

NEWS THE CORCORAN GALLERY OF ART

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Press Preview: Tuesday, October 11 at 10 am

Sam Gilliam: a retrospective

at the Corcoran Gallery of Art

October 15, 2005 – January 22, 2006

Washington, D.C. — *Sam Gilliam: a retrospective* marks the first full-career retrospective of Sam Gilliam and the most extensive presentation of his work to date. Gilliam first achieved widespread acclaim in the late 1960s with his groundbreaking Draped paintings, which blur distinctions between painting, sculpture and architecture. Now into his fifth decade as an artist, Gilliam, who has been described as the most prominent African American abstract painter, continues to create innovative approaches that influence younger generations of artists. *A retrospective* reveals the hallmarks of Gilliam's constantly evolving aesthetic: exploration, risk and formal invention. The exhibition features monumental paintings, elaborate mixed-media constructions and installations. Organized by the Corcoran Gallery of Art, *Sam Gilliam: a retrospective* is on view from October 15, 2005 through January 22, 2006.



Sam Gilliam, *Light Depth*, 1969, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

possibilities by thinking outside the dominant critical modes through which modernism is generally understood.”

“Sam Gilliam’s concentrated focus on painting and his belief that, as a discipline made up of objects, it is essentially no different from sculpture radically distinguishes him from his contemporaries who were also interested in furthering the modernist tradition, including color-field painters such as Helen Frankenthaler and the artists associated with the Washington Color School, such as Morris Louis and Kenneth Noland,” notes Jonathan P. Binstock, exhibition organizer and Corcoran Curator of Contemporary Art. “Gilliam’s ambition was, and still is, not just to reinvigorate the modernist tradition, but also to create new

Featuring approximately 45 works dating from 1967 to the present, *a retrospective* highlights Gilliam’s early beveled-edge and Draped paintings, his White and Black paintings of the 1970s, metal and wood constructions of the 1980s and 1990s and monochromatic Slatts of recent years.

His early Slice paintings are distinguished by the rhythmic patterns of their painted creases, which he made by folding acrylic-soaked canvases like accordions and allowing them to dry before unfurling them to see what he had made. Deep beveled-edge stretchers create the impression that these paintings, with Gilliam's sybaritic color combinations, are emerging from the wall as objects of weight, substance and sculptural presence.

To create his renowned Draped, or suspended, paintings, Gilliam discarded the stretcher completely, allowing his soaked and stained canvases to sag and hang from gallery ceilings and to interact with sculptural elements, such as handmade sawhorses or site-specific architectural details. Sometimes monumental in scale, these lyrical works swing through space, on occasion enabling viewers to walk under and through them, giving individuals the opportunity to be literally enveloped by painterly color.



Sam Gilliam, *Composed (formerly Dark As I Am)*, 1968–74, Collection of the artist's daughters. Photograph by Mark Gulezian/QuickSilver

In the past, critics have tended either to explain Gilliam's achievements as a Washington Color School artist or to situate his work within the confines of an African American art tradition. To concentrate too much on either account is to miss the brilliance and scope of his remarkable career, and his significant contributions to abstraction.

“While he is African American, he is not necessarily a maker of black art,” adds Binstock, who wrote his doctoral dissertation on Gilliam and has worked with the artist for many years. “In the late 1960s, Gilliam himself argued adamantly against applying the term ‘black art’ to his work. Indeed, because of its abstract qualities, his work was often criticized at the time for not adhering to the so-called socially responsible aesthetic then popularized by the Black Power movement. Nonetheless, certain works do engage an African American significance, such as *Composed (formerly Dark As I Am)* (1968–74). An extraordinary painting and one of the most important self-portraits of the era, *Composed (formerly Dark As I Am)* was created as an expressive response to certain kinds of political wrangling that Gilliam believes are out of place in discussions of art.”

A Washington, D.C. resident, Gilliam has been included in numerous museum and gallery shows and his career was effectively launched in a group show at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in 1969. His first solo museum showcases were in 1968 at The Phillips Collection and in 1971 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. He was one of six artists to represent the United States at the Venice Biennale in 1972. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum of Modern Art, National Gallery of Art, Art Institute of Chicago, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Walker Art Center, Whitney Museum of American Art and the Corcoran Gallery of Art, among other notable institutions, collect his work. Gilliam's art is also represented in public collections

abroad, including the Louisiana Museum, Denmark; Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris; and the Tate Gallery, London.



Sam Gilliam, *Red Slat*, 2002, Courtesy Marsha Mateyka Gallery, Washington, DC. Photograph by Mark Gulezian/QuickSilver

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

The exhibition is accompanied by the first fully illustrated in-depth scholarly publication, published by the University of California Press, devoted to Sam Gilliam. The approximately 220-page catalogue documents the works in the exhibition, as well as other Gilliam projects, including examples of his public commissions, site-specific temporary installations and a stage set design. Complete with more than 75 full-color images and 30 black-and-white illustrations, the catalogue features an essay by Jonathan P. Binstock, the exhibition's organizer and Corcoran Curator of Contemporary Art. Dr. Binstock explores the artist's career and discusses his influences, antecedents and contributions to the history of art in the context of late-twentieth century political and social developments. Renowned curator and early Gilliam champion Walter Hopps, who died in March 2005 and who held curatorial positions at the Menil Collection, Houston, and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,

among other institutions, wrote one of the catalogue's two Forewords. The other is by Jacquelyn D. Serwer, the Corcoran's Chief Curator. The catalogue also includes an illustrated chronology, bibliography and other relevant support material. For additional information on the catalogue, please call the Corcoran Shop at (202) 639-1790.

The following donors have generously supported the publication of this catalogue: Judy and John Aldock; The Andrew W. Mellon Research and Publications Fund; Don and Nancy Eiler; Katherine Dulin Folger Publication Fund; Aldus and Dolly Chapin; Raymond Garcia and Fruzsina M. Harsanyi; The Distribution Fund; Jean Efron; Marsha Mateyka Gallery; and Dr. Robert and Mrs. Jean Steele.

EXHIBITION ACTIVITIES

Gilliam Member Preview Day

Friday, October 14, 2005
10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

FRIENDS of the Corcoran: Member Preview and Reception

Friday, October 14, 2005
6:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.
FRIENDS Members: Complimentary

Talking about Sam Gilliam's Art: A Dialog with Lowery Sims

Thursday, November 3, 2005
7:00 p.m.
Corcoran members \$20; public \$25

Open Studio for High School Students Featuring Sam Gilliam

Saturday, November 12, 2005

1:30 p.m.

Free

Business Professional Women Luncheon and Tour

Tuesday, November 15, 2005

11:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.

BPW members: Complimentary

Non-members: \$20 advance; \$30 after November 8, if available

Sam Gilliam at Marsha Mateyka Gallery

Wednesday, November 16, 2005

4:30 p.m.

Corcoran members \$25; Public \$30

Corcoran College of Art + Design Fall Visiting Artist Program – Featuring Sam Gilliam

Discussion lead by Jonathan P. Binstock

Monday, December 5, 2005

3:00 p.m.

Free

Perspective Talk: Art in Motion

January 15, 2006

3:00 p.m.

Septime Webre, Artistic Director of the Washington Ballet, shares his choreographic response to Gilliam's art.

Free with museum admission; meet in the galleries

EXHIBITION ORGANIZATION

Sam Gilliam: a retrospective is organized by the Corcoran Gallery of Art and made possible through the generous support of The Women's Committee of the Corcoran Gallery of Art, The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, Ellen and Gerry Sigal and the FRIENDS of the Corcoran.

EXHIBITION ITINERARY

Following the presentation at the Corcoran, *Sam Gilliam: a retrospective* will tour nationally from 2006 through 2007. The exhibition will be on view from June 6, 2006 through September 3, 2006 at the Speed Art Museum in Louisville, KY; October 11, 2006 through December 31, 2006 at the Telfair Museum of Art in Savannah, GA; and January 27, 2007 through May 6, 2007 at the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston in Houston, TX.

PRESS PREVIEW

A press preview of the exhibition is scheduled for Tuesday, October 11, 2005, from 10 am to noon. For more information or to RSVP, please call Liz Bradley at (202) 639-1867 or email PR@corcoran.org.

PRESS IMAGES

High-resolution digital images are available to press via the Corcoran's FTP site www.corcoran.org/press. To register for image use, please visit the press section of the Web site and hit "Press Image Login." After provided contact information, an automated e-mail will be sent back with user name, password information and download instructions. For questions or problems, please contact the Corcoran Communications Office at PR@corcoran.org or (202) 639-1867.

ABOUT THE CORCORAN GALLERY OF ART

The Corcoran Gallery of Art was founded in 1869 as Washington's first museum of art. It is a privately funded institution incorporating both a museum and college of art and design. As one of America's oldest art institutions, the Corcoran is known internationally for its distinguished collection of historical and modern American art, as well as European painting, sculpture, photography and decorative arts.

Founded in 1890, the Corcoran College of Art + Design is Washington's only 4-year college of art and design. The college currently offers four-year Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) degree programs; two-year Associate of Fine Arts (AFA) degree programs; Master of Arts (MA) degree programs in Interior Design, the History of Decorative Arts and Teaching; and a Continuing Education program encompassing more than 250 courses and 14 certificate programs for part-time adult students; as well as year-round classes designed especially for children and teens.

The Corcoran Gallery of Art is located at New York Avenue and 17th Street, NW, Washington, D.C. and is open Wednesdays – Sundays from 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. and until 9 p.m. on Thursdays. The museum is closed on Mondays and Tuesdays, but open on holiday Mondays. Admission to the Corcoran is: \$8.00 for adults; \$6.00 for senior citizens and U.S. military personnel; \$4 for students with current ID and \$3 for Member guests. Admission is always free for Members and children under 12. Admission is "pay as you wish" on Thursdays after 5 p.m. For information about the museum, call (202) 639-1700 or visit www.corcoran.org. For information about the college, call (202) 639-1800 or visit www.corcoran.edu.

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