

The Menil Collection Opens *Chryssa & New York* September 29

Chryssa & New York, the first major survey of artwork by Chryssa in the United States since 1982, is co-organized by the Menil Collection, Houston, and Dia Art Foundation, New York



HOUSTON—August 22, 2023—The Menil Collection will open *Chryssa & New York* on **September 29, 2023**. Co-organized by the Menil and Dia Art Foundation, the exhibition explores the work of the Greek-born artist who was one of the first to incorporate neon into her practice. Her pivotal use of the medium, along with found elements of commercial signage and text, bridged ideas from the Pop, Conceptual, and Minimalist movements. Focused on Chryssa's output while she lived in New York from the late 1950s to the early 1970s, this exhibition presents major loans from American and European museums and collections. *Chryssa & New York* debuted at Dia Chelsea, New York, last spring and after the Houston venue will travel to Wrightwood 659, Chicago, in May 2024.



"We have thoroughly enjoyed curating this revelatory exhibition of Chryssa's work with our colleagues at the Dia Art Foundation," said Rebecca Rabinow, Director, The Menil Collection. "Dia and the Menil share a commitment to artists whose work emerged in the 1960s and '70s, and our institutions have partnered on exhibitions of work by Joseph Beuys, Brice Marden, and Blinky Palermo. We are proud to now turn our joint focus to Chryssa."

"Though celebrated in her time, Chryssa's work is now rarely seen. The art on view represents her prescient use of neon and industrial processes in sculpture and demonstrates some of her key concerns: abstraction, language, and technical innovation," said Jessica Morgan, Dia's Nathalie De

Gunzburg Director. "I am delighted that Dia and the Menil Collection, institutions with a rich history of collaboration, are mounting this important exhibition for audiences across the United States."

Chryssa & New York calls attention to the artist's deeply formal concerns as well as her critical interest in exploring post-World War II America. The centerpiece of the exhibition is the large-scale work *The Gates to Times Square* 1964–66, considered Chryssa's magnum opus. Restored for this presentation in partnership with the Buffalo AKG Art Museum, which owns the work, this towering interplay of neon, plexiglass, and metal pays homage to the signage and dazzling lights of New York's most famous intersection. Displayed alongside *The Gates* will be works detailing Chryssa's process in realizing this monumental sculpture, including transitional pieces combining metal and neon, as well as examples of her *Studies for The Gates*.

Other key early works include the reductive Cycladic Books 1954–57, a series of plaster and clay reliefs that highlight her interest in the interplay of light and shadow. This abstract series nods to both commercial culture and historic Mediterranean art. John and Dominique de Menil were early champions of her work and saw the connection between their collection of ancient sculpture from the Cycladic islands and Chryssa's Cycladic Books. The exhibition includes reliefs in plaster and metal that deftly capture the phenomenon of shifting natural light in an urban environment and work the artist made using discarded newspaper printing plates, signs, and other metal fragments she found during her frequent visits to Times Square.

"Chryssa was a leader within avant-garde circles while she lived in New York," said Michelle White, Senior Curator, The Menil Collection. "She was fascinated with the sparkling and text-filled space of Times Square and wanted her innovative body of work to capture the energy of this unique postwar environment. By radically bringing together actual materials from the square, including lights and letters, Chryssa's art stands as an early example of work that takes commercial communication as its primary subject."

"*Chryssa & New York* assembles major works from nearly a dozen museum collections within



the United States, demonstrating that, throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s, American institutions collected her work in depth,” said Megan Holly Witko, External Curator, Dia. “Because few of these pieces have been exhibited in recent years, this project has been realized through collaboration with numerous lenders to conserve and treat these fragile works, allowing them to be seen, once again, by the public.”

The exhibition is accompanied by the first major publication about Chryssa in more than thirty years, edited by Sophia Larigakis and co-curators Megan Holly Witko and Michelle White. In addition to Holly Witko and White, contributors include Joy Bloser, Assistant Objects Conservator, The Menil Collection; Lisa Cohen, Associate Professor, Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut; matt dilling, Creative Director and Partner, Lite Brite Neon; Jonathan D. Katz, Associate Professor, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia; artist Tiona Nekkia McClodden; independent scholar Kalliopi Minioudaki; and Tina Rivers Ryan, Assistant Curator, Buffalo AKG Art Museum.

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About Chryssa

Chryssa was born in Athens in 1933. She studied art at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière, Paris, and the California School of Fine Art (now San Francisco Art Institute) before settling in New York in the late 1950s. Following her first solo exhibition at Betty Parsons Gallery, New York, in January 1961, Chryssa was the subject of a one-person show at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, in November of that same year. Her early work with neon technology remains at the forefront of light art. Chryssa’s work has been exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (1963); Documenta, Kassel, Germany (1968); the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1972); the Albright-Knox Art Gallery (now Buffalo AKG Art Museum), New York (1982); and Tate Modern, London (2015). She died in Athens in 2013.

About the Menil Collection

Philanthropists and art patrons John and Dominique de Menil established the Menil Foundation in 1954 to cultivate 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 in central Houston. 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 buildings and surrounding green spaces. menil.org

About Dia Art Foundation

Taking its name from the Greek word meaning “through,” Dia was established in 1974 with the mission to serve as a conduit for artists to realize ambitious new projects, unmediated by overt interpretation and uncurbed by the limitations of more traditional museums and galleries. Dia’s programming fosters contemplative and sustained consideration of a single artist’s body of work and its collection is distinguished by the deep and longstanding relationships that the nonprofit has cultivated with artists whose work came to prominence particularly in the 1960s and ’70s. In addition to Dia Beacon, Dia Bridgehampton, and Dia Chelsea, Dia maintains and operates a constellation of commissions, long-term installations, and site-specific projects, notably focused on Land art, nationally and internationally. These include:

- Walter De Maria's *The New York Earth Room* (1977) and *The Broken Kilometer* (1979), Max Neuhaus's *Times Square* (1977), and Joseph Beuys's *7000 Eichen* (7000 Oaks, inaugurated in 1982 and ongoing), all located in New York City
- De Maria's *The Lightning Field* (1977), in western New Mexico
- Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970), in the Great Salt Lake, Utah
- Nancy Holt's *Sun Tunnels* (1973–76), in the Great Basin Desert, Utah
- De Maria's *The Vertical Earth Kilometer* (1977), in Kassel, Germany
- Cameron Rowland's *Depreciation* (2018)

Funding

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Image Captions

1. Chryssa, *The Gates to Times Square*, 1964-66. Cast aluminum, welded stainless steel, neon glass tubing, Plexiglass, and paper, 120 × 119 × 120 in. (304.8 × 302.3 × 304.8 cm). Collection Buffalo AKG Art Museum; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Albert A. List, 1972. © The Estate of Chryssa, National Museum of Contemporary Art Athens. Photo: Bill Jacobson Studio, New York, Courtesy Dia Art Foundation
2. Chryssa, *Times Square Sky*, 1962. Aluminum, steel, and neon, 60 × 60 × 9 1/2 in. (152.4 × 152.4 × 24.1 cm). Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Gift of the T.B. Walker Foundation, 1964. © The Estate of Chryssa, National Museum of Contemporary Art Athens
3. Chryssa, *Small White Letters*, ca. 1960. Wood, plaster, acrylic paint, and glass, 16 × 16 1/8 × 3 3/4 in. (40.6 × 41 × 9.5 cm). The Menil Collection, Houston, Gift of Adelaide de Menil Carpenter. © The Estate of Chryssa, National Museum of Contemporary Art Athens. Photo: Caroline Philippone

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