

How did Sam Gilliam make this?

Relative is an example of Sam Gilliam's innovative, large-scale, color-stained drape paintings. The work hangs on the gallery's wall, 13 ½ feet wide and 10 feet tall. Gilliam invented a new art form with his "drape" paintings. Rather than stretching canvas over a support, or stretcher, to make a flat rectangular surface, he put paint directly onto unstretched, untreated canvas. Gilliam started a work by pouring and blotting watery acrylic paints on large sheets of fabric. Then, as the paints soaked into the surface, he folded them up like accordions, adding additional washes of color. He left the sopping bundles to dry, letting the colors bleed into the fabric. Gilliam liked that chance became part of the process. When he peeled open the canvases... surprise!: dazzling abstractions of swirling, layered color.

Gilliam would next bunch up the canvas in areas and "sculpt" it into a three-dimensional fluid shape, suspending it with hooks and ropes and leaving it to hang free. The title of this work, *Relative*, refers to the fact that the work of art changes each time it is installed on a different wall or architectural setting—the relationships between the gathered fabric can be adjusted, the folds shift, shadows change, the whole is collectively reshaped.

Gilliam believes, "Making, building, thinking—it's just important. It's what the world is about."