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**Sarah Lewis and Theaster Gates named inaugural speakers for the Sam Gilliam Lecture series at the Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg Center**

**In partnership with the Sam Gilliam Foundation, the series invites speakers to reflect on the intersection of art, academia, and public policy**

**Lectures to take place April 9<sup>th</sup> and December 11<sup>th</sup>, 2025**

**Washington, D.C. (March 4, 2025)**— Art and cultural historian **Sarah Lewis** and artist **Theaster Gates** are the first two speakers in the new [Sam Gilliam Lecture Series](#) at the **Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg Center** in Washington, D.C. Made possible by the **Sam Gilliam Foundation**, the series will welcome prominent artists and thinkers to the University’s Washington, D.C. hub to reflect on the intersections between contemporary art, academia, and public policy, and the role art plays in advancing society.

Established to honor the artistic legacy and social justice commitments of the late Washington, D.C.-based artist Sam Gilliam, the series will launch on **April 9, 2025**, with a lecture by Sarah Lewis, followed by a fireside chat with Leah Wright Rigueur, associate professor of history at the SNF Agora Institute at Johns Hopkins University. The second installment will be an event with Theaster Gates on **December 11, 2025**. Lewis, the founder of catalytic civic initiative Vision & Justice whose work focuses on the intersection of art, visual culture, and democracy, and Gates, a multidisciplinary artist who centers his work on the idea of Black space, will explore topics frequently addressed in Gilliam’s life and work, including civil rights, democracy, and the transformative power of art. In recognition of the mission of the Hopkins Bloomberg Center—to connect research and discovery with policymaking—these lectures will provide a platform for speakers to engage in conversation with faculty experts, students, and the community about the role of art in addressing critical social issues.

“The Hopkins Bloomberg Center provides a critical platform for creative expression across a broad range of viewpoints, artistic traditions, and disciplines,” said **Cybele Bjorklund**, executive director of the Hopkins Bloomberg Center. “We thank Annie Gawlak and the Sam Gilliam Foundation for their partnership and the opportunity to honor Sam Gilliam’s legacy through these important lectures by Sarah Lewis and Theaster Gates.”

The Sam Gilliam Lecture Series will be free and open to the public, as part of the wide suite of public arts programming offered by the Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg Center. The series will continue in 2026, with additional speakers announced in the coming months.

"Sarah and Theaster are both deeply engaged in the intersection of art and social justice, using their creative work and ideas to explore identity, racial equity, and the transformative power of art—values that Sam also championed," stated **Annie Gawlak**, president of the Sam Gilliam Foundation. "They are the ideal choice for the inaugural guests of The Sam Gilliam Lecture Series, embodying Sam's visionary practice and his commitment to democratizing access to art."

"The Sam Gilliam Lecture Series strengthens the already-powerful network of arts initiatives within the Hopkins Bloomberg Center and Johns Hopkins University at large," said **Homewood Professor of the Humanities at Johns Hopkins University Daniel H. Weiss, president emeritus of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York**. "Using Gilliam's important legacy as its foundation, the series will be a catalyst for multidisciplinary conversations that will complement the rich array of arts and policymaking programs hosted at the Center."

### **About Sam Gilliam**

Gilliam (1933–2022) was a pioneering African American artist renowned not only for his great innovations in Post-war American art, but also his deep commitments to issues of social justice, racial equity, and democratizing access to art. Having moved to Washington, D.C. in 1962 and living there throughout his prolific artmaking career, Gilliam had a long-standing and deep relationship with the city throughout the Civil Rights Movement and other periods of extreme change in the nation.

Attendees at the lectures will also be able to visit a [permanent installation](#) by Gilliam on the Center's ground floor, *A Lovely Blue And !* (2022), among the final works created by the artist in the months before his death. The work encapsulates Gilliam's belief in the efficacy of abstraction and the value of risk-taking. On public view in the Center's pre-function space, the monumental 96" × 240" painting exemplifies Gilliam's expanded notion of the canvas as a three-dimensional object, showcasing the signature beveled-edge format he debuted in the 1960s and returned to in his later years.

The lecture series will complement existing arts programming at the Hopkins Bloomberg Center, which includes art exhibitions in the [Irene and Richard Frary Gallery](#); music and dance [performances](#) from the Johns Hopkins Peabody Conservatory faculty, students, and guest artists in a cutting-edge 375-seat theater; and literature, film screenings, and other humanities events that weave the arts into discussions on contemporary social and policy issues.

### **About Sarah Lewis**

Sarah Lewis is the founder of [Vision & Justice](#) and the John L. Loeb Associate Professor of the Humanities and Associate Professor of African and African American Studies at Harvard University. She is the author of *The Unseen Truth: When Race Changed Sight in America* (Harvard University Press); the bestseller, *The Rise: Creativity, the Gift of Failure, and the Search for Mastery* (Simon & Schuster); and the forthcoming book *Vision & Justice* (One World/Random House). Lewis is the editor of the award-winning volumes, "Vision & Justice" by *Aperture* magazine and the anthology on the work of Carrie Mae Weems (MIT Press). She is the organizer of the landmark Vision & Justice Convening, and co-editor of the Vision & Justice Book Series, launched in partnership with Aperture. Her awards and recognition include an honorary degree from Pratt Institute, the Infinity Award, the Andrew Carnegie Fellowship, a Cullman Fellowship, the Freedom Scholar Award (ASALH), the Arthur Danto/ASA Prize from the American Philosophical Association, and the Photography Network Book Prize. Her writing has been published in the *New Yorker*, the *New York Times*, *Artforum*, and the *New York Review of Books*, and her work has been the subject of profiles from *The Boston Globe* to the *New York Times*. Lewis is a sought-after public speaker, with a mainstage TED talk that received over 3 million views. She received her B.A. from Harvard University, an MPhil from Oxford University, an M.A. from Courtauld Institute of Art, and her Ph.D. from Yale University. She lives in New York City and Cambridge, MA.

### **About Theaster Gates**

Theaster Gates is an artist whose practice finds roots in conceptual formalism, sculpture, space theory, land art, and performance. Trained in urban planning and within the tradition of Japanese ceramics, Gates's artistic philosophy is guided by the concepts of Shintoism, Buddhism, and Animism—most notably honoring the "spirit within things." Foundational to Gates' practice is his custodianship and critical redeployment of culturally significant Black objects, archives, and spaces. Through the expansiveness of his approach as a thinker, maker, and builder, Gates extends the life of disappearing and bygone histories, places, traditions, and loved ones.

Gates has exhibited and performed at The LUMA Foundation, Arles, France (2023); The New Museum, New York, (2022); The Aichi Triennale, Tokoname (2022); The Serpentine Pavilion, London (2022); The Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK (2021); Whitechapel Gallery, London, UK (2013 and 2021); Tate Liverpool, UK (2020); Haus der Kunst, Munich (2020); Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (2019); Palais de Tokyo Paris, France (2019); Sprengel Museum Hannover, Germany (2018); Kunstmuseum Basel, Switzerland (2018); National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., USA (2017); Art Gallery of Ontario, Canada (2016); Fondazione Prada, Milan, Italy (2016); Kunsthaus Bregenz, Austria (2016); Punta della Dogana, Venice, Italy (2013); and dOCUMENTA (13), Kassel, Germany (2012).

Gates is the recipient of numerous awards and honorary degrees including the Isamu Noguchi Award (2023); National Building Museum Vincent Scully Prize (2023); Frederick Kiesler Prize for Architecture and the Arts (2022); an Honorary Fellowship from the Royal Institute of British Architects (2021); the World Economic Forum Crystal Award (2020); J.C. Nichols Prize for

Visionaries in Urban Development (2018); Nasher Sculpture Prize (2018); Sprengel Museum Kurt Schwitters Prize (2017); and Artes Mundi 6 Prize (2015).

### **About the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg Center**

Building on Johns Hopkins' history as the nation's first research university, the Hopkins Bloomberg Center serves as a nexus for trusted academic experts, global leaders, policymakers, and students to provide multidisciplinary expertise and objectivity to decision-makers while educating future civic leaders. The Hopkins Bloomberg Center brings together the brightest minds in policy, business, academics, and nonprofits to find solutions to global challenges and opportunities for human advancement. State-of-the-art facilities offer dynamic learning experiences and adapt to emerging disciplines.

### **About the Sam Gilliam Foundation**

Established in 2023, the Sam Gilliam Foundation advances the vision and values of abstract artist Sam Gilliam by organizing and supporting significant exhibitions of the artist's work, fostering new research and publications, and collaborating with arts organizations and institutions on initiatives that extend Gilliam's generosity and enthusiasm for supporting emerging and longtime artists, art students, scholars, curators, and the cultural ecosystem at large. Helmed by Annie Gawlak, the Foundation serves as a primary resource on the artist and a steward of his collection and archive, with important holdings of Gilliam's work in a variety of mediums and original papers and materials pertaining to his life and work. Since its activation, the Foundation has expanded its mission to champion the work of rising artists by establishing the Sam Gilliam Award in partnership with Dia Art Foundation in 2023, and to continue Gilliam's legacy by launching the Gilliam Visiting Artist Program in collaboration with the Speed Art Museum in 2024.

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