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David Kordansky Gallery is very pleased to announce Green April, an exhibition of major large-scale paintings by Sam Gilliam from the late 1960s and early 1970s. The show will open on June 4 and remain on view through July 16, 2016. An opening reception will be held on Saturday, June 4 from 6:00pm until 8:00pm.

Sam Gilliam is one of the key figures in postwar and contemporary American art. Emerging from the Washington, D.C. scene in the mid 1960s with works that both elaborated upon and disrupted the ethos of Color School painting, he has subsequently pursued a wide-ranging, pioneering course in which improvisation and experimentation have been the only constants. Green April focuses on works executed during a crucial period in the artist's development, one in which he began to make the iconic Beveled-edge and Drape paintings for which he is best known. These works feature a number of striking formal advances, but their radicality also hinges upon the fact that they were made in dialogue with the profound social shifts that were taking place at the time. Most of the works on view have remained in Gilliam's studio since their creation and have never before been exhibited.

The Beveled-edge paintings (or Slice paintings, as they were also called) that Gilliam started to produce in 1967 were quickly recognized by critics as a breakthrough body of work. By pouring acrylic paints onto a length of canvas and then folding it over on itself while still wet, or vice versa, he created prismatic spatial effects and unexpected color combinations, pushing the brushless staining and soaking techniques also employed by artists like Thomas Downing, Morris Louis, and Kenneth Noland to a newly lyrical extreme. He then stretched the canvas on a beveled frame, so that the painting appeared to emerge from the wall on which it was hung. This sculptural extension established a physically immediate and active connection with the viewer, who now approached not a flat picture plane but a dimensional and bodily one.

Green April's title is borrowed from a monumental Beveled-edge painting from 1969. Over twenty feet wide and eight feet tall, it represents

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Gilliam at his most ambitious and exploratory. Its panoramic landscape format and ethereal palette channels the immersive optical richness of Monet's Water Lilies. While dominant art historical narratives hail those hallmarks of Impressionism as gateways to a modernist realm of pure abstraction, one in which painting exists as a stand-alone, idealized mode of discourse, Gilliam's work engages the body as well as the eye. Green April is a decidedly volumetric object; the processes, both intensely physical and material, responsible for its creation inform the way the painting is experienced as a thing in space.

With works like these Gilliam began eroding the distinction between the visual world traditionally conjured within a painting and the tangible world outside it. For an African-American artist working in the nation's capital in the late 60s, at the height of the Civil Rights Movement, this was not merely an aesthetic proposition. It was a way of defining art's role as a primary mode for expression in a democratic society undergoing dramatic change, and of affirming the power and relevance of non-objective painting in the widest array of cultural as well as political contexts. Gilliam increasingly embodied the idea that free, and free-ranging, expression was itself a form of engaged citizenship.

This idea would take dramatic new form in the Drape paintings he began to produce in 1968, cementing his position as one of the most important formal innovators of his generation. By suspending a stretcherless, often vast length of painted canvas from the walls or ceiling of an exhibition space, Gilliam transformed both his medium and the contexts in which it was viewed. Architectural in scale, these installation-based objects both literalized the sublimity of abstract expressionism and returned painting to its archaic roots as an intervention in, or on, a particular space, be it a cave or a church or an exterior wall. In many ways this was a natural outgrowth of the experimental and embodied processes he was using to apply his pigments. It also reflected his treatment of the canvas not only as a surface or support, but as a material with its own expansive potential for plastic manipulation.

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However, unlike other contemporary artists' attempts to break with the rectilinear constraints of the stretcher, the Drapes are also painterly works in the traditional sense of the word. As minimalism was beginning to exert its dominant influence as a formal language, Gilliam's unabashedly bold use of color and performative, even baroque sensibility evince his ongoing interest in the trajectory of Western painting as a discrete discipline with its own pleasures and mysteries. The works on view in this exhibition attest to the fact that the Drapes, and the Beveled-edge paintings, must also be read as stand-alone compositions, each of which has its own internal logic and mood. Herein lies the bracing paradox at the heart of Gilliam's project. Dismantling one of painting's basic structural foundations not only energized the medium, but also showed that the visceral experience of beauty is, figuratively and literally, an "all-over" phenomenon. Such experiences might originate within an artwork, but they are not limited to a space delimited by the edges of a canvas; they exist in a social dimension, always shared among communities of viewers, and yet simultaneously unique to each viewer alone.

Sam Gilliam (b. 1933, Tupelo, Mississippi) was the subject of a traveling retrospective organized by the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. in 2005; over the last four decades his work has also been the subject of solo exhibitions at the J.B. Speed Memorial Museum, Louisville, Kentucky; the Whitney Museum of American Art, Philip Morris Branch, New York; The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; and the Museum of Modern Art, New York, among many other institutions. In 1972, Gilliam exhibited his work in the group exhibition, curated by Walter Hopps, comprising the American Pavilion of the 36th Venice Biennale. Recent group exhibitions include Not New Now, Marrakech Biennale 6, Morocco (2016); Black: Color, Material, Concept, The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York (2015); Surface Matters, Edward H. Linde Gallery, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (2015); Surface Tension, The FLAG Art Foundation, New York (2015); Affecting Presence and the Pursuit of Delicious Experiences, The Menil Collection, Houston (2015); Represent: 200 Years of African American Art, Philadelphia Museum of Art (2015); Witness: Art and Civil Rights in the

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Sixties, Brooklyn Museum, New York (2014); and A Bigger Splash: Painting after Performance, Tate Modern, London (2012). Gilliam's work is in the collections of many prominent institutions worldwide, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Tate Modern, London; the Art Institute of Chicago; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. He lives and works in Washington, D.C.

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