

The Beginning of Everything is curated by David Breslin.

This exhibition is generously supported by Clare Casademont and Michael Metz, Chinhui and Eddie Allen, Anne and David Kirkland, Marilyn Oshman, Leslie and Shannon Sasser, Nina and Michael Zilkha, and the City of Houston.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Notes on Drawing

Friday, February 24, 7:00 p.m.

Artist Terry Winters discusses the importance of drawing in his practice and the relationship of his work to that of other artists in *The Beginning of Everything*.

On the Beginning of Everything

Saturday, February 25, 7:00 p.m.

Art historian Richard Shiff responds to the exhibition.

All public programs are free and open to the public. Menil members enjoy additional events, including a gallery talk with Curatorial Assistant Kelly Montana on Friday, March 31.

Front: Eva Hesse, no title, 1964. Watercolor, gouache, ink, graphite, and paper on paper, 25½ x 19¾ inches (64.8 x 49.8 cm). Promised gift from the Collection of Louisa Stude Sarofim. © 2017 The Estate of Eva Hesse, Courtesy of Hauser & Wirth. Photo: Paul Hester

THE MENIL COLLECTION

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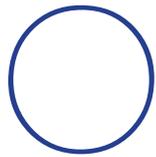
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THE BEGINNING OF EVERYTHING

Drawings from the Janie C. Lee, Louisa Stude Sarofim,
and David Whitney Collections



February 24–June 18, 2017
The Menil Collection



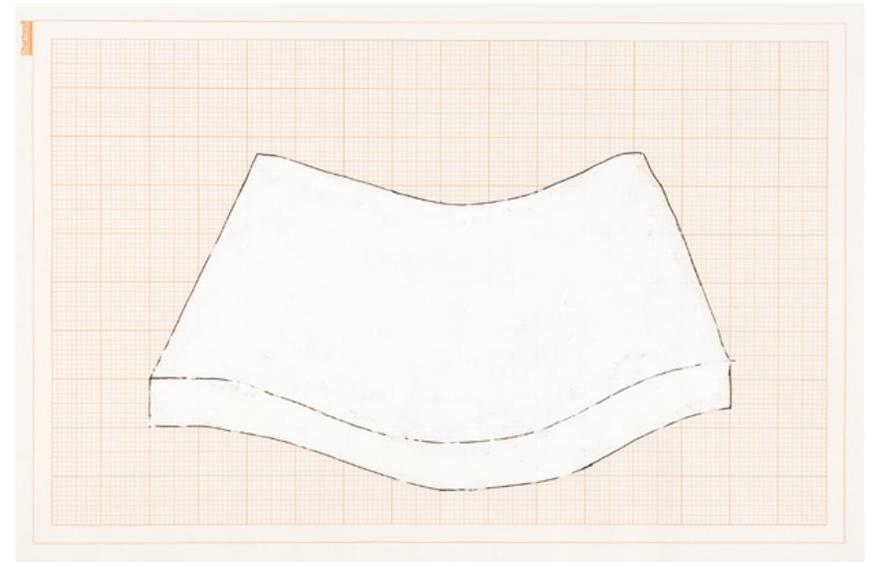
Over a decade ago, three remarkable trustees of the Menil Collection—Janie C. Lee, Louisa Stude Sarofim, and the late David Whitney—began to champion the creation of the Menil Drawing Institute. Since that time, a number of acquisitions have been made and exhibitions, publications, and a major scholarly project organized under its auspices. In October 2017, the Menil will inaugurate the Drawing Institute's newly constructed building, which will serve as a premier venue for the exhibition, study, and conservation of modern and contemporary drawings. As the museum prepares to open this new chapter, we are proud to present nearly one hundred extraordinary nineteenth- and twentieth-century works, all of which are recent promised gifts and bequests from these trustees.

The Beginning of Everything: Drawings from the Janie C. Lee, Louisa Stude Sarofim, and David Whitney Collections derives its title from the words of artist Ellsworth Kelly: "When I see a white piece of paper, I feel like I've got to draw. And drawing, for me, is the beginning of everything." Drawing is particularly well suited to capturing immediate thoughts and impressions. It is an art form instinctively practiced by children and habitually used in architecture, science, and choreography, among other fields. In the European tradition, a drawing might be described as a relatively dry medium—such as chalk, charcoal, graphite, crayon, and/or pastel—applied to paper. Over the past century, however, artists have expanded the possibilities and definition. Drawings can be made with watercolor or oil paint, collaged, or even created from string or rays of light.

The exhibition opens with three figural works. Paul Cézanne's *Bather from the Back* (*Baigneur de dos*), ca. 1877–80, and Edgar Degas's *Study for "The Daughter of Jephthah"* (*Etude pour "La fille de Jephthé"*), ca. 1859, are studies made in preparation for large oil paintings (*Bathers*, ca. 1890, and *The Daughter of Jephthah*, 1859–60, respectively). Although both belong to a centuries-old academic tradition, their descriptions of shape and motion betray a modern sensibility. Philip Guston's *Head*, 1968, said to be a self-portrait, is a figure drawing of a different sort. In its breathtaking economy, the work barely resists abstraction, its line just suggesting a silhouette.

Over the last sixty years, artists' diverse approaches to drawing have altered the very nature of the art form. Robert Rauschenberg was tremendously influential in the expansion of drawing techniques and materials. One of his innovations, seen in the small shadowy figures in *Cage*, 1958, and technical diagrams in *Open Season*, 1961, is a transfer method in which he saturated commercially printed images with chemical solvents and then rubbed them onto paper. Richard Serra frequently uses his body to determine scale. In *T.W.U. #10*, 1980, which was made by pushing an oversized block of paintstick across paper, the measure of the drawing is not defined by the reach of the artist's wrist but by the length of his arm.

In the mid-twentieth century, artists such as Eva Hesse and Vija Celmins became intrigued by repetition and the meditative aspects of drawing. Celmins depicts intricate natural surfaces and textures while Hesse created a number of



Rachel Whiteread, *Study for White Bed*, 1992. Correction fluid, ink, and varnish on graph paper, 12 x 17⁷/₈ inches (30.5 x 45.4 cm). Collection of Janie C. Lee. © 2017 Rachel Whiteread. Photo: Paul Hester

works in which she detailed small circles or colored blocks within the lines of unassuming, commercially printed graph paper. In a drawing on view from 1966, Hesse filled each square of a grid with a single dot and circle of varying opacities. However, rather than work on pre-printed paper, she drew the lines herself—a deviation that further underscores the ephemeral and spontaneous qualities of the medium.

The fourth gallery brings together drawings that depict not the body so much as the bodily. Cy Twombly's thickly scribbled lines in *Untitled*, 1959, and *Untitled (Sunset Series)*, 1959–60, along with Arshile Gorky's floating patches of color in *Study for Agony I*, 1946–47, evoke corporality without correlation to a figure. Jackson Pollock also divorced line from shape, an approach that can be traced back to his early drawings of surreal and biomorphic symbols and led to his expansive dripped-paint canvases. Six of such early works from the 1930s and '40s are on view.

In his influential book *The Pleasure in Drawing*, philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy posits that it is fruitless to argue whether drawing begins in the head or the hand. For him, a drawing is an art form that unites thought and action. Georgia O'Keeffe's *From a River Trip*, 1962, and Rachel Whiteread's *Study for White Bed*, 1992, are both examples of drawings born from everyday activities, whether it be a visit to a desert valley or a stroll past junk on a city sidewalk. The creation of a drawing can come as easily as a breath and be just as essential.

—Kelly Montana, Curatorial Assistant