

**NEW EXHIBITION, *THE PRECARIOUS*, EXPLORES HOW ARTISTS
IN POST-1945 AMERICA ADOPTED THE TRADITION OF COLLAGE**

On View Exclusively in Houston through May 1, 2016



HOUSTON, TX, November 25, 2015 — The medium of collage entered modern art in the first years of the 20th century through the hands of Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, bringing with it possibilities for formal experimentation and new meanings that today's artists continue to deploy and investigate.

To explore the sensibilities and worldviews that underlie collage, and to document the special place this medium held for U.S. artists in the wake of World War II, the Menil Collection will present *The Precarious*. Comprised of 30 works on paper and sculpture by thirteen artists, the exhibition casts new light on a strain of practice that brings to the

foreground reconstituted materials which are worn, distressed, or discarded. Such rescued and reassembled materials transformed into art implicitly speak to social concerns. The poet and critic Guillaume Apollinaire described the then-novel medium of collage as “steeped in humanity.” The implication was that many hands were tacitly responsible for a work’s manufacture. *The Precarious* takes a focused look at works in the Menil’s collection indebted to the collage tradition and the metaphors that attend the medium.

Opening on December 16, the exhibition will remain on view exclusively at the Menil through May 1 of next year.

The post-World War II works in the exhibition are drawn from the Menil’s holdings with two loans from private collections. The artists included are: John Chamberlain, Gene Charlton, Sari Dienes, Ellsworth Kelly, Elizabeth McFadden, Robert Nickle, Claes Oldenburg, Robert Rauschenberg, Anne Ryan, Richard Tuttle, and Cy Twombly.

Bookending the works of these artists, chronologically and geographically, are collages from the 1920s by the German-born Kurt Schwitters (1887-1948) and two contemporary works by the Vietnamese-born Danh Vō (born 1975).

The Precarious is curated by David Breslin, the John R. Eckel, Jr. Foundation Chief Curator of the Menil Drawing Institute – his first since joining the Menil earlier this year. Breslin said, “The framework for the exhibition comes from the philosopher Judith Butler’s contention that dependence and fragility are the agents that shape community. ‘Precariousness,’ Butler wrote in 2009, ‘implies living socially, that is, the fact that one’s life is always in some sense in the hands of the other.’”

The lesson is not a new one, it can be seen as far back as the writings of Homer and in Greek tragedies that reflect on the consequences of war, but one could argue that World War II and the horrors that attended it heightened our awareness of the condition. The difficulties of survival and the importance of coexistence became obvious; nations needed to be allied, refugees needed accommodation, and cities needed to be rebuilt. The exhibition concentrates on a strain of artistic practice that foregrounds how precariousness is as much a social phenomenon as an aesthetic concern. Employing unstable materials that speak of past lives and alternative uses, collage embodies the joy and vulnerability that come with depending on others.

Added Menil Director Josef Helfenstein, “*The Precarious* demonstrates the wide knowledge, profound insight, and humane touch that David Breslin brings to our museum. Surprising and moving, this exhibition is both a substantial contribution to our understanding of modern and contemporary art and a promise of great things to come from the MDI under David’s leadership.”

The Precarious is generously supported by the John R. Eckel, Jr. Foundation; McGovern Foundation; Scott and Judy Nyquist; Susanne and William E. Pritchard III; Architectural Digest; and the City of Houston.

Public Programs

Conversation with an Artist

Friday, January 29, 7:00 p.m.

David Breslin, curator of *The Precarious*, discusses the exhibition with Vietnamese-born artist Danh Vō, who grew up in Copenhagen after his family fled Vietnam by boat in 1979. Vō's conceptual installations and sculptural works have appeared internationally, and he is the winner of the 2012 Hugo Boss Prize.

The Precarious, the Social, the Parochial

Tuesday, February 9, 7:00 p.m.

Director of the Rothko Chapel David Leslie and curator David Breslin discuss the way art creates and reflects communities.

All public programs are free and open to the public. Menil members enjoy additional programs and events. Visit the museum or menil.org for more information.

About the Menil Collection

A legacy of the late philanthropists John and Dominique de Menil, the Menil Collection opened in 1987. Housed in the first United States building designed by the Italian architect Renzo Piano, the Menil Collection’s main museum building anchors the 30-acre campus, which includes the Cy Twombly Gallery, a site-specific Dan Flavin installation, the Byzantine Fresco Chapel— now a venue for long-term installations by contemporary artists— and outdoor sculpture. A new building for the Menil Drawing Institute by Johnston Marklee and expected to open in 2017 will be the first freestanding facility in the United States designed expressly for the exhibition and study of modern and contemporary drawings. Presenting regular rotations of artworks from the growing permanent collection, the Menil also organizes special exhibitions and programs throughout the year, publishes scholarly books, and conducts research into the conservation of modern and contemporary art. The museum is open Wednesday through Sunday, 11am to 7pm, and charges no admission fee.

www.menil.org

www.facebook.com/menilcollection/

www.twitter.com/menilcollection

www.instagram.com/menilcollection/

#

Image: Richard Tuttle, II, 3, 1977. Watercolor and collage on paper, 14 × 11 in. (35.6 × 27.9 cm). The Menil Collection, Houston, Bequest of William F. Stern. © Richard Tuttle

Press Contact:

Menil Press Office

Vance Muse or Tommy Napier

713 535 3170 / press@menil.org

www.menil.org