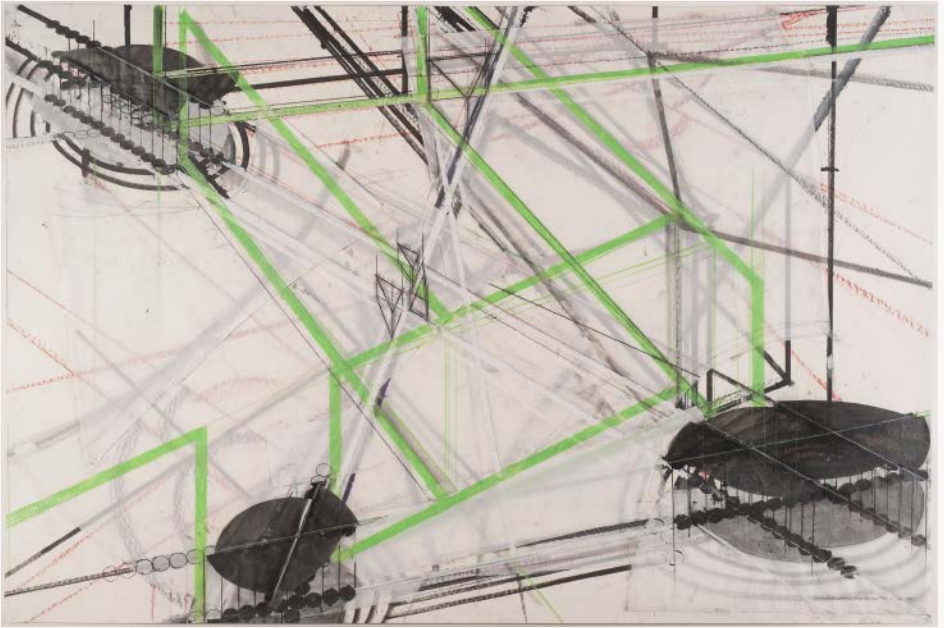


SPATIAL AWARENESS



**DRAWINGS
FROM THE
PERMANENT
COLLECTION**

This thematic exhibition brings together a diverse group of drawings from the mid-20th century to the present that realize the age-old ambition of rendering space, often in unexpected ways. From maps to perspectival rendering, drawing has long served a fundamental role in human efforts to record and understand physical space. During this period, many artists reimagined this task in a manner that challenged its conventions and traditions as part of a broader reevaluation of drawing as a dynamic and fully independent arena of artistic practice. The term “spatial awareness” denotes the understanding of the relationship between one’s body and its surroundings. We 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.

From the 1960s to the present, Sam Gilliam has often challenged the conventional flatness of painting and drawing. An untitled work on paper from 2019, for instance, asserts its physical materiality alongside its eye-catching hues. Produced by folding and repeatedly soaking absorbent Japanese paper with pigment, the drawing beckons viewers to contemplate its undulating, irregular surface as revealed in pooled areas of color and the glimmering iridescence of metallic paint. Dorothea Rockburne also used folding in *Rectangle, Square*, 1978, but to strikingly different effect. In place of Gilliam’s layered pigment, Rockburne varnished her paper to make it translucent so that viewers could better perceive its layered construction. The drawing 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, and captures her interest in exploring the spatial relationships between line, color, structure, and geometry. Such works effectively take on some characteristics of sculpture, blurring the boundaries between mediums.

Other drawings in the exhibition bring attention to the social, urban, and architectural environments we inhabit, which can engage viewers in new or revised understandings of such spaces. In Barry Le Va’s *Drawing Interruptions Blocked Structures #4*, 1981, forceful lines and layers of translucent paper establish a dynamic, architectonic structure that confounds attempts to resolve the drawing into familiar

three-dimensionality. Rick Lowe's *Untitled*, 2017, emphasizes communal space, namely, Project Row Houses, a hub for neighborhood development and arts programs in Houston's Third Ward that he helped establish and that he has described as "social sculpture." A longtime player of dominoes, Lowe layered a network of lines formed from the contours of the game pieces over an aerial view of the area. The shifting, interconnected network of red lines plays against the more static, grid-like underdrawing, suggesting 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. Frequent visitors to the Menil might recall Brown's monumental *Untitled (Montpellier)*, 2002, from previous installations; however, this exhibition marks the museum's first time displaying the work off the wall. The unusual horizontal presentation of such a large drawing reflects the process of its making: Brown created the work on the floor as part of a live dance performance, and thus the drawing has no specified top or bottom. A trained dancer and choreographer, Brown used her entire body in making the work, drawing with charcoal held alternately in her fingers and her toes while standing, crouching, lying, and tumbling over the paper's surface. Her expansive use of space echoes in lines that arc and stutter across the sheet. While many drawings can be said to record traces of the maker's gesture, it resonates particularly strongly here where the work serves as an afterimage of Brown's movement through space. Tuttle's *No. 7*, 1992, redirects our attention to the wall, where a single graphite line extends from a small sculpture positioned near the floor, traveling upwards and onto the ceiling, activating a frequently overlooked space of the museum. Another gallery wall features prominently in Porter's conceptual work, *Mural Circular VI*, 1974. Here, a graphite line inscribed directly on the wall appears 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. With a single line, Porter surmounts the boundaries between mediums, surfaces, and, indeed, spaces both real and virtual. In so doing, she manifests with stark economy the creative and spatial plasticity of the drawn line, revealing the profound physical and conceptual agility at the heart of drawing.

Curated by Saskia Verlaan, 2020–21 Menil Drawing Institute
Pre-Doctoral Fellow.

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Public Programs

Public programs held in conjunction with this exhibition, including Artist Talks with Kate Shepherd (January 13, 2022) and Liliana Porter (February 10, 2022), are listed on the museum's website at menil.org. All public programs are free and open to everyone.

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Exhibition Dates

October 29, 2021–March 13, 2022