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# ARTFORUM

## Los Angeles

**Sam Gilliam**  
**DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY**  
**5130 West Edgewood Place**  
**June 4–July 16**

Are Sam Gilliam's paintings improvisations, meticulously structured formalism, ethereal attempts at going beyond substance, social objects inextricably embedded in political struggles, or all of the above? The works in his current show, "Green April," dating from 1968–70, crisscross these once well-policed boundaries that helped modernist painting lay claim to objectivity.

Consider the show's eponymous piece from 1969, a large rectangle of shifting emerald.

The thin cascades of acrylic with aluminum dust conjure a portal while remaining indexical. The quality of light and wide format of this piece, created by folding unstretched canvas over wet paint, recall a verdant landscape equally arboreal and watery. The image is disrupted by a mark on the lower left side of the canvas—perhaps a scuff from the hard-to-control process—and the gesture brings the viewer's attention out from the inner world of the picture and back to its material. This quality is heightened by the beveled edges that make the painting a faceted object rather than a support for a distinct picture plane.

The title also reflects a concern with the world outside. Unlike Jackson Pollock's *Autumn Rhythm (Number 30)*, 1950, which can be seen as evoking a season either metaphorically, universalizing it, or reflexively, marking the time of his painting's creation, *Green April* refers to a social history that is not purely aesthetic—the April 1968 assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. What to make of the calm sense of elsewhere that pervades it, a work that also marks a violent death? By maintaining visual and material decisions as expressions of personal freedom, Gilliam's work complicates the transcendental aspirations of abstract painting by reminding us *who*, exactly, is allowed to forget their own bodies.



Sam Gilliam, *Green April*, 1969, acrylic on canvas, 98" x 22' 7" x 4".

— David Muenzer