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PUBLIC OPENING RECEPTION

Thursday, February 20, 7:00 p.m.

Menil Drawing Institute

ARTIST TALK

Brice Marden in Conversation with Assistant Curator Kelly Montana

Friday, February 21, 7:00 p.m.

Main Building

MUSICAL PERFORMANCE

Stop, Look, and Listen!

Da Camera Young Artists Reflect on the Exhibition

Saturday, February 22, 3:00 p.m.

Main Building

LECTURE

Lilly Wei

Romancing the Line: The Drawings of Brice Marden

Wednesday, April 1, 7:00 p.m.

Menil Drawing Institute

CURATOR TALK

Kelly Montana on Brice Marden's *Cold Mountain Studies*

Sunday, June 14, 3:00 p.m.

Menil Drawing Institute

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Think of Them as Spaces Brice Marden's Drawings



THE MENIL DRAWING INSTITUTE
THE MENIL COLLECTION

FRONT Brice Marden, *15 x 15 12*, 2015–17. Ink and colored ink on paper, 20 x 15 in. (50.8 x 38.1 cm). Collection of the artist

INSIDE Brice Marden, *Post and Lintel 7*, 1984/2019. Graphite and wax on paper, 22 ½ x 30 in. (57.2 x 76.2 cm). Collection of the artist

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THE MENIL COLLECTION

FEBRUARY 21–JUNE 14, 2020

Brice Marden (b. 1938) established himself as an artist in the 1960s with monochromatic paintings and drawings that reconciled the reductive forms of Minimalism with gestural abstraction and infused them with a raw, emotive power. In a 1979 statement, he asked that his drawings be seen “as spaces.” This comment suggests that, for him, drawing is a medium that is capable of encompassing and reflecting its present environs as well as the circumstances of its making. Highlighting the catalytic processes of innovation and permutation that occur as he works and thinks on paper, *Think of Them as Spaces: Brice Marden’s Drawings* is a consideration of the artist’s remarkable draftsmanship through six distinct series of drawings that span almost the entirety of his ongoing career.

Nearly forty-five years ago, Marden visited Houston to see the Rothko Chapel for the first time, an occasion that would augur the development of atmospheric color in his art. Shortly thereafter, the Institute for the Arts at Rice University commissioned Marden to create work in direct response to Mark Rothko’s monumental canvases. The result was *The Seasons*, 1974–75, a four-panel painting now held in the Menil Collection that was inspired by the sensorial experiences of nature’s annual cycle, the studies for which are on view. *River Study 1*, 2015, is evocative of those early monochromes, with each of the four sheets that make up the drawing saturated with a different color of oil paint. The applied medium forms a square against which the bottom of the paper is left bare, save for the paint’s drips. The sequence of drawings, titled *15 × 15*, 2015–17, shares *River Study’s* compositional structure, but here he began most of the sheets by laying down a fifteen-high-by-fifteen-across grid of black glyph-like marks. The artist connected these across the sheet with ink lines, tangles, and tails. Marden added lines in vibrantly hued colors and went over select areas of the composition with white ink. However, some whites are translucent, giving the covered marks a presence in the finished composition.

Marden’s earliest explorations of the calligraphic line occurred in the mid-1980s in works like the *Shell Drawings*, 1985–87, which signaled a shift away from his earlier monochromatic art. This particular series refers to sea volutes he found while traveling in Thailand; crucially, Marden drew not the shells themselves but the striations and indentations upon them, releasing the lines from the objects that inspired them. The organic contours dovetail with Marden’s work reflecting his deep engagement with East Asian calligraphy.



In writing traditions based on Chinese script, calligraphers are highly esteemed for their ability to endow a character’s strokes with human rhythms and environmental forces. Moved by the poetry of Han Shan, who may have lived between the sixth and eighth centuries, Marden adapted the structure of the poems to a new body of work called *Cold Mountain Studies*, 1988–91. The poems—most with four couplets of five-character lines, traditionally written vertically—can appear as a grid formation where visual associations could be built between adjacent characters in all directions: vertically, horizontally, and diagonally. Marden’s drawings adapt this form, where skeins of ink at times swell into a dense network of lines. In several sheets, a few bundles of lines remain unattached from the surrounding net, revealing the shared understructure of the work.

One of the earliest series on view in the exhibition happens to be the most recently completed. Marden started the *Post and Lintel* drawings in the early 1980s when he began spending time on the Greek island of Hydra, and he finished them in 2019. They not only allude to classical architecture, they also proceed naturally from the monochromatic paintings and drawings that brought him acclaim early in his career. On each sheet, lightly visible graphite lines define three slabs that top nine elongated masses as well as carefully delimit the vertical and horizontal elements from the edges of the sheet. This particular body of work finds the artist revisiting a geography personally resonant to him as well as methods crucial to his artistic development. As an evolutionary medium in essence, drawing is a natural site for such invention, rendering new lines and movements for artists that intrepidly return to prior terrain.

—Kelly Montana, Assistant Curator