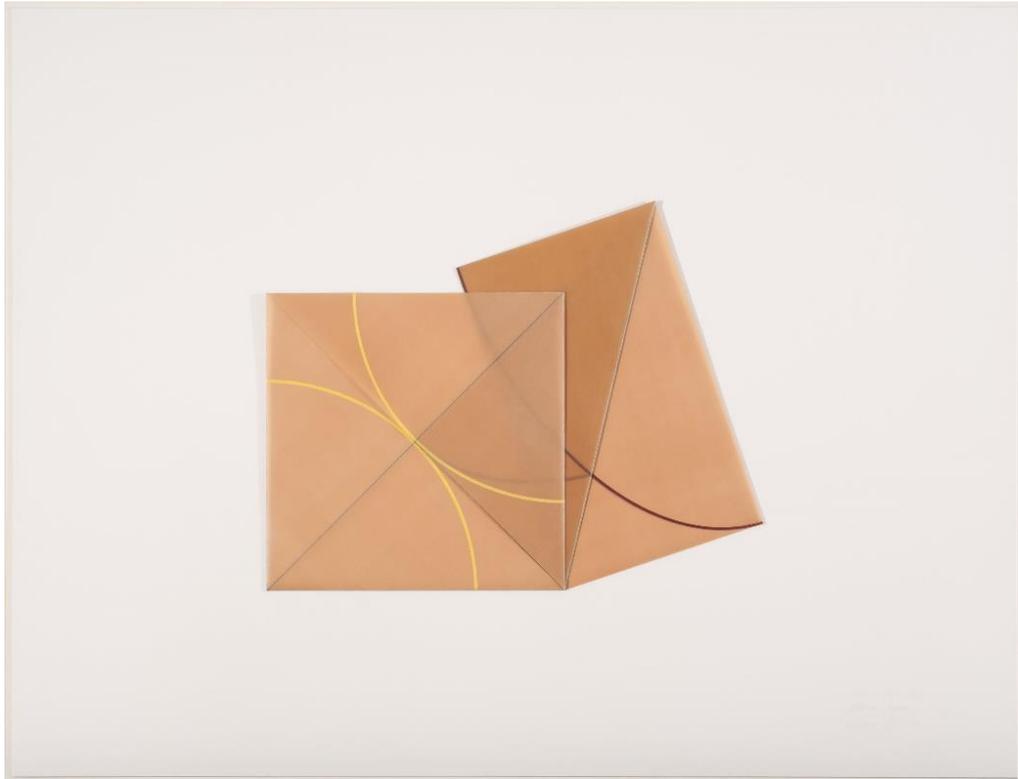


The Menil Collection opens *Spatial Awareness: Drawings from the Permanent Collection* at the Menil Drawing Institute

First exhibition organized as part of the new Menil Drawing Institute Scholars Program explores how artists conceive of and render space



HOUSTON—*September 22, 2021*—The Menil Collection is pleased to present *Spatial Awareness: Drawings from the Permanent Collection*, a thematic exhibition which will bring together a diverse group of 30 drawings from the mid-20th century to the present day that illustrate how artists have conceived of and realized their ambitions to render space, often in unexpected ways.

Spatial Awareness will be **on view at the Menil Drawing Institute October 29, 2021, through March 13, 2022.**

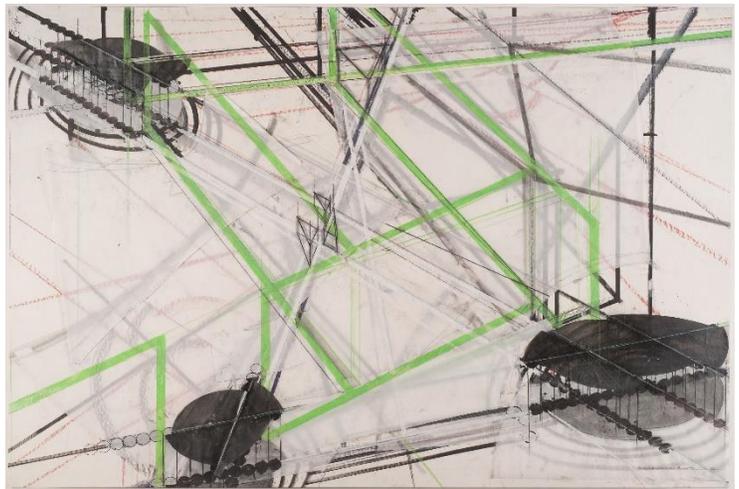
The term “spatial awareness” denotes the understanding of the relationship between one’s body and its surroundings. In this exhibition, visitors will encounter a range of approaches that highlight this connection, including three-dimensional drawings that create physical space rather than represent it, works that emphasize the body in motion through its physical traces, and art that renders space through the clever use of line, illusion, voids, reflection, and transparency.

Rebecca Rabinow, director of the Menil Collection, said: “The Menil Collection is delighted to present *Spatial Awareness*, the first exhibition at the museum organized through the new Menil Drawing Institute Scholars Program. When the Drawing Institute was established as a program in 2008 and with its dedicated building completed in 2018, we set out to provide opportunities for deep engagement and research using our growing permanent collection of modern and contemporary drawings. Our first Pre-Doctoral Fellow at the Drawing Institute, Saskia Verlaan, has organized a fascinating examination of drawings that explore the fundamental role the medium has played in human efforts to record and understand physical space.”

Said Saskia Verlaan, 2020–21 Menil Drawing Institute Pre-Doctoral Fellow, said: “I am honored to have had the opportunity to serve as the Menil Drawing Institute’s first Pre-Doctoral Fellow. Having the chance to dive into such a dynamic collection has been thrilling. As a result, visitors will have the opportunity to explore works that represent the very heart of the Menil Drawing Institute’s mission—works that challenge the conventional and traditional ideas about drawing as a part of the broader reevaluation of the medium as a dynamic and fully independent arena of artistic practice.”

The exhibition highlights technical aspects, such as folding and layering techniques, with standout examples from Dorothea Rockburne and Sam Gilliam. In Rockburne’s *Rectangle, Square, 1978*, her varnished paper is translucent so that viewers can better perceive its layered construction. Her interest in spatial relationships stems from her long-term investigation of the golden section, a mathematical ratio sometimes used for dividing lines and shapes in an aesthetically pleasing proportion. Sam Gilliam has often challenged the conventional flatness of painting and drawing. His untitled work from 2019 asserts its physical materiality with eye-catching hues of blue and orange applied through a folding technique that includes repeatedly soaking absorbent Japanese paper with pigment, resulting in undulating irregular surface layers.

Other drawings in the exhibition bring attention to the social, urban, and architectural environments we inhabit, such as Barry Le Va’s *Drawing Interruptions Blocked Structures #4, 1981*, which uses layers of translucent paper to establish a dynamic, architectonic structure that confounds attempts to resolve the drawing into familiar three-dimensionality. Houston-based artist Rick Lowe’s *Untitled, 2017*, emphasizes the communal space of Project Row Houses, a hub for neighborhood development and arts programs in the city’s Third Ward that he helped establish and has described as “social sculpture.” A longtime player of dominoes, Lowe’s layered network of lines is formed from the contours of the game pieces traced over an aerial view of the neighborhood. The juxtaposition of the interconnected network of red lines plays and the more static, grid-like underdrawing, suggest a notion of space that is formed at the nexus of location and community.



Line again emerges as a vehicle for exploring space in works by Trisha Brown, Richard Tuttle, and Liliana Porter. Brown created *Untitled (Montpellier), 2001*, on the floor as part of a dance performance; as a result, the drawing has no specified top or bottom. A trained dancer and choreographer, Brown used her entire body to make the work, drawing with charcoal held alternately in her fingers and between her toes while standing, crouching, lying, and tumbling over the paper’s surface. While Brown’s drawing will be installed horizontally to convey her movement, Tuttle’s *No. 7, 1992*, will redirect viewers’ attention to the wall, where a single graphite line extends from a small sculpture positioned near to the floor, traveling upwards and onto the ceiling, activating a frequently overlooked space of the museum. Similarly, Porter’s conceptual work, *Mural Circular VI, 1974*, also includes a graphite line inscribed directly on the wall, appearing to make an improbable journey into the depicted space of a photograph, traveling over another blank surface, and onto a posed human hand, maintaining a near-perfect circle all the while. Porter’s work surmounts the boundaries between mediums, surfaces, and, indeed, spaces both real and virtual, revealing the profound physical and conceptual agility at the heart of drawing.

Spatial Awareness: Drawings from the Permanent Collection is curated by Saskia Verlaan, 2020–21 Menil Drawing Institute Pre-Doctoral Fellow.

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 buildings and surrounding green spaces. menil.org

Funding

This exhibition is generously supported by Clare Casademont and Michael Metz; John R. Eckel, Jr. Foundation; Linda and George Kelly; Susanne and William E. Pritchard III; Leslie and Shannon Sasser; and the City of Houston through Houston Arts Alliance.

Images

1. Dorothea Rockburne, *Rectangle, Square*, from the series *Vellum Curve*, 1978. Vellum paper, varnish, and glue, 33 x 43 in. (83.8 x 109.4 cm). The Menil Collection, Houston, Bequest of William F. Stern. © Dorothea Rockburne / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.
2. Barry Le Va, *Drawing Interruptions Blocked Structures #4*, 1981. Mixed media on paper, 48 x 72 1/8 in. (122.1 x 183.4 cm). The Menil Collection, Houston, Bequest of William F. Stern. © Barry Le Va

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