Curated by Clare Elliott, Associate Research Curator


Public Programs

**Curators Lecture Series**
Clare Elliott on Dorothea Tanning
Sunday, October 13
3 p.m.
Main Building

The above program is free and open to the public.

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A trio of small animals similarly violate boundaries by peeking into windows in *Voyeurs*, 1970. This distorted image of domestic life, where male authority figures are conspicuously absent, reappears in such prints as *Orphans*, 1963; *My Aunt (Ma tante)*, 1972; and *Sisters (Sœurs)*, 1973. Of *Orphans*, Tanning remarked, “The deeply acid-bitten lines seemed to speak of the state of being an orphan. And their entanglement was perhaps the asylum.”

The motif of embracing figures recurs throughout her oeuvre, including in the sculpture *Cousins*, 1970, which Dominique and John de Menil acquired in 1971. In works like *Japanese Poses*, 1967, multiple pairs of intertwined bodies appear in elongated horizontal compositions that Tanning called “friezes.” The long, narrow format was inspired by drawings that she had created on scraps of high-quality papers left over from the paper cutter. The distinct scroll-like presentation illustrating series of linked events imbues these works with a sense of time.

In her illustrated book *Welcome (Accueil)*, 1958, Tanning juxtaposed vivid embossed etchings alongside a dreamlike narrative, previously unpublished, by the Surrealist author René Crevel. The nine plates that compose *Nobody (Personne)*, 1962, are each cut laterally into thirds. Readers can turn individual sections to engage in the Surrealist game of “exquisite corpse,” potentially creating hundreds of different monstrous figures out of the pages’ separate parts. A much different atmosphere is conjured in the nearly abstract illustrations that accompany *The Tide (La Marée)*, 1970. Their sensuous watery feel conjures the moody seaside encounter recounted in André Pieyre de Mandiargues’ text. In a much later project, *Volcanic Holiday*, 1992, Tanning provided intense colors and powerful imagery to accompany the words of American poet James Merrill. Of responding to the text of other writers, she recalled, “A reasonable fidelity to the poet’s subject and to his persona [was] always my goal in these collaborations.”

A writer herself, Tanning succumbed more than once to the “irresistible temptation” to embellish her own work. The printer’s proof of the miniature *Tomorrow (Demain)*, 1964, contains Tanning’s adjustments to the layout of her poem. In the contrasting large format *In Flesh and Gold (En chair et en or)* from 1973 Tanning created, in her words, “a world of cheerful carnality.” A play on the French expression “en chair et en os (in flesh and bone),” this volume depicts boldly colored, elongated nudes who sprawl and cavort next to Tanning’s spare haiku-like verse.