

The Menil Collection presents  
***Virginia Jaramillo: The Curvilinear Paintings, 1969–1974***

*First solo museum exhibition of Jaramillo's work marks the fiftieth anniversary of her participation in The De Luxe Show, the Menil Foundation's 1971 groundbreaking exhibition*



HOUSTON—September 2, 2020—The Menil Collection is pleased to present *Virginia Jaramillo: The Curvilinear Paintings, 1969–1974*, the artist's first solo museum exhibition. *The Curvilinear Paintings* will be on view exclusively at the Menil from **September 26, 2020, through July 3, 2021**.

This focused exhibition presents eight abstract paintings by Jaramillo (b. 1939, El Paso), in which thin, undulating lines dance across monochrome fields of bright, flat color. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, American artists like Jaramillo took a cool and minimal approach to painting. These works have been defined with descriptive terms such as post-painterly, hard-edge, and non-gestural.

The Menil's presentation marks the fiftieth anniversary of *The De Luxe Show*, one of the first racially integrated exhibitions of contemporary art held in the United States. Organized by the Menil Foundation in 1971, *The De Luxe Show* was installed in a shuttered movie theater located in Houston's Fifth Ward. The trailblazing exhibition, curated by New York artist Peter Bradley, included works by Sam Gilliam, Al Loving, Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, and others exploring new approaches to abstraction. Jaramillo, the only woman and Latina included, exhibited the painting *Green Dawn*, 1970, which will be on view at the Menil for this special presentation

Rebecca Rabinow, director of the Menil Collection said, "Virginia Jaramillo's ongoing career spans six decades. The Menil Collection is deeply honored to present her first—and long overdue—solo museum exhibition. We are especially proud that the exhibition will include an untitled painting by Jaramillo from 1971 that was recently acquired by the Menil. After half a century, the impact of *The De Luxe Show*, in which she was a key participant, continues to resonate throughout the contemporary art world. By celebrating Jaramillo's achievements, we also pay tribute to the legacy of the artists who made *The De Luxe Show* an epochal event."

Born in El Paso, Texas, and raised in Los Angeles, where she attended the Manual Arts High School and then studied at Otis Art Institute, Jaramillo first came to public attention at age 18, when one of her works was selected for the Los Angeles County Museum of Art's (LACMA) annual exhibition. She repeatedly participated in the LACMA Annual in subsequent years, signing her works with the gender-neutral "V. Jaramillo." Following the Watts riots in 1965, she temporarily relocated to Paris before settling in New York City in 1967. There, her painting evolved as she became a part of the artistic community, where she worked alongside figures such as Melvin Edwards, Kenneth Noland, Mark Di Suvero, and Jack Whitten. It was at this moment when Jaramillo embarked on her curvilinear paintings, with intensely vivid fields of color

crossed by curving, intersecting, and meticulously painted lines, which artist Frank Bowling aptly described as “lightning whips.”

Jaramillo uses abstract painting to translate “the structure of our physical, spiritual, and mental worlds” into the space and geometry of art. She describes the planes of color in the curvilinear paintings as a “mental space” that invites reflection: “I lay out the groundwork and the viewer projects onto the space” to fill the “spatial arena with their own feelings and experiences.” To create these transporting arenas, she custom mixes her pigments to achieve deep color fields, that play with the viewer’s understanding of light, space, and depth.

Michelle White, senior curator at the Menil Collection, said, “Working with Virginia Jaramillo on this exhibition over the past several years has been extraordinary, and I hope this show can help us consider the artist’s deeply under-recognized work as a critical contribution to the history of twentieth-century abstract painting. Highlighting the Menil Collection’s initiative to illuminate areas of the museum’s growing permanent collection through surprising and revelatory installations, the exhibition features Jaramillo’s painting in our collection. It also dives into this period of her work to reveal one of her core concerns, from the beginning of her career up to the present: how to use her experiments with materials, forms and process to challenge our perception of reality.”

Over the past decade Jaramillo’s paintings have been included in major exhibitions reconsidering the place of women and artists of color in art history, including *We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women, 1965-85*, at the Brooklyn Museum; *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power*, at Tate, London; and *Now Dig This! Art and Black Los Angeles, 1960-1980*, at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles.

*Virginia Jaramillo: The Curvilinear Paintings, 1969-1974* is organized by senior curator Michelle White as part of the museum’s ongoing series of exhibitions of contemporary artists represented in the Menil Collection.

### **About The De Luxe Show**

One of the first racially integrated art exhibitions organized in the United States, *The De Luxe Show* was sponsored by the Menil Foundation and took place in the remodeled De Luxe movie theater in Houston’s Fifth Ward from August 22 to September 29, 1971. The theater, which had been closed since 1969, was chosen as the venue because of its past prominence as a gathering place for Houston’s African American community, and through community initiatives under the leadership of future congressman Mickey Leland. New York-based artist Peter Bradley, then associate director of Perls Galleries in New York, served as curator, selecting 40 abstract works by 19 contemporary artists.

### **About the Menil Collection**

Houston philanthropists and art patrons John and Dominique de Menil established the Menil Foundation in 1954 to foster greater public understanding and appreciation of art, architecture, culture, religion, and philosophy. In 1987, the Menil Collection’s main museum building opened to the public. Today, the Menil Collection consists of a group of five art buildings and green spaces located within a residential neighborhood. The Menil remains committed to its founders’ belief that art is essential to human experience and fosters direct personal encounters with works of art. The museum welcomes all visitors free of charge to its museum buildings and surrounding green spaces. [menil.org](http://menil.org)

### **Funding and Organization**

Major funding for this exhibition is provided by a Gift in memory of Virginia P. Rorschach; Diane and Michael Cannon. Additional support comes from; Laura and Walter Elcock; Marley Lott; Poppi Massey; Suzanne Deal Booth; Clare Casademont and Michael Metz; Janet and Paul Hobby; Linda and George Kelly; and the City of Houston through Houston Arts Alliance.

**This exhibition is being presented in association with the [Feminist Art Coalition](#) (FAC), a platform for art projects informed by feminisms. FAC fosters collaborations between arts institutions that aim to make public their commitment to social justice and structural change.**

### **Image Caption**

Virginia Jaramillo, *Untitled*, 1971. Acrylic on canvas, 84 1/8 x 71 in. (213.7 x 180.3 cm). The Menil Collection, Houston, purchased with funds provided by Suzanne Deal Booth. Courtesy of the Artist.

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