

# Basic Detail Report



## **Title: Yielding**

Date: 1982

Primary Maker: com.gallerysystems.emuseum.core.entities.RecordXPerson@2849a

Medium: Acrylic polymer on prepared paper

Description: "Yielding" engages the viewer in looking for order beneath the seeming chaos of corpuscular color balls within an abstract pictorial field, a process that involves the viewer with Francis's way of making forms, of differentiating and ordering the application of color. Two paintings, "Simplicity" (1980; Saison Foundation, Tokyo) and "The Bound and the Unbound" (1984; estate of the artist), provide a historical framework for the dialogue of order and chaos found in "Yielding".

(1) "Simplicity" represents a culminating moment in Francis's oeuvre. Having replaced the white void of his paintings of the late 1960s with the strongly centered mandala structure of the paintings, lithographs, and monotypes of the mid-1970s, Francis sought greater looseness: centralized structure yielded to the uncentered grid, which supports an ever more spontaneous play of light-filled color. One of his aphorisms published in 1975 speaks to this process: "He is named space / He is named time / He is named light / He is named / He has the mercy of eternity / He is spreading / (moving in space is spreading) / moving is possible / because of easing / because of loosening." (2) In the early 1980s Francis returned to the problem of how to reconcile structure and spontaneity. As structure became more dynamic, it allowed for greater spontaneity. The very title "The Bound and the Unbound" points to the concern that led him to push his art toward an ever greater loosening. Francis's explorations in the medium of etching were especially important in this evolution. In works from 1981, such as "Totem", "Second Mother", and "First

# Basic Detail Report

Subject" (all National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), strong diagonals play an important role. Their dynamism enters into a dialogue with the fluid, spatially subtle properties of etching.<sup>(3)</sup> The excitement of this dialogue is brought, at a larger scale and in a more unusual medium for Francis, to "Yielding", an acrylic on paper. Although technically a drawing, "Yielding" visually and viscerally functions very much like a painting. Beneath the seeming chaos of corpuscular balls of colored matter (thick, matte, sometimes "cratered," largely red, though often paired with turquoise balls), one immediately notices the structuring order of a white bar separating sloping beams. This structure acts as a magnet, beginning to organize and interact with the color balls: the fuchsia ball in the lower right corner, juxtaposed with a blood red ball to its left, marks the origin of the lower wider beam. Red balls float at pictorially strategic points: at the top center of the beam, above the joining of the leglike struts that help support its diagonal rise, and between these struts in conjunction with turquoise. Another such pairing of red and turquoise occurs in the center of the pictorial field, where the turquoise takes the eye and the imagination into the white bar; its quality as a spatial void recalls Francis's preoccupation with the void in the late 1960s. While the bottom beam is characterized by mottles and specks that recall the Milky Way, the narrower, less clearly defined beam above this bar is a massing of substantial color balls, especially in the juxtaposition of red, turquoise, and dark blue just to left of center. This massing establishes a directional force, taking the eye farther toward the upper left, where a gestural trajectory of dark blue opens into action and a new space; a different kind of action than the diagonal trajectories of the beams, a different kind of space than the Milky Way of the lower beam or the denser constellations of the upper beam. This looping space of a gesture continues, in a second swing, in red. The red gesture loops up onto the organic folds of the red area that holds the upper left hand corner, reminding us of the work's modernist pictorial surface. The other corners are also pinned by red: an architectural slab of boldly brushed-on red in the lower left, the matte diagonally brushed triangular tab in the upper right. This focus on binding corners brings us back to the fuchsia ball in the lower right: we begin to appreciate its contribution to the loosening of this pictorial universe. As we continue to explore complexities, discovering new points of order, we remain tantalized by the chaotic elements that give "Yielding" an unending life. ELL Bibliography: Robert T. Buck, Franz Meyer, and Wieland Schmied, "Sam Francis: Paintings", 1947-1972, exhib. cat. (Buffalo: Albright-Knox Art Gallery, 1972); Peter Selz, "Sam Francis" (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1975); Connie W. Lembark, "The Prints of Sam Francis: A Catalogue Raisonné", 1960-1990, 2 vols. (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1992); Pontus Hulten, "Sam Francis" (Stuttgart: Edition Cantz, 1993). NOTES: 1. Pontus Hulten posits order/chaos as a framework for appreciating Francis's art (Sam Francis, p. 17). 2. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 37. 3. On the structural dynamism of etchings, see Ruth E. Fine, "Patterns across the Membrane of the Mind," in Lembark, Prints, vol. I, p. 30. On Francis's concentration on the fluid, broadly drawn, tonal variations possible with

# Basic Detail Report

sugar-life and spitbite aquatint, see *ibid.*, pp. 20, 30.  
Dimensions: 37 x 71 3/4 in.