

## CARTOGRAPHIES OF COLOUR

SAM GILLIAM • PETER HALLEY • ODILI DONALD ODITA • PAT STEIR

April 29 – July 16, 2022



Sam Gilliam, "Musketeers", 1998  
Acrylic on sewn cloth, 66 x 72,4 x 17,7 cm (26 x 28 1/2 x 7 in.)

*Cartographies of Colour* brings together the work of four abstract painters whose work foundationally relies upon colour and abstraction. Whether calibrated through gesture or geometry, the presence of colour articulates an existential presence and defines the territory of the image. Each painter asserts in their work specific boundaries, defined by external shape – in the case of Gilliam and Halley – or internal formal resolutions – in the case of Steir and Odita.

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**GALERIE THOMAS MODERN**

Modern & Contemporary

Tuerkenstrasse 16 · 80333 Munich · Germany · Phone +49-89-29 000 860  
Fax +49-89-29 000 866 · [modern@galerie-thomas.de](mailto:modern@galerie-thomas.de) · [www.galerie-thomas.de](http://www.galerie-thomas.de)

If cartography is the drawing or delineating of an area through map making, then in the context of this exhibition, this metaphorical defining of territory is used to understand how the work of each artist remains vital in today's highly charged, often polarized climate. Colour is never neutral.

Conceived by curator David Moos, who has for many years investigated the subject of the "cartography of colour" in contemporary painting, this presentation refers back to his 2005 exhibition "The Shape of Colour: Excursions in Colour Field Art, 1950-2005" where the narrative dimension of abstract painting was explored in relation to formalism.

By gathering the work of four artists to engage the in a dialogue, distinct positions may be assessed. Each artist's work has unfolded over decades and is well defined, etched into American visual culture. In an era where cartography is being replaced by digital scanning and constant surveillance, each of these artist's work operates to chart and define the human realm. All featured artists are considered important representatives of abstract painting from the 1960s to the present day, with the presence of colour and its arrangement in regulated patterns or in a gestural relief being the decisive means with which the nature of the world is remeasured – creating Cartographies of Colour.

**Peter Halley** addresses the geometrization of our living environment as a result of modern mechanization in colour-spatial compositions of strict clarity. **Sam Gilliam** detaches the pictorial space and colour from a fixed location in an unchangeable composition. In **Pat Steir's** works, the colour oscillates between pure gestural abstraction and a material, figurative representation. **Odili Donald Odita** allows the coloured geometric patterns of his pictures to become a metaphor for the complexity of the world and of thoughts in their kaleidoscopic alternation.

As Gilliam stated in a 1976 interview, remarking about how an artwork can reverse engineer architecture: "I am concerned about the work organizing the space." If one extends this assertion of the work's power, it is possible to conceive of painting as cartography of the contemporary city. Recalling Halley's observation that the grid of New York necessitated an eradication of landscape features, one might surmise that colour alone becomes the medium through which the human territory may be outlined.

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Peter Halley, "The Division", 2022  
Acrylic, fluorescent acrylic and Roll-A-Text on canvas, 203 x 171 cm (80 x 67 1/2 in.)

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Odili Donald Odita, "Origin Story", 2022  
Acrylic latex paint on aluminum-core fabricated wood panel with reconstituted wood veneer  
233,7 x 137 x 4,5 cm (92 x 54 x 1 3/4 in.)

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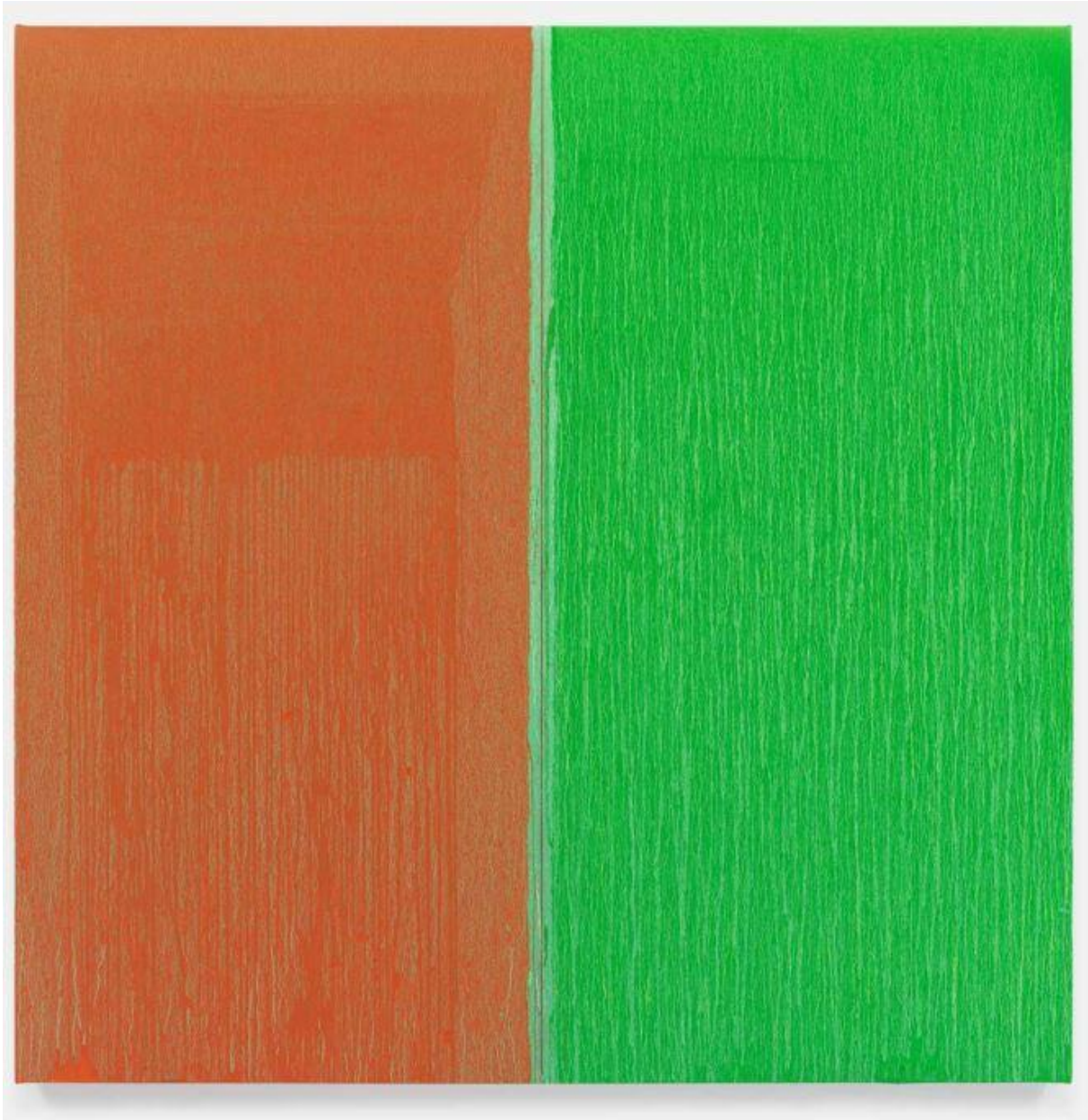
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Pat Steir, "Or is it Red?", 2016 - 2017  
oil on canvas, 152,4 x 152,4 cm (60 x 60 in.)

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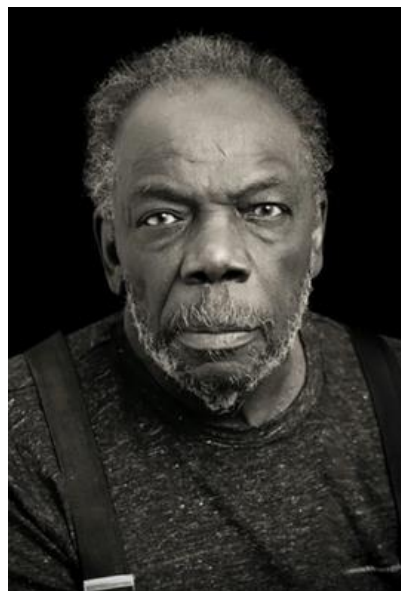
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**Sam Gilliam**  
(\*30. November 1933 in Tupelo, Mississippi, USA)

Sam Gilliam is one of the most important representatives of abstract painting in the USA. Since 1962, the artist has lived and worked in Washington, D.C. His works are represented in numerous collections, including the Art Institute of Chicago, MoMA (New York), the National Gallery of Art and the Whitney Museum of Art. The Music of Color is the artist's first institutional solo exhibition in Europe. Here, with a focus on the years 1967 to 1973, Gilliam's most radical creative period takes center stage. In 2017, his work Yves Klein Blue, which follows on from his experimental early work, was on view at the 57th Venice Biennale.



In 1967, Sam Gilliam began the series of Beveled-edge paintings: he poured acrylic paint directly over the unprepared canvas and folded and crumpled it while the paint was still wet. He then stretched the canvas on a beveled stretcher, which gave the painting a spatial, object-like quality. Gilliam's most important artistic achievement is the series of Drape paintings he began in 1968. Here he worked the canvas in the same way as for the Beveled-edge paintings, with the difference that he freed the paintings from the stretcher. Unlike the easel painting, which usually functions independently of its context, the Drape paintings performatively incorporate the exhibition space, as they can be installed differently depending on the spatial situation.

Sam Gilliam strove to blur the widely accepted distinction between painting and sculpture cultivated by prominent contemporaries, such as Donald Judd. Gilliam's works from 1967-1973 are characterized by their monumentality and expressive color. The canvas becomes a carrier of traces of the production process, while displaying its own materiality. Just at a time when painting seemed to be in decline, Gilliam breathed new life into it, his expressive, vital painting style being inspired not least by jazz.

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## Peter Halley

(\* 24. September 1953 in New York City, USA)

Peter Halley's recent paintings deploy color as sequestered structure. The traditional compositional rectangle has been abandoned in favour of discrete quadrants, some of pure colour, others coded as sectioned "cell" forms. These assembled parts reside in a tense union, forming an irregular territory. As with all of Halley's work, the vibrancy of color acquires a political dimension: chromatic clashes and charged juxtapositions set in motion theories of containment, symbolism, and control.



Peter Halley's art is set on Constructivist Colour Field Painting, the composition of his pictures being based on the relationship between - mostly rectangular - forms and the colour fields. As a third element, he adds various colour qualities and surfaces to his repertoire of forms, for instance by using neon and industrial colours or mixing sand or other particles into his paint, adding a three-dimensional relief-quality to his works. On account of these formal aspects of Peter Halley's works, they have been classified as Postmodern Concrete Art and Neo-Geo Art. In terms of content, however, Halley refers to our contemporary semiotic system and forms of communication, especially to digital code systems such as the Internet or circuit diagrams. He perceives this technological structure of the world as a prison of perception, which is why he calls his geometrical colour fields themselves 'prisons'. With his bold colour contrasts and his cultural criticism, Halley combines a powerful aesthetic element with great intellectuality. This makes him one of the leading abstract painters of his generation.

Peter Halley's work has been in exhibitions worldwide, such as the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, the Dallas Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art in New York City and the Museum Folkwang in Essen. His paintings are in many important public collections, such as the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, the Tate Gallery, London, and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York City. Peter Halley has created three new paintings especially for this exhibition of Cartographies of Colour at the Thomas Modern Gallery.

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**Odili Donald Odita**  
(\*18. Februar 1966 in Enugu, Nigeria)

Color as content defines the work of Odili Donald Odita, whose painting merges formalist histories with atavistic cultural experience. Sharply defined wedges and shapes of color abrade, intersect and overlap, simultaneously connoting pure forms and evocative poetic associations. There is no neutrality in Odili's dynamic compositions: all parts of the territory are occupied by discourse - spanning from the textiles and textures of Africa to the arid formalism of late-1960s Color Field painting. Each form carries a double meaning within ultra-smooth, complexly sectioned compositions that refute modernism's grid—pulsing with new rhythmic geometry.



Odili Donald Odita is an abstract painter whose work explores color both in the figurative historical context and in the sociopolitical sense. He is best known for his large-scale canvases with kaleidoscopic patterns and vibrant hues, which he uses to reflect the human condition. For Odita, color in itself has the possibility of mirroring the complexity of the world as much as it has the potential for being distinct. In his paintings, we see color interwoven and mixed, becoming an active agent in representing the essential power that light has in identifying the entirety of our world. He thinks of his colors as agents to express thoughts, ideas, and transformational change. Much of his color selection is based on personal memories and created intuitively by hand-mixing, so that no two shades are ever repeated. Born in Nigeria and raised in the American Midwest, Odita's work is also heavily inspired by a sense of dual identity, combining aspects of Western modernity with African culture. His practice speaks to a contrast of cultures and a desire to create something new from a set of distinct parts. In this sense, his paintings, like a stitched or quilted textile, are weavings from different spaces, times and various temperaments, which convey the complexity of culture, identity, and being.

Odita has exhibited in numerous museums, including Philadelphia, Miami, Atlanta and Houston, as well as at the Venice Biennale. The Birmingham Museum of Art in Alabama, the Hirshorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C., the Miami Art Museum and the Philadelphia Museum of Art have works by Odita in their collections.

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**Pat Steir**  
(10. April 1940 in Newark, New Jersey, USA)

Pat Steir's monumental wave works, drawn at an architectural scale in the 1980s, declared that nature's energy may be calibrated by single, gestural lines—often forcefully articulated. These works led to a pure exploration of gesture that Steir distilled into her eidetic waterfall forms that serve as a sign of self, ascribing a territory that is simultaneously formal yet summons nature. This decades-long investigation into a cascading trope may be read as a mapping of color against color, figure against ground, action depicted as pure form. In her most recent work an agitated facture often defines a realm of combined and colliding colors.



Pat Steir's signature abstract paintings feature vast, textural fields of color and poetic gestures that embrace both action and chance. Steir, who started her career aligned with Conceptual art and Minimalism, soon embraced wide-ranging influences including Chinese ink painting, Taoist philosophy, and the ideas of musician John Cage. Her subsequent works, such as her iconic "Waterfall" paintings, are strikingly elemental. They feature broad brushstrokes atop canvases, which produce long, elegant, freeflowing drips below.

Steir has exhibited in New York, London, Mexico City, San Francisco, Berlin, Rome, and Paris. Her work has sold for seven figures at auction and belongs in the collections of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, the Long Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the Smithsonian American Art Museum, the Tate, and the Whitney Museum of American Art.

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Founded in 1964, Galerie Thomas has become one of the leading and most reputable galleries for works by masters of German Expressionism, Classic Modernism, Post-War Art and Contemporary Art. Galerie Thomas' history includes many significant milestones such as its first exhibition featuring one hundred works by Alexej von Jawlensky, acquiring parts of the legendary Rheingarten collection.

After fifty successful years in its Maximilianstrasse location, Galerie Thomas relocated all activities to a lofty gallery space with more than 500 square metres at the centre of Munich's museum district. Masterworks of Pop Art, US Postwar and Abstract American, German Postwar art as well as national and international contemporary positions are now displayed alongside the gallery's original programme.

Galerie Thomas works with an extensive network of international private and corporate clients, institutions as well as other art market constituencies, known for its expertise and scholarship with a special focus on German Expressionism, Classic Modernism and Post-War Art.

Within German Expressionism, Galerie Thomas has staged exhibitions featuring artists of the Blaue Reiter, such as Wassily Kandinsky, Alexej von Jawlensky and Gabriele Münter; the Brücke group, including Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, Otto Mueller and Emil Nolde; and, as representatives of the Bauhaus, Lyonel Feininger, Paul Klee and Oskar Schlemmer. Classic Modern Art has been represented by solo shows of Edvard Munch, Joan Miró, Alexander Calder and Fernand Léger. Artists such as Joseph Beuys, Anselm Kiefer, Georg Baselitz, Ernst Wilhelm Nay or Eduardo Chillida and American artists such as Chuck Close, Peter Halley or Joan Mitchell as well as artists from the ZERO group and Pop artists punctuate the activities of the gallery in the field of Post-War Art.

Galerie Thomas participates in the international art fair circuit presenting works at fairs including Art Basel, Art Basel Miami Beach, The Armory Show New York, TEFAF Maastricht, Art Cologne and Art Basel Hong Kong. Today Raimund Thomas, together with Silke Thomas, Joerg Paal and Nadine Kriesemer, make up the directorial team of the gallery.

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