

SAM GILLIAM: SELECTIONS



Thanks go to the nine collectors who have graciously agreed to lend their works to this exhibition at The Ringling. A special acknowledgement is due to Warren Colbert who opened doors to many of the lenders and who is an enthusiastic supporter and collector of Sam Gilliam's work. Support for this exhibition was provided, in part, by the Community Foundation of Sarasota County and the Bob and Diane Roskamp Endowment.



LIST OF LENDERS

Ellen Berman
Warren and Marie Colbert
Dianne Earley
Giselle and Benjamin Huberman
Frank and Katherine Martucci
William and Beverly Parker
Otis M. and Harryette A. Robertson
Sheffield/Steward Art Collection
Bene and Joyce White

This brochure accompanies the exhibition
Sam Gilliam: Selections, February 21 - August 15, 2021.
Curated by Marian Carpenter and Steven High.

Photography by Lunardi Photography.

COVER IMAGE | Sam Gilliam, *Green Wave*, 1999. Acrylic on birch plywood with metal frame and piano hinges, 86 1/2 x 83 x 2 in. Collection of Giselle and Benjamin Huberman.

The Ringling THE JOHN & MABLE RINGLING MUSEUM OF ART
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SAM GILLIAM SELECTIONS

ON VIEW FEB 21 - AUG 15, 2021

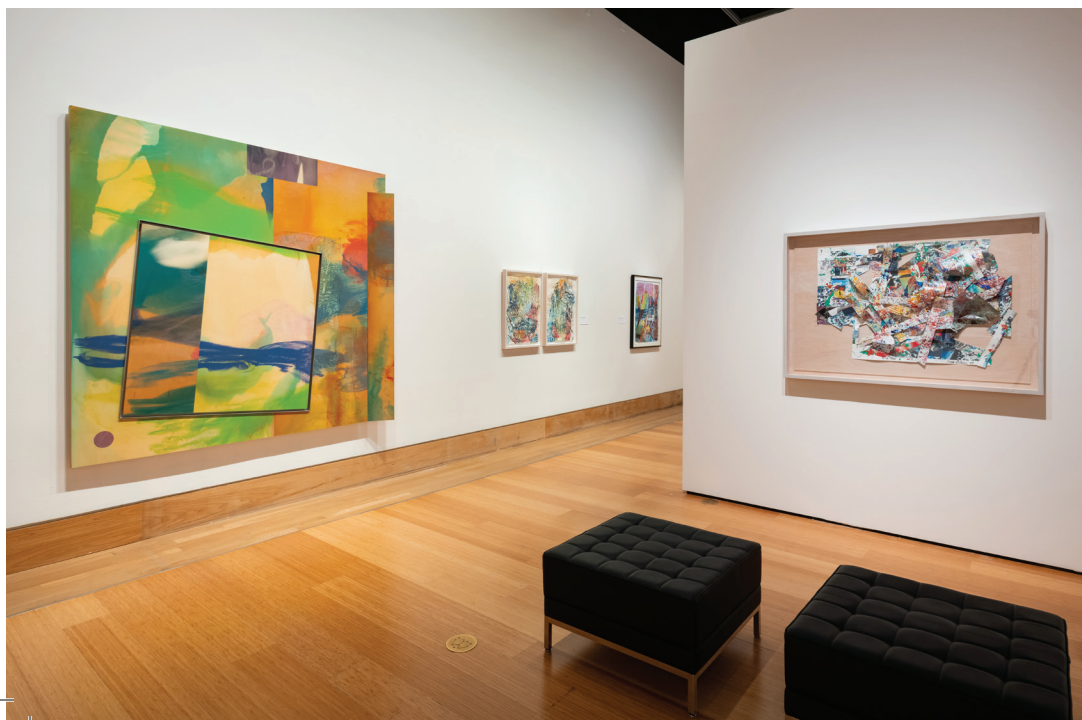
The Ringling is proud to present the work of Sam Gilliam, one of the most important abstract artists working today, in this exhibition drawn primarily from local collectors. Born in 1933 in Tupelo, Mississippi, Gilliam received an MFA from the University of Louisville in 1961. During his time in Louisville, he actively took part in civil rights actions, from sit-ins to picketing. University art faculty introduced the young Gilliam to the abstract figuration of the San Francisco Bay Area and he was particularly influenced by the artists Nathan Oliveira and David Park. In 1962 Gilliam moved to Washington, DC, to marry the journalist Dorothy Butler. He participated in the March on Washington in 1963 but then stepped back to focus on his painting and teaching. To Gilliam art was as important as politics in creating new ways of thinking.

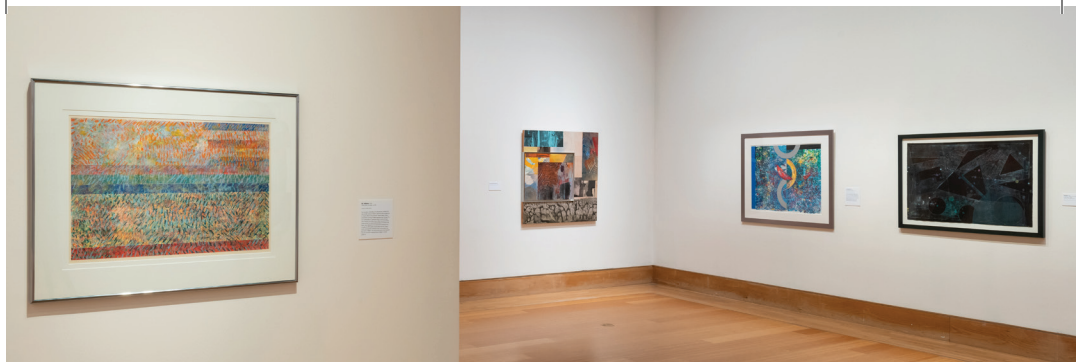
Known for his experimentation with materials and constant invention, Gilliam first received critical attention in the 1960s as a later member of the Washington Color School. The painter Tom Downing brought Gilliam into the Color School circle of artists where he achieved some success and had his first solo gallery show in 1965. Two years later Gilliam met the famed curator/director Walter Hopps, who was then directing the Washington Gallery of Modern Art (WGMA) and, through support from the city, was establishing a series of artist residencies and studios in downtown Washington. Gilliam soon received a fellowship from the WGMA and established a studio with the artist Rockne Krebs. It was in this

rich environment that Gilliam flourished and created some of his most innovative early work. It was also where he met and collaborated with the renowned artist/printmaker Lou Stovall.

Throughout his career Gilliam has been influenced by the artistry of the jazz musicians John Coltrane, Miles Davis, and others. This influence is reflected in Gilliam's openness to improvisation as a fundamental component of his work. Gilliam's spontaneity when working with materials led to the creation, in the late 1960s, of the first of his important "Drape" or suspended-painting works that he would continue to explore throughout his career. By removing the canvas from the traditional stretcher, Gilliam created innovative work that was both painting and sculpture (*What Fish Sea I* and *What Fish Sea II* are both from 1994 but show the continuing influence of his earlier work). The suspended-painting works were first exhibited in 1968 at Jefferson Place Gallery. In 1969 they featured at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in an exhibition curated by Walter Hopps titled *Gilliam, Krebs, McGowin*. That same year Gilliam was included in the exhibition *The Washington Painters* organized by The Ringling. He was represented by three works from the late 1960s including *Breeze*, an early breakthrough work from his "Slice" painting series.

In the 1970s Gilliam quickly expanded beyond the Color School tradition with his fierce experimentation with the use of color and materials. As an African American artist working during the height of the Civil Rights Movement, Gilliam was influenced by the social and political activism of the period. This was





reflected in *Red April*, 1970 (not in the exhibition), which was part of a series that he created in reaction to the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Gilliam's later pieces, such as the silkscreen *Destiny* from 2008, responded to the political changes accompanying the election of the first African American president, Barack Obama. Although Gilliam did not neatly align with the ideology of the Black Arts Movement to produce art that represented Black social issues, he used his abstraction as an activist tool to educate museums and museum-goers on diversity. In the 1990s Gilliam continued his experimentation with materials and fabrication with paintings on birch plywood (*Green Wave* from 1999, which also includes an internal metal frame and a piano-hinged panel), collages comprising cut-up painted canvas, and polypropylene works either presented pinned to a backing or adhered to intricately cut birch panels (*Wheels* from 1995-96).

In addition to painting and making objects, Gilliam experimented throughout his career with the process of printmaking. Collaborating with renowned printmakers such as Lou Stovall in Washington, DC, or art presses such as Tandem Press in Madison, Wisconsin, Gilliam produced prints that were integral and influential to his entire creative process. Represented in this exhibition are prints in a wide variety of mediums, including silkscreen (*New Bridge*, 2008, and *Destiny*, 2004), woodblock, stencil and hand coloring (*Chehaw*, 1990), collage (*Wind*, 2005), and complex monotypes that involve stitching on handmade paper (*Ichu* and *Cuatro* both from 1994). Always one to push the limits of his abilities, Gilliam's 1,500-yard print *Fireflies and Ferris Wheels* from 1997 (not in the exhibition) is recognized as one of the longest prints ever made.

This exhibition brings together nearly 20 unique works and limited edition prints by Gilliam, from the early 1970s to 2010. The works demonstrate the technical and visual experimentation of the artist and show how he often circles back to incorporate earlier styles. At 87 years of age, Gilliam is actively working and continues to inspire other contemporary artists with his techniques, teaching, and mentoring. We are pleased to welcome the work of Sam Gilliam back to The Ringling and to present this exhibition, featuring work drawn primarily from local collectors in the Sarasota area, as a precursor to Gilliam's career retrospective in 2022 at the Smithsonian Institution's Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, DC.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION



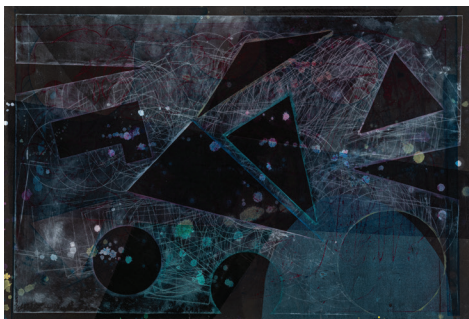
St. Albans, 1976
Silkscreen on paper, 11/60
34 x 40" framed
Collection of Ellen Berman



After Smoke, 1985
Silkscreen on paper, wp
Lou Stovall Workshop,
Washington, D.C.
38 x 46"
Collection of Otis M. and
Harryette A. Robertson



In Celebration, 1987
Silkscreen on paper, 65/150
Lou Stovall Workshop,
Washington, D.C.
40 1/2 x 48"
Collection of Otis M. and
Harryette A. Robertson



Chehaw, 1990
 Woodblock, intaglio, stencil
 and hand coloring
 on black paper, 12/40
 Tandem Press, Madison, WI
 30 x 44"
 Collection of Frank and
 Katherine Martucci



Slanting, 1993
 Acrylic and collage on panel
 36 1/2 x 43 3/4"
 Collection of William and
 Beverly Parker



Cuatro, 1994
 Monoprint with screenprint, collage,
 acrylic, stitching and embossing on
 handmade paper, 29/40
 39 x 32" framed
 Collection of Sheffield/Stewart
 Art Collection

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION



Ichi, 1994

Monotype with relief painting,
screenprint, collage, acrylic,
stitching and embossing
on hand-made paper, ed. of 40

25 1/2 x 33"

Collection of Warren and
Marie Colbert



What Fish Sea I, 1994

Oil on canvas

58 x 30" approximately

Collection of Ellen Berman.

Gift of Harriet Silverman.



What Fish Sea II, 1994

Oil on canvas

58 x 30" approximately

Collection of Ellen Berman.

Gift of Harriet Silverman.



Crystal and Counter Light, 1994

Acrylic on birch plywood with
metal frame

47 x 47 x 2"

Collection of Giselle and
Benjamin Huberman



Wheels, 1995-96

Acrylic on canvas and
polypropylene on birch
plywood

36 x 52"

Collection of Ellen Berman



What's with fall, 1999

Acrylic on formed birch
plywood

48 x 48 x 9"

Collection of Giselle and
Benjamin Huberman

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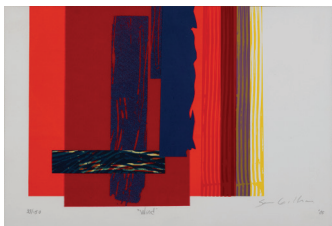
Untitled, 1999
Acrylic on paper and collage
40 3/4 x 56 1/2"
Collection of Otis M. and
Harryette A. Robertson



Green Wave, 1999
Acrylic on birch plywood
with metal frame and
piano hinges
83 x 86 3/4 x 2"
Collection of Giselle and
Benjamin Huberman



New Bridge, 2004
Silkscreen on paper, 11/50
35 1/2 x 27 1/2"
Collection of Dianne Earley



Wind, 2005
 Collage and acrylic, 33/150
 15 x 22"
 Collection of Bene and
 Joyce White



Destiny, 2008
 Silkscreen, 5/60
 Lou Stovall Workshop,
 Washington, D.C.
 38 1/2 x 27 1/2" frame
 Collection of Otis M. and
 Harryette A. Robertson



Untitled Set (Parts 1 & 2),
 2010
 Acrylic on paper with
 mixed media
 25 x 33 3/4"
 Collection of Otis M. and
 Harryette A. Robertson

