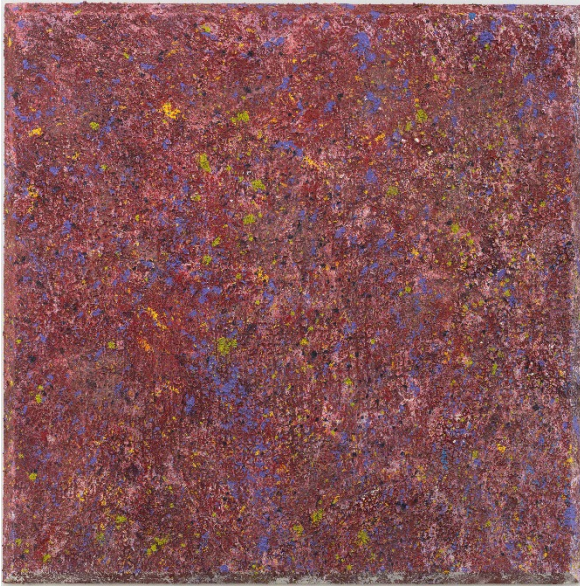


Sam Gilliam: Late Paintings

11 October – 12 November, 2022
Hanover Square
London

Opening Reception: Monday 10 October, 8-10pm



Sam Gilliam, *Oak, Net and This!*, 2021
acrylic on canvas, bevelled edge, 243.8 cm × 243.8 cm × 10.2 cm © Sam Gilliam

London—Pace Gallery is honoured to announce *Sam Gilliam: Late Paintings*, a landmark exhibition of late works by one of the most celebrated figures in post-war American art. Debuting a suite of large-scale paintings and works on paper executed in the last two years of his life, *Late Paintings* is a testament to Gilliam's remarkable and unflagging commitment to abstraction. Conceived together with the artist prior to his death in June of 2022, the exhibition will occupy the entirety of Pace's Hanover Square gallery. It will mark Gilliam's first ever solo presentation in the United Kingdom.

Throughout his nearly seven-decade career, Sam Gilliam invented and continuously reinvented a singular and deeply influential approach to abstraction, working both with paint and with the canvas itself in radically new and revolutionary ways. A leading member of the Washington Color School in the 1960s, Gilliam's paintings, sculptures, and installations continued to draw on myriad influences including music, poetry, and politics throughout his career. For Gilliam, art and life were inextricably entwined—the world of his paintings flowed directly from the dramatis personae of his own social and familial existence. The titles of his artworks make reference to a wide range of aspects from everyday life: significant sites of memory; cultural icons from music, poetry, and popular culture, from Ornette Coleman to Beyoncé; and most of all close friends, family members and loved ones, in particular the artist's wife, Annie.

The monumental late paintings embody the apotheosis of Gilliam's work with the bevelled-edge canvas, which he pioneered in the late 1960s. His late abstractions are material landscapes, built up from fields of densely layered and richly saturated pigment, applied through a vast range of expressive gestures and experimental techniques of mark-making. The extraordinary surfaces of Gilliam's paintings buzz with materiality, achieved through the alchemic mixing of acrylic paint with a wide variety of non-traditional agents and materials, from sawdust to powdered metals. Gilliam manipulated the wet surfaces using a range of everyday tools and innovative techniques, from fishing net to garden rakes, scraping away and scoring the layers of pigment to produce a dazzling range of chromatic and formal interactions. The resulting compositions vibrate, suggesting the raw energies of nature itself.

Gilliam developed the bevelled-edge paintings in tandem with his *Drape* series, in which he freed the canvas from its support, treating painting as a sculptural object by draping the work in cascading folds suspended in space, eschewing conventions of painting's edges, front, or back. Gilliam's concurrent experimentation with shaped supports pursued a parallel path that was similarly concerned with painting's objecthood and its material presence: the bevelled-edge paintings, in which he stretched canvas over a bespoke strainer, imbue these wall-bound abstractions with a sculptural immediacy that makes physical the ecstatic and visceral possibilities of colour. Finding kinship in the improvisatory spirit of jazz, which also embraces chromatic invention, Gilliam's painting was intuitive, bodily, and responsive. "The studio is as much of a performance space as it is a painting space," Gilliam once explained.

For Gilliam, abstraction was never merely formalism; colour, gesture, and materiality offered a means for exploring fundamental questions about what it meant to be human. Throughout his career, Gilliam often hinted that although his paintings were entirely abstract, they remained rooted in the specificity of his own particular experiences as a Black artist born and raised in the American South in the 1930s and 1940s. During the late 1960s, Gilliam's radical departure from hard-edged Color Field abstractions toward a new, freer mode of experimentation coincided with radical upheavals in American society and politics, in particular the seminal events of the Civil Rights movement, to which the titles of several works of the period make reference.

In addition to large-scale acrylic on canvas paintings, the exhibition also includes a suite of Gilliam's masterful watercolours on washi paper that relate to his ongoing *Slice* series, which he also began in the late 1960s. Throughout his career Gilliam developed a practice of creating works in watercolour on paper, which explore the medium's distinct material properties. Over the last several decades of his life, Gilliam worked with a specialist paper supplier in Japan to achieve a precise quality of washi that was delicate enough to hold pigment in its purest state and durable enough for him to fold and paint in a manner reminiscent of his *Slice* paintings on canvas, as if it were "origami, or even ritual games I would play as a kid, like a cat's cradle, a game with strings," Gilliam explained, before soaking the support in rich, jewel-toned pigments. Once unfurled, the large-scale works reveal dynamic, vibrant compositions that represent a masterfully orchestrated collaboration between the careful calibration of colour and the spontaneous irruption of form.

Sam Gilliam (b. 1933, Tupelo, Mississippi, d. 2022, Washington D.C.) 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 stretcher-less 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.

A major exhibition, *Sam Gilliam: Full Circle*, was recently presented at the Hirshorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C. 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 several significant 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. Sam Gilliam passed away in June 2022 aged 88.

Pace is a leading international art gallery representing some of the most influential contemporary artists and estates from the past century, holding decades-long relationships with Alexander Calder, Jean Dubuffet, Barbara Hepworth, Agnes Martin, Louise Nevelson, and Mark Rothko. Pace enjoys a unique U.S. heritage spanning East and West coasts through its early support of artists central to the Abstract Expressionist and Light and Space movements.

Since its founding by Arne Glimcher in 1960, Pace has developed a distinguished legacy as an artist-first gallery that mounts seminal historical and contemporary exhibitions. Under the current leadership of President and CEO Marc Glimcher, Pace continues to support its artists and share their visionary work with audiences worldwide by remaining at the forefront of innovation. Now in its seventh decade, the gallery advances its mission through a robust global program—comprising exhibitions, artist projects, public installations, institutional collaborations, performances, and interdisciplinary projects. Pace has a legacy in art bookmaking and has published over five hundred titles in close collaboration with artists, with a focus on original scholarship and on introducing new voices to the art historical canon.

The gallery has also spearheaded explorations into the intersection of art and technology through its new business models, exhibition interpretation tools, and representation of artists cultivating advanced studio practices. Pace's presence in Silicon Valley since 2016 has bolstered its longstanding support of experimental practices and digital artmaking. As part of its commitment to innovative, technologically engaged artists within and beyond its program, Pace launched its own dedicated NFT platform, Pace Verso, in November 2021. The gallery's past NFT projects have spotlighted digital works by Glenn Kaino, DRIFT, Lucas Samaras, Simon Denny, Urs Fischer, John Gerrard, and other artists.

Today, Pace has nine locations worldwide including London, Geneva, a strong foothold in Palo Alto, and two galleries in New York—its headquarters at 540 West 25th Street, which welcomed almost 120,000 visitors and programmed 20 shows in its first six months, and an adjacent 8,000 sq. ft. exhibition space at 510 West 25th Street. Pace was one of the first international galleries to establish outposts in Asia, where it operates permanent gallery spaces in Hong Kong and Seoul, as well as an office and viewing room in Beijing. In 2020, Pace opened temporary exhibition spaces in East Hampton and Palm Beach, with continued programming on a seasonal basis.

Press Inquiries

Europe

Rebecca Riegelhaupt
Communications Director
rriegelhaupt@pacegallery.com
+44 7917 909779

Kirsteen Cairns

PR & Events Associate
kcairns@pacegallery.com
+44 7467 830230

Sam Talbot

sam@sam-talbot.com
+44 7725 184630

Sales Inquiries

Pace Gallery
londoninfo@pacegallery.com

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