



SPEED ART MUSEUM ANNOUNCES NEW GILLIAM VISITING ARTIST PROGRAM WITH INAUGURAL ARTISTS VANESSA GERMAN AND ERIC N. MACK

*Program brings two artists to Louisville each year and will have a dedicated curator;
made possible through the generosity of the Sam Gilliam Foundation*

Louisville, KY, October 16, 2024 — The Speed Art Museum announced today the launch of the **Gilliam Visiting Artist Program**, a new initiative designed to strengthen engagement with living artists by bringing two artists to Louisville each year to create fellowship and new dialogues with Kentucky artists and community members, culminating in new collaborations and public programming both at the Museum and beyond. The **inaugural 2025 Gilliam Visiting Artists** will be multi-media artists **vanessa german** (b. 1976) and **Eric N. Mack** (b. 1987).

Developed in collaboration with the **Sam Gilliam Foundation** in recognition of the late artist's commitment to the city of Louisville where he spent many of his formative years, the initiative also includes the **creation of the Sam Gilliam Assistant Curator of Artist Programs, a new full-time position** that will work cross-departmentally with the Speed's Curatorial and Learning, Engagement, and Belonging teams to manage the Gilliam Visiting Artist Program and facilitate programming and relationship-building with artists and communities in the region. **Dr. fari nzinga, Curator of African and Native American Collections**, and **Tyler Blackwell, Curator of Contemporary Art**, will work closely with the new Sam Gilliam Assistant Curator to manage the initiative. The Speed is launching an immediate national search to fill the new position.

"We are thrilled to be launching this new program that pays tribute to visionary artist Sam Gilliam by bringing artists from around the country to engage with artists and makers in Louisville and Kentucky in addition to our collections, staff, and communities," said **Raphaella Platow, director of the Speed**. "A testament to Sam's support of artists from Kentucky throughout his lifetime, this new program will allow the Speed to deepen our relationships with artists, providing space and resources for creative experimentation and cross-pollination with our community. We are exceptionally grateful for the partnership and generosity of the Sam Gilliam Foundation for recognizing the importance of having visiting artists leading the way in how we as an institution shape relationships with the rich ecosystem of Kentucky-based artists."

The inaugural Gilliam Visiting Artists will coincide with the third year of the Speed's *Louisville's Black Avant-Garde* exhibition series, which spotlights local, historically significant Black visual artists who were active in the dynamic midcentury Louisville artist collectives in which Gilliam also played a key role. Throughout the artist-driven engagement, Gilliam Visiting Artists will be encouraged to design their own engagements with Kentucky artists and community leaders, allowing space for authentic connection and conversation to manifest outside of their normal studio practice while in residence—

simultaneously exploring new facets of their own work and shaping new modes of community involvement. Public programs presented as part of the initiative will take place during the academic year to enable the participation and attendance of students and scholars, including from the University of Louisville, Gilliam's alma mater.

"It is an honor to work with the Speed Art Museum to establish a program that extends Sam's legacy and reflects our organizations' shared missions to uplift diversity and cultural exchange through supporting local artists," said **Annie Gawlak, president of the Sam Gilliam Foundation**. "Sam's practice championed pushing the boundaries of artmaking, and the Gilliam Visiting Artist Program embodies that sentiment by encouraging artists to experiment within their practice and find new sources of inspiration through engagement with the broader Kentucky community."

Sam Gilliam (1933-2022) spent his formative years as an artist in Louisville, supported by the robust midcentury art scene in Louisville, as well as through his studies at the University of Louisville's Hite Art Institute. As a graduate student there, Gilliam cofounded the Gallery Enterprises art collective (1957-1961), which included emerging artists such as Bob Thompson and Kenneth Victor Young, as well as local luminaries G. Caliman Coxe, Robert L. Douglas, Fred F. Bond, and Eugenia V. Dunn. In an era defined by the Black struggle for justice and freedom, Gallery Enterprises established a consistently supportive forum and network for artists to showcase their emerging talent. After his move to Washington, D.C., Gilliam frequently returned home to visit family, as well as friends associated with another major art collective: the Louisville Art Workshop (1966-1978). The Workshop expanded the legacy of Gallery Enterprises, furthering the impact of Gilliam's leadership and contributions to the arts in Louisville.

The Speed previously hosted four exhibitions of Gilliam's work: *Sam Gilliam (1933-2022)* (2022); *Sam Gilliam: A Retrospective* (2006); *Construction: An Installation at the J.B. Speed Museum by Sam Gilliam* (1996); and *Sam Gilliam: Paintings and Works on Paper* (1976), and the Museum has seven works by the artist in its collection. Gilliam served on the Speed's Board of Governors from 1992 to 2002, becoming an Emeritus Governor in 2002; he also served on the Speed's National Board beginning in 2007 and was an Emeritus Trustee until his death in 2022.

About the Inaugural 2025 Gilliam Visiting Artists at the Speed Art Museum

vanessa german

vanessa german (b. 1976, Milwaukee, WI) is a self-taught citizen artist working across sculpture, performance, communal rituals, immersive installation, and photography, in order to repair and reshape disrupted systems, spaces, and connections. The artist's practice proposes new models for social healing, utilizing creativity and tenderness as vital forces to reckon with the historical and ongoing catastrophes of structural racism, white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, resource extraction, and misogynoir.

A visual storyteller who lives and works in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina, german

utilizes assemblage and mixed media, combining locally found objects to build protective ritualistic structures known as her power figures. Modeled on Congolese Nkisi sculptures and drawing on folk art practices, they are embellished with materials including beading, glass, fabric, and sculpted wood, and come into existence at the axis on which Black power, spirituality, mysticism, and feminism converge.

She is the recipient of numerous awards, including the Heinz Award for the Arts (2022), the Don Tyson Prize from the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art (2018), the United States Artists Fellowship (2018), the Jacob Lawrence Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters (2017), and the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Grant (2015). Her work is held in private and public collections including the Speed Art Museum, Louisville, KY; Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT; Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, AR; Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, MO; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, PA; High Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA; and Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL, among others.

Eric N. Mack

Eric N. Mack (b. 1987, Columbia, MD) lives and works in New York. An abstractionist who creates textile-based installations of various sizes and scales, Mack's work often incorporates and transforms easily found objects, such as garments, blankets, pegboards, and magazine pages. Mack's visual language speaks through these materials, as well as through color and texture, optics, and flux. His works flow and shift, alive with a spectrum of hues, irregular shapes, and poetic drama. References to the fashion industry and the figure impart a seductive quality, connecting to identity or a material fiction of desire and intention.

In 2017, Mack was the recipient of the inaugural BALTIC Artists' Award, selected by artist Lorna Simpson and completed the Rauschenberg Residency in Captiva Island, FL and an artist-in-residency at Delfina Foundation in London, UK. Institutional solo exhibitions include *Lemme walk across the room*, Brooklyn Museum, NY (2019); *In austerity, stripped from its support and worn as a sarong*, The Power Station, Dallas, TX (2019); the BALTIC Artists' Award 2017, BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead, UK (2017); and *Eric Mack: Vogue Fabrics*, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY (2017). Major group exhibitions include the Whitney Biennial 2019, Whitney Museum of American Art, NY; *Ungestalt*, Kunsthalle Basel, Switzerland (2017); *In the Abstract*, Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, MA (2017); *Blue Black*, Pulitzer Arts Foundation, St. Louis, MO (2017); *Making & Unmaking: An exhibition curated by Duro Olowu*, Camden Arts Centre, London, UK (2016); and *Greater New York 2015*, MoMA PS1, Long Island City, NY (2015). Mack's work is in the permanent collections of Albright-Knox Art Gallery, The Studio Museum in Harlem, and the Whitney Museum of American Art. He received his BFA from The Cooper Union, NY, and his MFA from Yale University, CT.

About the Speed Art Museum

The Speed Art Museum in Louisville, Kentucky is the state's oldest and largest art museum, and has served as a vital cultural resource for the Louisville community and the wider region for nearly 100

years. The Speed's ever-growing encyclopedic collection, timely exhibitions, and community-driven programming explore contemporary issues and inspire meaningful personal experiences through the transformative power of art, sparking new conversations and creating opportunities for dialogue. Located on the campus of the University of Louisville but operating as an independent nonprofit institution, the Speed provides visitors from around the world with opportunities to engage with art through public and academic programs, screenings at the Speed Cinema, family offerings in the Art Sparks interactive learning gallery, and more. Fulfilling its mission of inviting everyone to celebrate art forever, the Speed is committed to creating a welcoming and accessible space for the community, including through free admission on Sundays, Community Connections artmaking programs, and the Speed For All free membership. For more information, visit speedmuseum.org.

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