

Sam Gilliam *Watercolors*

January 21 – March 19, 2021
Quai des Bergues 15-17
Geneva



Image: Sam Gilliam, *Untitled*, 2019 © Sam Gilliam / 2020 Artists Rights Society

Geneva — Pace Gallery is pleased to present an exhibition of new watercolors by Sam Gilliam, on view from 21 January to 19 March 2021, at Quai des Bergues. This is the artist's first exhibition in Geneva. Since the early 1960s, Gilliam has been creating richly colored abstract compositions using watercolors on Japanese washi, a traditional type of paper made from inner fibres of plants. The watercolors featured in the exhibition extend the artist's ongoing exploration of color and form into a palpable entity: a physical, textural presence that reaches beyond painting's two-dimensional surface. This exhibition marks Gilliam's third solo exhibition with the gallery, following a presentation at Pace in New York and Palm Beach.

Watercolors follows *The Music of Color*, an exhibition of Gilliam's work presented at Kunstmuseum Basel, Switzerland, in 2018 and curated by Jonathan Binstock and Josef Helfenstein. His work was also included in *Pattern, Decoration & Crime* presented at Musée d'art moderne et contemporain (MAMCO), Geneva in 2018-19.

The techniques that Gilliam has explored in watercolor—staining, folding, and otherwise distressing the surface of the paper—have exerted a powerful effect on his artistic practice as a whole. While in graduate school, a professor encouraged Gilliam to experiment with watercolors on paper as a way of mitigating a sense of control in his painting. Several years later, for an exhibition at the Adams-Morgan Gallery in Washington, D.C. in 1963, Gilliam chose a single watercolor to be included in the show, marking the moment that he began to seriously consider the importance of the medium in his artistic practice.

His early approach to watercolor expanded upon the staining technique that was adopted on canvas by several other artists from the Washington Color School in the late 1950s and early '60s, including Helen Frankenthaler, Morris Louis, and Kenneth Noland. As Gilliam's practice matured, his watercolors continued to play a powerful role

in shaping his own approach to the canvas, opening up a new sense of freedom and an embrace of abstraction. Since that time, Gilliam has pushed the chromatic and textural possibilities of watercolors with unprecedented verve. His works saturate the paper support with luminous pigment and transform the composition into an object, rather than an image.

In a recent interview with curator Hans Ulrich Obrist, the artist shared of his process with watercolors: “You go with the flow, and you don’t have to play just for the accidental aspect. You can learn to do deliberate things; you establish your references on the page... the real thing is not to have control of what happens, just to set it into motion. It’s not to be exact so they can arrive at something.”

In Gilliam’s most recent watercolors, color and support are inseparable: the paper becomes the color rather than simply serving as a conveyer or carrier for it. Like his draped canvases, a sense of depth in the creases and folds of the fabric is echoed in the composition of each watercolor painting. Vertical washes of color on each flattened surface create the illusion of folds or pleats within rich and rhythmic planes of light and dark that bleed and overlap.

Like much of Gilliam’s work, both chance and choice play an important role, as the application of watercolor is inherently more unruly than that of other types of paint, bleeding into the fibers of the paper and remaining resistant to the careful control that is possible with oil or acrylic on canvas. This chance echoes the artist’s love of jazz, with its improvisatory ethos and spontaneity.

Gilliam’s solo exhibition at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C. will take place in spring 2022 and will mark the artist’s first museum retrospective in the United States in 15 years.

Sam Gilliam (b. 1933, Tupelo, Mississippi) is one of the great innovators in postwar American painting. He emerged from the Washington, D.C. scene in the mid 1960s with works that elaborated upon and disrupted the ethos of Color School painting.

A series of formal breakthroughs would soon result in his canonical Drape paintings, which expanded upon the tenets of Abstract Expressionism in entirely new ways. Suspending stretcherless lengths of painted canvas from the walls or ceilings of exhibition spaces, Gilliam transformed his medium and the contexts in which it was viewed. As an African-American artist in the nation’s capital at the height of the Civil Rights Movement, this was not merely an aesthetic proposition; it was a way of defining art’s role in a society undergoing dramatic change. Gilliam has subsequently pursued a pioneering course in which experimentation has been the only constant. Inspired by the improvisatory ethos of jazz, his lyrical abstractions continue to take on an increasing variety of forms, moods, and materials.

In addition to a traveling retrospective organized by the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. in 2005, Sam Gilliam has been the subject of solo exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (1971); The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York (1982); Whitney Museum of American Art, Philip Morris Branch, New York (1993); J.B. Speed Memorial Museum, Louisville, Kentucky (1996); Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C. (2011); and Kunstmuseum Basel, Switzerland (2018), among many other institutions. A semi-permanent installation of

Gilliam's paintings opened at Dia:Beacon in August 2019. His work is included in over fifty public collections, including those of the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris; Tate Modern, London; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; and the Art Institute of Chicago. He lives and works in Washington, D.C.

Pace is a leading contemporary art gallery representing many of the most significant international artists and estates of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Under the leadership of President and CEO Marc Glimcher, Pace is a vital force within the art world and plays a critical role in shaping the history, creation, and engagement with modern and contemporary art. Since its founding by Arne Glimcher in 1960, Pace has developed a distinguished legacy for vibrant and dedicated relationships with renowned artists. As the gallery enters its seventh decade, Pace's mission continues to be inspired by a drive to support the world's most influential and innovative artists and to share their visionary work with people around the world.

Pace advances this mission through its dynamic global program, comprising ambitious exhibitions, artist projects, public installations, institutional collaborations, performances and interdisciplinary projects through Pace Live, and curatorial research and writing. Today, Pace has nine locations worldwide: two galleries in New York—including its newly opened headquarters at 540 West 25th Street, and an adjacent 8,000 sq. ft. exhibition space at 510 West 25th Street—as well as galleries in Palo Alto, London, Geneva, Hong Kong, and Seoul. In July 2020 Pace opened a temporary gallery space in East Hampton, New York that will be programmed through October 2021. Additionally, the gallery's seasonal exhibition space in Palm Beach will be open through spring 2021.

Press Inquiries

EUROPE

Adeline Drechou

Gallery Manager

adeline@pacegallery.com

+41 22 900 16 50

Léonore Cachat

lcachat@pacegallery.com

Follow Pace Gallery

 [@pacegallery](https://www.instagram.com/pacegallery)

 [@pacegallery](https://twitter.com/pacegallery)

 [@pacegallery](https://www.facebook.com/pacegallery)

UNITED STATES

Amelia Redgrift

Senior Director, Global Communications & Content

aredgrift@pacegallery.com

+1 646 236 5241

Adriana Elgarresta

Director of Public Relations

aelgarresta@pacegallery.com

+1 305 498 1649