

First Major Survey of Artwork by Chryssa in North America Since 1982

Chryssa & New York is co-organized by The Menil Collection, Houston, and Dia Art Foundation, New York



HOUSTON—November 30, 2022—The Menil Collection and Dia Art Foundation are pleased to announce an exhibition of work by Chryssa. Under-recognized for decades, the Greek-born artist radically used signage, text, and neon in a practice that bridges Pop, Conceptual, and Minimalist ideas of art making. *Chryssa & New York* is the first major exhibition of work by the artist in the United States since 1982. Focusing on Chryssa's output while she was based in New York from the late 1950s to the early 1970s, this exhibition presents major loans from American and European museums and collections. *Chryssa & New York* will premiere at Dia Chelsea, New York, in March 2023 and **open at the Menil Collection in September 2023**. The exhibition will travel to Wrightwood 659, Chicago, in May 2024.

“Though celebrated in her time, Chryssa’s work is now rarely seen. The art on view will represent her prescient use of neon and industrial processes in sculpture and demonstrate some of her key concerns: abstraction, language, and technical innovation,” said Jessica Morgan, Dia’s Nathalie De Gunzburg Director. “I am delighted that Dia and the Menil Collection, institutions with a rich history of collaboration, are mounting this important exhibition for audiences across the United States.”

“Dia Art Foundation and the Menil Collection are connected through the patronage of the de Menil family,” said Rebecca Rabinow, Director, the Menil Collection. “The institutions share a commitment to artists whose work emerged in the 1960s and ’70s and have partnered on exhibitions of work by Joseph Beuys, Brice Marden, and Blinky Palermo. We are proud to now turn our joint focus to Chryssa’s work.”

Chryssa & New York brings together the artist’s deeply formal concerns with her critical interest in exploring post–World War II America. At the centerpiece of the exhibition is the large-scale work *The Gates to Times Square* (1964–66), considered Chryssa’s magnum opus. Restored for this presentation in partnership with the Buffalo AKG Art Museum, which owns the work, this towering interplay of neon, plexiglass, and metal pays homage to the signage and dazzling lights of New York’s most famous intersection. Displayed alongside *The Gates* will be works detailing Chryssa’s process in realizing this monumental sculpture, including transitional pieces combining metal and neon, as well as examples of her Studies for *The Gates*.

Other key early works include the enigmatic Cycladic Books (1954–57), a series of plaster and clay reliefs that highlight her interest in the interplay of light and shadow. This series nods to both commercial culture and ancient Mediterranean art. Additional reliefs in plaster and metal also deftly capture the phenomenon of shifting natural light. Experimenting with different formal approaches, Chryssa explored typography from a variety of angles and made work using the newspaper printing plates and discarded signs and metal fragments she found in her frequent visits to Times Square.

“*Chryssa & New York* assembles major works from nearly a dozen museum collections within the United States, demonstrating that, throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s, American institutions collected her work in depth,” said Megan Holly Witko, External Curator, Dia. “Because few of these pieces have been exhibited in recent years, this project has been realized through collaboration with numerous lenders to conserve and treat these fragile works, allowing them to be seen, once again, by the public.”

“Chryssa was a leader within avant-garde circles while she lived in New York,” said Michelle White, Senior Curator, the Menil Collection. “Her fascination with the sparkling and text-filled urban space of Times Square led to work that not only addresses but also radically deploys the phenomena of this commercial environment. It therefore constitutes some of the earliest art that critically incorporated these then-new material forms of communication.”

The exhibition is accompanied by the first major publication about Chryssa in more than thirty years, edited by Sophia Larigakis and co-curators Megan Holly Witko and Michelle White. In addition to Holly Witko and White, contributors include Joy Bloser, Assistant Objects Conservator, the Menil Collection; Lisa Cohen, Associate Professor, Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut; Matt Dilling, Creative Director and Partner, Lite Brite Neon; Jonathan D. Katz, Associate Professor, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia; artist Tiona Nekkia McClodden; independent scholar Kalliopi Minioudaki; and Tina Rivers Ryan, Assistant Curator, Buffalo AKG Art Museum.

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About Chryssa

Chryssa was born in Athens in 1933. She studied art at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière, Paris, and the California School of Fine Art (now San Francisco Art Institute) before settling in New York in the late 1950s. Following her first solo exhibition at Betty Parsons Gallery, New York, in January 1961, Chryssa was the subject of a one-person show at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, in November of that same year. Her early work with neon technology remains at the forefront of light art. Chryssa's work has been exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (1963); Documenta, Kassel, Germany (1968); the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1972); the Albright-Knox Art Gallery (now Buffalo AKG Art Museum), New York (1982); and Tate Modern, London (2015). She died in Athens in 2013.

About the Menil Collection

Philanthropists and art patrons John and Dominique de Menil established the Menil Foundation in 1954 to cultivate 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 in central Houston. 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

About Dia Art Foundation

Taking its name from the Greek word meaning "through," Dia was established in 1974 with the mission to serve as a conduit for artists to realize ambitious new projects, unmediated by overt interpretation and uncurbed by the limitations of more traditional museums and galleries. Dia's programming fosters contemplative and sustained consideration of a single artist's body of work and its collection is distinguished by the deep and longstanding relationships that the nonprofit has cultivated with artists whose work came to prominence particularly in the 1960s and '70s. In addition to Dia Beacon, Dia Bridgehampton, and Dia Chelsea, Dia maintains and operates a constellation of commissions, long-term installations, and site-specific projects, notably focused on Land art, nationally and internationally. These include:

- Walter De Maria's *The New York Earth Room* (1977) and *The Broken Kilometer* (1979), Max Neuhaus's *Times Square* (1977), and Joseph Beuys's *7000 Eichen* (7000 Oaks, inaugurated in 1982 and ongoing), all located in New York City
- De Maria's *The Lightning Field* (1977), in western New Mexico
- Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970), in the Great Salt Lake, Utah
- Nancy Holt's *Sun Tunnels* (1973–76), in the Great Basin Desert, Utah
- De Maria's *The Vertical Earth Kilometer* (1977), in Kassel, Germany

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Image Caption

Chryssa, *The Gates to Times Square*, 1964–66. © Estate of Chryssa. Photo: Bill Jacobson Studio, New York

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