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For Immediate Release

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Installation of Pioneering Early Work by Sam Gilliam on Long-Term View at Dia:Beacon Opening August 10, 2019



Sam Gilliam, *Spread*, 1973 acrylic on canvas 69 x 113 1/2 x 1 3/4 inches (175.3 x 288.3 x 4.4 cm) (Inv# SG 13.036) Photography: Fredrik Nilsen Studio Courtesy of David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles

Beacon, NY – June 11, 2019 – This summer, Dia Art Foundation presents an exhibition of Sam Gilliam’s early work from the 1960s and 1970s at Dia:Beacon in Beacon, New York. The display brings together a large-scale canvas installation, featuring two Drape paintings suspended in concert with one another from the ceiling, and a painting from his Beveled-Edge series. Installed alongside Dia’s permanent collection, this presentation situates Gilliam’s practice in dialogue with that of his Minimal and Postminimal peers, such as Robert Ryman and Anne Truitt. Each of these artists considered painting in an expanded form and created near-sculptural objects. Opening on August 10, 2019, the exhibition is on long-term view at Dia:Beacon to encourage far-reaching engagement with Gilliam’s practice and to allow visitors to see the site-responsive work in different seasons and under multiple light conditions.

“Sam Gilliam’s Beveled-Edge paintings and Drape works from the 1960s and 1970s represent a radical approach to the medium of painting. Architectural in scale, these works chart a crucial moment in Gilliam’s early practice as he explored the possibilities of manipulating canvas in three-dimensional space,” said Jessica Morgan, Dia’s Nathalie de Gunzburg Director. “Gilliam’s practice relates to many of the artists in Dia’s permanent collection on view at Dia:Beacon, while also strikingly rejecting the strict formal language practiced by his Minimalist contemporaries. I am delighted that visitors to Dia will be

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able to draw connections between these artists and assemble a more comprehensive understanding of this period.”

One of the most important figures in American abstract art, Gilliam emerged from the Washington, DC, cultural scene in the 1960s alongside Truitt. Setting himself apart stylistically from Washington Color School painters such as Morris Louis and Kenneth Noland, Gilliam experimented with vibrantly hued and suspended canvases that follow a more spontaneous and uninhibited approach to coloration and form. With the pioneering Drape paintings, he shifted his canvases from the frame and wall to three-dimensional space, imparting a sculptural element to the installations and allowing them to become site-responsive. Unique to each space, the soft folds of canvas may not be draped the same way twice.

The presentation at Dia:Beacon features two of Gilliam’s drapes, both titled *Carousel II* and made in 1968, which are united to fill a 3,500-square-foot gallery. This immersive, site-specific installation—titled *Double Merge* (1968; installation: 2019) recalls the artist’s room-sized, situational works of the late 1960s and early 1970s, in which unstretched painted canvases were arranged to encompass the volume of an existing space. Composed on-site, the installation responds to the industrial scale of Dia:Beacon’s high ceilings and large entryways, with drapes hanging from ceiling beams and hovering above the floor. Visitors will be able to move around the suspended material as they walk from one end of the gallery to another.

Spread (1973), a large-scale painting from the Beveled-Edge series, will also be on view. Long considered one of the most groundbreaking aspects of his practice, the artist began producing Beveled-Edge paintings in 1967. While working on this series, Gilliam added a water-tension breaker to his paint to create translucency once the paint was applied to the canvas. Pouring acrylic paint onto swathes of canvas, he would then fold the canvas while the paint was still wet, creating unpredictable spatial and color effects. Once dry, Gilliam wrapped the painted canvas around beveled-edge stretchers, which transformed the formerly two-dimensional painting into a relief that was either angled away from or toward the wall. *Spread* is exemplary of this period of art making that marks Gilliam’s departure from the Washington Color School, and his challenge to the traditional two-dimensional concept of the medium.

“Sam Gilliam redefined not only what might be called a painting, but also how a painting might be shown by allowing painted canvas to use space differently. By moving his paintings off of the wall and/or removing their stretchers, he showed that the work was not dependent upon a fixed entity. The painting could determine its own relationship to space. When he doubled the stretcher and added the 45-degree bevel angle to the canvas, he asserted that not only was a painting not contingent on the wall, it could be stable as an object,” said Courtney J. Martin, Dia’s Deputy Director and Chief Curator.

In November 2019, Gilliam will be honored at the annual Dia Fall Night in New York City. Further details on the event will be announced in the coming months.

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About Sam Gilliam

Sam Gilliam was born in Tupelo, Mississippi, in 1933. He grew up in Louisville, Kentucky, where he attended the University of Louisville and gained a BA degree in 1955 and an MFA in 1961. After moving in 1962 to Washington, DC, he became involved with the Washington Color School. In the 1960s he began exhibiting abstract paintings without a stretcher, suspended from the gallery wall or ceiling. Gilliam has been the subject of many exhibitions at venues including the Kunstmuseum Basel in Switzerland (2018), Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, DC (2005), J. B. Speed Memorial Museum in Louisville (1996), Studio Museum in Harlem (1982), and Museum of Modern Art in New York (1971). He has been the recipient of numerous grants and awards, including the United States State Department Medal of Arts (2015), National Endowment for the Arts Individual Grant (1989 and 1967), and John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship (1971). Gilliam lives and works in Washington, DC.

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Taking its name from the Greek word meaning “through,” Dia was established in 1974 with the mission to serve as a conduit for artists to realize ambitious new projects, unmediated by overt interpretation and uncurbed by the limitations of more traditional museums and galleries. Dia’s programming fosters contemplative and sustained consideration of a single artist’s body of work and its collection is distinguished by the deep and longstanding relationships the nonprofit has cultivated with artists whose work came to prominence particularly in the 1960s and 1970s.

In addition to Dia:Beacon and Dia:Chelsea, Dia maintains and operates a constellation of commissions, long-term installations, and site-specific projects, notably focused on Land art, nationally and internationally. These include:

- Walter De Maria’s *The New York Earth Room* (1977) and *The Broken Kilometer* (1979), Max Neuhaus’s *Times Square* (1977), and Joseph Beuys’s *7000 Eichen* (*7000 Oaks*, which was inaugurated at Documenta in 1982), all of which are located in New York City
- The Dan Flavin Art Institute (established in 1983) in Bridgehampton, New York
- De Maria’s *The Lightning Field* (1977) in western New Mexico
- Robert Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty* (1970) in Great Salt Lake, Utah
- Nancy Holt’s *Sun Tunnels* (1973–76) in Great Basin Desert, Utah
- De Maria’s *The Vertical Earth Kilometer* (1977) in Kassel, Germany

As part of a strategic and comprehensive plan to further advance its mission, program, and ongoing operations, Dia will be upgrading and expanding its principal programming spaces of Dia:Chelsea, Dia:SoHo, and Dia:Beacon.

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