

LUAG @ Home: Drape Paintings inspired by Artist Sam Gilliam



Sam Gilliam
American, 1933

***Untitled*, 1998**
Lithograph, Handmade Paper and Collage
Fine Art Purchase
LUG 98 1007

BIOGRAPHY

Sam Gilliam (b. 1933) is a contemporary African American Artist who grew up in Tupelo, Mississippi, and studied art in Louisville, Kentucky. In 1962 he moved to Washington, D.C., and created abstract paintings inspired by the Washington Color School artists. Color field artists broke the rules of abstract expressionism by pouring thinned paint directly onto unprimed canvas instead of applying thick, vigorous brushstrokes. Gilliam pushed this method even further by folding and draping the canvas before it dried, creating unusual "tie-dye" effects. He started working with very large canvases in the late 1960s, hanging vast pieces of painted cloth across walls and ceilings to emphasize the relationship between the work and its environment. His art focuses on the principles of design, which include form, design, color and scale. Although his work is abstract (having no recognizable subject matter), they are energetic, active, harmonic, and decorative because of their strong composition.

Today Gilliam still lives in Washington D.C. He is still making and exhibiting his artwork there. There is a retrospective exhibition of his artwork planned for the Hirshhorn Museum in DC for Spring 2022.

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

This work is untitled, what would you name it and why?

How do the bold colors in this artwork affect your reaction to the work? How does it make you feel?

VOCABULARY

Abstract art is more about the shapes and colors and the feelings it expresses, not about the accurate portrayal of a subject. Abstract art also encourages discussion about colors, shapes, and lines and how the artist arranges them. Abstract art is interpreted differently by everyone who sees it.

Canvas is a strong, unbleached cloth made from hemp, flax, cotton, or a similar yarn, used to make items such as sails and tents, and as a surface for oil painting.

Color Field Painting - The term color field painting is applied to the work of abstract painters working in the 1950s and 1960s characterised by large areas of a more or less flat single colour

Collage is a process of making art by sticking various different materials such as photographs and pieces of paper or fabric on to a backing.

Design is the method by which artists organize and place the elements of art (light, line, shape and color) within their work.

Form is three-dimensional and encloses space. Like a shape, a form has length and width, but it also has depth. Forms are either geometric or free-form/organic.

Geometric Patterns is a type of design using a repetition of regular lines and shapes.

Scale refers to the size of an object in relation to another object. In art the size relationship between an object and the human body is important to how we see and view the work.

Texture is how something feels when it is touched, is an important part of art. Texture can be actual, or tactile, which means it can really be felt; or it can be implied or visual texture, which just looks as if there are textures on a surface that's really soft, rough, or smooth to the touch.

2-Dimensional Shapes are simple flat figures which have height and width but no depth.

3-Dimensional Shapes are figures that have height, width and depth so that they appear to "pop-out" at you.

DRAPE PAINTINGS INSPIRED BY ARTIST SAM GILLIAM

SUPPLIES

- Watercolors or Water-Based Markers
- Paint Brush
- Water in a small container
- Cereal box, cardboard, or thick paper
- Scissors
- Paper Towels
- Glue



Sam Gilliam, *Double Merge* (1968) at Dia:Beacon. Image: Ben Davis.

LEARNING GOALS:

- Develop fine motor skills
- Engage creativity and imagination
- Explore two and three-dimensional shapes



Activity Directions

Step 1: Color and paint like Sam Gilliam. Use markers to fill the paper towel with lots of color and interesting marks. Think about how different colors look when placed next to each other.

Step 2: When you are done coloring, spray your towel with water or run your paper towel under the faucet and squeeze out excess water. After your art is dry, think about how you want to display your art on the board. Experiment with twisting, folding, fanning your towel to create different 3-dimensional designs.

Step 3: Once you have decided on your form, use a glue stick to mount your work onto the cardboard.

Step 4: Proudly display your finished work! You can even create your own artwork label like you would see in an art museum or gallery which includes Artist Name, Title, Date Created, Medium (or materials used to create the artwork).

Additional Resources:

- <https://www.encyclopedia.com/people/history/historians-miscellaneous-biographies/sam-gilliam>
- <https://www.artbasel.com/news/sam-gilliam--a-life-beyond-the-frame>
- <https://americanart.si.edu/artist/sam-gilliam-1811>

Share your work with us at @LUArtGalleries or luag@lehigh.edu