

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Feb. 19, 2009

CONTACT: Thea M. Page, 626-405-2260, tpage@huntington.org
Lisa Blackburn, 626-405-2140, lblackburn@huntington.org

HUNTINGTON RECEIVES MASTERWORK BY ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONIST PAINTER SAM FRANCIS

The monumental Free Floating Clouds will dramatically enrich the display of 20th-century works in the expanded American art galleries when they open in May



Samuel L. Francis (1923–1994), *Free Floating Clouds*, 1980, acrylic on canvas, 125 in. x 254 in., installed in The Huntington's new Virginia Steele Scott Galleries, which open May 30, 2009. Credit: Tim Street-Porter

SAN MARINO, Calif.—The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens announced today the gift of an important painting by California abstract expressionist Samuel L. (“Sam”) Francis (1923–1994). *Free Floating Clouds* (1980), a work of overlapping layers of shimmering colors that measures more than 10 feet tall and 21 feet wide is a gift of the Sam

Francis Foundation. A favorite of the artist that has been featured in major museum retrospectives, *Free Floating Clouds* bridges two facets of Francis' career—his earlier interest in gridlike structure and his later looser and more gestural style. It will be presented among other works of the mid-to-late 20th century in The Huntington's expanded and redesigned Virginia Steele Scott Galleries of American Art when they open on May 30, 2009.

“With impeccable timing and uncanny sensitivity to The Huntington's curatorial ambitions, the Sam Francis Foundation has made a monumental gift,” said Steven S. Koblik, president of The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens. “With this work, we make great strides toward expanding the meaning and educational potential of our American art collection.”

The gift to The Huntington is the first of a new gifting program initiated by the Sam Francis Foundation this year. “We are interested in placing specific works in the most meaningful contexts possible,” explained Debra Burchett-Lere, director of the foundation and editor of a forthcoming catalogue raisonné on Francis. “In the case of *Free Floating Clouds*, we considered carefully, and determined that The Huntington would be the ideal setting. Among its examples of 19th-century American landscape painting and surrounded by acres of gardens, this abstract landscape will inspire countless comparisons.”

Begun in 1979, with a major gift from the Virginia Steele Scott Foundation that included 50 paintings, The Huntington's American art collection since has grown to include about 9,400 objects spanning the late 17th century to the middle of the 20th century. “The paintings at the core of the collection given to us by the Scott Foundation 30 years ago are based on the tradition of representation in art,” explains John Murdoch, Hannah and Russel Kully Director of the Art Collections at The Huntington. “A more recent goal of the collection has been to acquire works of art that reflect other artistic ambitions, such as the development of abstraction in the 20th century. *Free Floating Clouds* is as magnificent an example as we could have hoped for.”

The expansion and redesign of The Huntington's Virginia Steele Scott Galleries will double the exhibition space available for American art—an increase made possible in 2005 by the construction of the Lois and Robert F. Erburu Gallery adjoining the existing Scott Gallery. Jessica Todd Smith, The Huntington's Virginia Steele Scott Curator of American Art, who is overseeing the reinstallation of the collection, notes, “The visually stunning *Free Floating*

Clouds will be a radiant focal point of the new installation while furthering our aim to incorporate art of California and the West into a narrative about American art that has tended to emphasize art produced on the East Coast.”

The painting will hang in a gallery of works by New York artists such as Robert Motherwell (1915–1991) and Joseph Cornell (1903–1972) as well as California masters including Richard Diebenkorn (1922–1993) and Ed Ruscha (b. 1937).

A highlight of a major international traveling retrospective, “Sam Francis: Paintings 1947–1990,” that originated at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, in 1999, *Free Floating Clouds* was a favorite of the artist and hung in his studios whenever it was not on loan for exhibitions.

Artist’s Biography

Born in San Mateo, Calif., Francis studied botany, medicine, and psychology at the University of California, Berkeley, but began painting in 1945 during a long period of hospitalization following injuries sustained in a plane crash and subsequent illness. After his recovery, he returned to Berkeley to continue his artistic studies. He spent most of the 1950s in Paris and had his first exhibition there in 1952. Returning to California in the 1960s, he made Los Angeles his permanent base. He later spent time in Japan, and some have seen an influence from Zen Buddhism in his work. Unlike many of his fellow abstract expressionists, who considered painting a vehicle for their emotional states, Francis was influenced by the natural world around him: light, space, color, movement, and growth.

About the Sam Francis Foundation

The mission of the Sam Francis Foundation is to research, document, protect, and perpetuate the creative legacy of the artist Sam Francis. Based in Glendale, Calif., the foundation aims to promote awareness of and knowledge about the art of Sam Francis to the public internationally through education and information.

About The Huntington

The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens is a collections-based research

and educational institution serving scholars and the general public. More information about The Huntington can be found online at www.huntington.org.

Visitor information

The Huntington is located at 1151 Oxford Rd., San Marino, Calif., and is open to the public Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday from noon to 4:30 p.m.; and Saturday, Sunday, and Monday holidays from 10:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Summer hours (Memorial Day through Labor Day) are 10:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Closed Tuesdays and major holidays. **Admission on weekdays:** \$15 adults, \$12 seniors (65+), \$10 students (ages 12–18 or with full-time student I.D.), \$6 youth (ages 5–11), free for children under 5. Group rate \$11 per person for groups of 15 or more. Members are admitted free. **Admission on weekends and Monday holidays:** \$20 adults, \$15 seniors, \$10 students, \$6 youth, free for children under 5. Group rate \$14 per person for groups of 15 or more. Members are admitted free. Admission is free to all visitors on the first Thursday of each month with advance tickets. Information: 626-405-2100 or www.huntington.org.

For more information visit the Press Room at www.huntington.org.

[EDITOR’S NOTE: High-resolution digital images for publicity use are available on request.]

###