

“Earth Paint Paper Wood: Recent Acquisitions” is curated by Clare Elliott, assistant curator at the Menil Collection.

This exhibition is generously supported by William J. Hill and the City of Houston.

PUBLIC PROGRAM

Gallery Talk

“Earth Paint Paper Wood”

Monday, September 20, 8:00 p.m.

This briskly paced evening will introduce a range of sculptures, paintings, and works on paper that have recently entered the collection by gift, purchase, or bequest. Four curators and three conservators from the Menil Collection will each speak briefly about a favorite work.

Cover:

Lee Krasner. *Nude Study from Life*, 1938. Charcoal on paper, 24³/₄ x 19 inches. The Menil Collection, Houston, Gift of William J. Hill in honor of Adelaide de Menil Carpenter. © 2010 The Pollock-Krasner Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo: Paul Hester, Houston

THE MENIL COLLECTION

1515 Sul Ross Street Houston, Texas 77006 713-525-9400
www.menil.org

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Earth Paint Paper Wood Recent Acquisitions



THE MENIL COLLECTION

August 27–November 28, 2010

Visitors to the Menil Collection have long enjoyed the extraordinary array of art assembled by John and Dominique de Menil during their lifetimes. They are perhaps less aware that a key element of the museum's mission is to build on this foundation through the careful addition of works of art by gift, purchase, and bequest. "Earth Paint Paper Wood: Recent Acquisitions" celebrates the ongoing development of the collection by showcasing a selection of newly acquired art that highlights the significance and diversity of gifts and accessions from the last several years. While some of these works have previously been included in exhibitions and collection installations at the Menil, others are being shown for the first time.

The establishment of the Menil Drawing Institute and Study Center has brought a remarkable number of works on paper into the collection. Spanning nearly a century, the newly acquired drawings on view illustrate the breadth of approaches to drawing by artists of the twentieth century, from Lee Krasner's early experiments with abstraction, such as *Nude Study from Life*, 1938; to Suzan Frecon's intuitively composed watercolors on antique paper; to Joe Goode's recent experiments with unique digital prints from the series *Studies on the Past*, 2008. Other drawings illustrate artists' engagement with architecture and landscape, including Michael Heizer's *Transparent Earth: Two Chambers*, 1969, and Max Neuhaus's *Sound Figure*, 2007, a companion drawing to the sound work of the same title, commissioned by the Menil Collection and installed near the building's front entrance.

An unusual group of charcoals by Frank Stella illustrate the artist's work from 1958–59, a seminal point in his career. The influence of Abstract Expressionists on the young artist is clear—he even inscribes the name "Kline," for Franz Kline, at the bottom of three drawings. The charcoal drawings display nothing of the range of colors and sculptural elements Stella would later introduce into his work. One can detect in the vigorous application of the charcoal, however, a re-examination of the movement that would eventually lead to Stella's signature stripe motif.

As the title "Earth Paint Paper Wood" suggests, acquisitions have not been limited to drawings, but have included works in a number of media. Vivid ceramic cups by California artist Ken Price and assemblages by the late Texas artists Jim Love and David McManaway blur the distinction between art and craft. Jay Defeo's *Untitled (cross)*, 1953, stands at the juncture of painting and sculpture. In the small alcove gallery on the west side of the museum, eighteenth-century portraits of Denis Diderot and Voltaire, an oil painting and terracotta sculpture respectively, create a link to the past, connecting today's artists with the great thinkers of the Enlightenment.

Gifts of art from artists themselves, notably a selection of drawings from a large number donated by Claes Oldenburg earlier this year, continue the de Menils' legacy of fostering close relationships with living artists. Street figures rendered with childlike simplicity in a variety of media—collage, crayon, pencil, and ink—were Oldenburg's response to New York in the early 1960s. These figures were



Frank Stella, *Untitled*, ca. 1958–59. Charcoal on paper, 8½ x 11 inches. The Menil Collection, Houston. © 2010 Frank Stella / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo: Hester + Hardaway, Houston

part of an early experiment titled *The Street*, 1961, in which Oldenburg created a gallery installation of urban detritus and staged happenings and theatrical events within. The series *Studies for Store Objects* and *Studies for Store Window*, both 1961, document another of Oldenburg's early radical gestures: the storefront from which the artist sold his own sculptural reproductions of everyday objects.

The Menil's recent acquisitions are not confined to a single gallery space. New additions to the collection by Robert Gober and Robert Rauschenberg may be found in the twentieth-century galleries; a drawing by Dan Fischer that pays homage to René Magritte hangs among the museum's Surrealist collection; two sculptures donated in 2005 by Cy Twombly now have a permanent place in the Cy Twombly Gallery; the newly reinstalled African galleries showcase a stunning nineteenth-century Kongo medicine staff; and finally, the temporary exhibition "Objects of Devotion" includes a recently acquired Persian mace constructed of iron and animal skin.

The ongoing acquisition of new works of the highest quality would not be possible without the support of members of the de Menil and Schlumberger families, the trustees of the Menil Collection, and the many other generous friends of the museum. We wish to dedicate "Earth Paint Paper Wood" to these individuals who make the continued development of the collection possible.

Clare Elliott, Assistant Curator