Maurizio Cattelan

**Exhibition **

**Maurizio Cattelan: Is There Life Before Death?**

February 12–August 15, 2010

The exhibition catalogue features new works by Maurizio Cattelan and several of his large-scale pieces dating from 2003 to 2007. Published by the Menil Collection, available at the Menil Bookstore and distributed internationally by Yale University Press.

**Notes**

1. Although the phrase could relate to any common usage, it is also the title for the 1969 exhibition by Harold Rosenberg, “Love Is the Drug When Wisdom Awakes Beyond Form.” The innovative exhibition was one of the first to recognize and acknowledge the process of creation as a work of art.

2. Maurizio Cattelan, quoted in Michele Robecchi, “Maurizio Cattelan,” one of the first to recognize and acknowledge the process of creation as a work of art.

3. Maurizio Cattelan, quoted in Andrea Bellini, “An Interview with Maurizio Cattelan,” the artist’s recent sculptures in a new presentation—interacting with works from the Menil Collection.

4. Cattelan was born in 1960 in Padua, Italy. While in his twenties, he saw a small exhibition of mirror paintings by Michelangelo Pistoletto; intrigued, Cattelan asked the gallerist about them. The gallerist’s recommended reading led to Cattelan’s discovery of additional artists, and eventually to his own private course of study and creation. Of that early period Cattelan has said, “Here I was, in my late twenties, with no art education or anything like that, desperately trying to come up with something clever without making a complete fool of myself ... I didn’t even consider myself an artist. To a certain extent, I still don’t.”

5. Despite any doubts Cattelan may have about his identity as an artist, over the last twenty years he has created an impressive body of work in a variety of media, including sculpture, photography, and artistic actions. In addition to his solo work, Cattelan has displayed a continuing passion for the collaborative pictorial essays he has worked on since the mid 1990s. In journals such as Permanent Food, 1996–2007, and, more recently, Clarity, Cattelan has worked with hundreds of artists, writers, curators, and others to produce these eye-popping experiments in graphic design filled with curious juxtapositions of images. Made up of pictures appropriated from various magazines and other sources, Permanent Food included no text, just images from front to back. The editing was carefully done, and though narratives sometimes appeared, most often the choices were based on what layout would leave the greatest, most enduring impression appropriate. Cattelan’s fascination with images—he has said that “more than anything else, I listen to the murmur of image” —is essential to his art making. His desire to create images that linger is evident in many of his artistic choices, certainly in the text-free pictorial essays, but in much of his other work as well. His sculptures are usually fabricated, and his wax figures, tanned animals, and photographs all avoid any display of the artist’s hand. The result, as illustrated by several works in this exhibition, is that the emphasis is squarely on the image, rather than on the art-making process or narrative that might follow. This preoccupation with imagery can be seen even in his conceptual art actions. For An Sunday in Rivara, 1992, his contribution to an early group exhibition at the Castello di Rivara in Italy, Cattelan unfurled sheets in the form of a rope out of a second-story window of the building, hanging at a certain angle, as if to make a ghost appear. Rather than confronting the absurdity of the object or his lack of confidence about making a “beautiful” work of art, Cattelan vanished. But the trace he left behind was more than enough to make us point at the subtext of conceptual art. Along with many of his generational peers, Cattelan seemed to be working against
Cattelan's piece. Cattelan's undomesticated animal was a stand-in for the young artist, bereft of ideas but stubborn enough to make something work. Cattelan's piece. Cattelan's undomesticated animal was a stand-in for the young artist, bereft of ideas but stubborn enough to make something work. Cattelan's piece. Cattelan's undomesticated animal was a stand-in for the young artist, bereft of ideas but stubborn enough to make something work. Cattelan's piece. Cattelan's undomesticated animal was a stand-in for the young artist, bereft of ideas but stubborn enough to make something work.