintings or use varnish in his paint. He describes some of Francis' processes for achieving brilliant flat colors, which did not include varnishing or coating, leaving the canvasses vulnerable. Cytron specifically describes Francis' process for creating monotypes using a letter press and dry pigments, and his use of resin in his paints. He also mentions that Francis rarely used black, but would use intense colors that approached black.	acrylic (resin) acrylic paint black (color) Bocour Artists Color Co. Bocour, Leonard* dry color Jack Richeson Shiva Oil Paint** letterpresses monotypes (planographic prints) pigment varnish
00:39:05	(Image) Sam Francis <i>Dark Beams</i> , 1978 (detail) The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles	
00:42:46	Conservation Issues Dan Cytron discusses Sam Francis' feelings regarding the conservation of his paintings. He explains that after an exhibition, any marks or damage would be removed, but there would be no repainting or attempts to match or reproduce the original colors.	damage (condition) gesso stretching
00:45:28	Process of Creation Dan Cytron clarifies that Sam Francis did not work on unprimed	Abstract Expressionist canvas (textile material) Dove, Arthur Garfield

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	<p>canvases. He explains that Francis adhered to the traditional French technique of priming with sizing and rabbit skin glue. The group also discusses the role of canvas and priming in both French and American Abstract Expressionism.</p>	<p>Hopps, Walter Huber, Caroline* Newman, Barnett Pollock, Jackson primer (material) priming (coating process) rabbitskin glue size (material) sizing (process) Still, Clyfford</p>
00:47:50	<p>(Exhibition Reference) "Jackson Pollock: New Approaches" Symposium organized in conjunction with the exhibition "Jackson Pollock" Museum of Modern Art, New York October 28, 1998-February 2, 1999</p>	
00:48:16	<p>(Artwork Reference) Jackson Pollock <i>Echo, Number 25</i>, 1951 Museum of Modern Art, New York</p>	
00:48:41	<p>(Artwork Reference) Jackson Pollock <i>Enchanted Forest</i>, 1947 Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, NY</p>	
00:49:52	<p>Historical Anecdote William Agee shares an anecdote about a damaged Kenneth Noland painting.</p>	<p>damage (condition) Gund, Graham Potoff, Len**</p>
00:49:54	<p>(Exhibition Reference) "Kenneth Noland: The Circle Paintings 1956-63" Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 1993</p>	
00:50:30	<p>Process of Creation Dan Cytron discusses <i>Joyous Lake</i>, 1977 and describes Sam Francis' use of color and his own role as Francis' colorist. Cytron provides insight into the pigment industry and chemistry, explaining how he created a collection of colors exclusive to Francis for use in painting and printmaking.</p>	<p>artists' materials assistant artists chemistry coating (material) coating (process) color (perceived attribute) fading inorganic pigment organic pigment permanence pigments transparency (optical property) ultramarine (color)</p>

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		ultramarine blue (pigment) yellow (color)
00:50:36	(Image) Sam Francis <i>Joyous Lake, 1977</i> Sam Francis Estate, California	
00:57:02	(Exhibition Reference) "Sam Francis: Work in Progress" Otis Institute Art Gallery Los Angeles February 11-April 2, 1978	
00:59:40	Process of Creation Dan Cytron continues discussing his work as Sam Francis' colorist. He describes creating color for lithographs, and the business that grew up around the print shop.	coating (material) color (perceived attribute) lithographs Noland, Kenneth pigments printing ink watercolor (paint)
01:02:11	Process of Creation Dan Cytron describes the materials and techniques employed by Sam Francis for the creation of <i>Joyous Lake, 1977</i> . In particular, he discusses the brushes used by Francis and contrasts his use of paint drips with that of Jackson Pollack.	brush strokes drip painting feathers (animal components) paint rollers paintbrushes Pollok, Jackson sumi-e (technique)
01:04:55	Process of Creation Dan Cytron discusses Sam Francis' painting process and techniques in his later works, specifically describing his use of a grid for the works' underlying structures, and his application of thick opaque paints. Cytron also describes preparing colors in five-gallon buckets, and Francis' selecting colors based solely on emotional choice, with no consideration to the cost of the pigments.	cadmium orange (color) color (perceived attribute) dispersion (material) strontium yellow (color)
01:10:16	Process of Creation and Historical Anecdote Dan Cytron discusses Sam Francis' methods and techniques, touching on Francis' work as a poet and his poetic expression through painting. He describes how Francis used thicker, more opaque paints in his late works. Cytron and Agee continue to discuss Francis' use of color, particularly noting the intensity of his colors in the 1980s. Additionally, Cytron shares an anecdote about Francis' reaction to an intense red pigment.	Albers, Josef color (perceived attribute) Page, George Poetry red (color)
01:13:45	Process of Creation and Technical Specifications Dan Cytron discusses the preparation of paints and pigments for	chemistry dispersions (material)

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	Sam Francis. He specifically describes Francis’ use of thicker paints and the blue used in <i>Free Floating Clouds</i> , 1980. He also explains the industrial process for creating inorganic pigments.	linseed oil paint (coating) pigment blue 60** pigments printing ink propylene glycol phthalocyanine blue watercolor (paint)
01:15:45	(Image) Sam Francis <i>Free Floating Clouds</i> , 1980 The Sam Francis Estate, California	
01:19:14	Process of Creation Cytron explains that Sam Francis prioritized the act of painting over the quality of the paints he used. He describes how Francis created visual effects by incorporating different aspects of paints, such as bronzing pigments and reflectants, into his work.	acrylic (resin) assistant artists cobalt (mineral) cobalt violet (pigment) inorganic pigment manganese violet (pigment) painting (coating) pigments reflectant** texture (physical attribute)
01:22:48	Historical Anecdote Dan Cytron discusses his handling of the remaining pigments and materials after Sam Francis’ death. He touches on the challenge of finding takers for the costly pigments and describes learning to handle highly toxic pigments.	cobalt (mineral) cobalt violet (pigment) oxidation polymerization toxicity
01:27:17	Historical Anecdote Dan Cytron discusses what it was like to work with Francis.	assistant artists
01:28:23	Historical Anecdote Dan Cytron discusses “The Last Paintings of Sam Francis” and reflects on the end of Francis’ life. He talks about the studio assistants who helped Francis paint through the last days of his illness, including Cytron making Francis a set of watercolors to use at home when he was too ill for the studio.	assistant artists Brand, Krauth** Matisse, Henri Shields, Douglas**
01:28:29	(Artwork/Exhibition Reference) Sam Francis “The Last Paintings of Sam Francis” 152 small paintings, painted June-August 1994, At his Santa Monica house studio Exhibited at The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) In 1995	
01:35:32	Closing Credits	