

Walter De Maria: Trilogies

On View at the Menil September 16, 2011 – January 8, 2012

The artist's first solo museum exhibition in the U.S.

Exclusive venue

PUBLIC PREVIEW AND WINE RECEPTION: THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 7:00-9:00 P.M.

Houston, August 11, 2011 – Organized by the artist and Menil director Josef Helfenstein, ***Walter De Maria: Trilogies*** is the artist's first major museum exhibition in the United States. The exhibition includes three series of related works: one painting series and two sculpture series, each comprised of three parts.



“We are extremely proud to present Walter De Maria’s first solo museum exhibition in the United States,” said Menil Director Josef Helfenstein. “This boundary-breaking artist has played a crucial role in the development of the art of our time. His work already holds an important place in the Menil’s permanent collection, and for the first time, visitors can see and experience the full scale and great depth of his provocative ideas.”

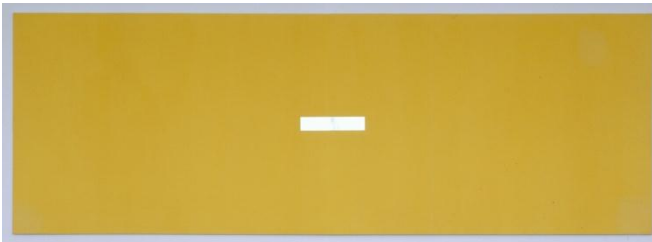
The *Statement Series*, which occupies the museum foyer, consists of three large horizontal, monochrome paintings: *Red Painting*, *Yellow Painting*, and *Blue Painting*. These large works (14’ x 20’) create a unified, site-specific installation. In addition to acting as a dramatic spatial ensemble, each painting has a small rectangular plate of polished stainless steel at its center that is engraved with a singular statement. The *Yellow Painting*, originally titled *The Color Men Choose When They Attack the Earth* (1968), is part of the museum’s permanent collection. *Red Painting* and *Blue Painting* (2011) were created especially for this exhibition.

The exhibition continues in the museum’s vast west gallery. First on view is the *Channel Series: Circle, Square, Triangle* (1972), a trilogy that resides in the Menil’s permanent collection. The basic geometric shapes in this series are outlined by lengths of metal

with squared sides, forming a U-shaped channel. Each channel contains a solid stainless steel sphere equal in width to the passageway. The spheres may be moved to different locations inside the channels at varying times, introducing an element of randomness.

Also occupying the gallery is the third series of works, *Bel Air Trilogy* (2000–2011). This installation consists of three 1955 Chevrolet Bel Air automobiles, meticulously restored with only minor customizations by the artist. Highly popular because of its crisp, clean design and classic lines, this renowned model often featured a signature two-tone color scheme; the three cars exhibited here are a matched set, each painted in “Gypsy Red” and “Shoreline Beige”.

While considering each car as a beautiful object in itself, the artist has intervened with a component familiar within his work: a highly polished metal rod. The front windshield of each car has been seamlessly pierced by a 12-foot-long stainless steel rod that runs through the interior of the passenger compartment parallel to the chassis, exiting through the rear window. A defining feature of early hardtop car design is the absence of a center window post, which here allows an unobstructed side view of the rod’s transversal path. Each rod has a distinct geometric shape: again the primary forms of a square, a circle, and a triangle. The long minimalist rods, with their reflective surfaces



and classic linear, three-dimensional form, share some of the same qualities as the 1955 Chevy Bel Air. The combination and interaction of these two elements activate the new work.

Born in Albany, California, in 1935, Walter De Maria attended the University of California at Berkeley, where he studied history and art, completing a master’s degree in 1959. He moved to New York the following year, where he has lived and worked ever since. Although trained as a painter, De Maria soon turned to sculpture and began using other media, participating in happenings and making music recordings and films. His first three-dimensional works, sparsely designed and constructed wooden boxes, anticipated Minimalism. Over the last fifty years De Maria has played a continuous role in the development of four major art movements: Minimalism, Conceptual Art, Land Art (Earthworks), and Installation Art. He has had seven solo European museum exhibitions -- in Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Sweden, and France.

By the late 1960s, De Maria had started to conceive of the earth itself as a site and medium for artworks of immense scale, free of the limits of gallery or museum. In 1968 he made *Mile Long Drawing*, two parallel white chalk marks set twelve feet apart that ran for a mile across one of the vast, dry salt lakes of California’s Mojave Desert. De

Maria is perhaps best known for *Lightning Field* (1977), a geometrically precise arrangement of 400 pointed stainless steel poles set in mile-by-kilometer grid in a remote desert of western New Mexico.

In the late 1970s De Maria created three enduring urban works. As complementary pieces, *Vertical Earth Kilometer* (1977), and *The Broken Kilometer* (1979), address the idea of unseen or abstracted distance. *Vertical Earth Kilometer* is a one-kilometer long brass rod, two inches in diameter, drilled into a city parkground in Kassel, Germany. The rod's circular top, flush to the earth's surface, is framed by a two-meter square plate of red sandstone. *The Broken Kilometer*, a permanent indoor installation in New York, consists of 500 two-meter-long brass rods of equal diameter (totaling one kilometer in length) laid on the floor in precise rows of 100 rods each. In contrast to the hard metal of both Kilometer pieces, the third of these urban works, *The New York Earth Room* (1977), is a 3,600-square-foot room filled to a depth of 22 inches with 250 cubic yards of earth.

De Maria's complex investigations—using rigorous mathematical principles, natural materials and environments, and precisely manufactured elements—do not lead to a vision of rational materialism, but to one of enduring mystery. **Trilogies** – installations that explore the conceptual, the monumental, the minimal, and the real – expresses some of the defining features of De Maria's work.

This exhibition is generously supported by Houston Endowment Inc., The Eleanor and Frank Freed Foundation, Olive McCollum Jenney, David and Anne Kirkland, William F. Stern, Clare Casademont and Michael Metz, the City of Houston and by proceeds from Men of Menil. Exhibition underwriter United Airlines is the Preferred Airline of the Menil Collection.

Images: Walter de Maria, *Statement Series: Yellow Painting (The Color Men Choose When They Attack the Earth)*, 1968. Oil on canvas with stainless steel plaque. © Walter De Maria. The Menil Collection, Houston, Purchase, with funds contributed by the Estate of Mary Kathryn Lynch Kurtz. Photo: George Hixson, Houston.

Walter De Maria, *Bel Air Trilogy*, 2000–2011 (detail) Stainless steel rod with 1955 Chevrolet Bel Air two-tone hardtop. © Walter de Maria. Courtesy Gagolian Gallery. Photo: Robert McKeever.

For more information or images write to press@menil.org or call 713-535-3170.