

Leaps into the Void: Documents of Nouveau Realist Performance

On View at The Menil Collection March 19 – August 8, 2010

Presented in Conjunction with FotoFest 2010 – 13th International Biennial of Photography and Photo-related Art



Houston, February 9, 2010 – Pyrotechnics, exploding pigment, blowtorches, lacerated décollage, and found materials: these radical media, tools, and gestures characterize Nouveau Réalisme (New Realism), the avant-garde movement founded in Paris in 1960 by Pierre Restany and Yves Klein. Together, the noted art critic and artist drew their inspiration from the contrarian, anti-art philosophies of Dada.

Conceived and organized by Associate Curator Michelle White, *Leaps into the Void: Documents of Nouveau Realist*

Performance will include nearly 40 works by artists associated with the group, including Niki de Saint Phalle, Jean Tinguely, Martial Raysse, Christo, Mimmo Rotella, and Arman. All held to the belief that direct and

aggressive physical explorations – characterized by a paradoxical emphasis on notions of deconstruction and accumulation, as well as the use of the detritus and debris of everyday life (in the tradition of Dada) – could lead to a more truthful understanding of modern society. This was especially so at a moment of rising, rampant consumerism. “If one succeeds at reintegrating oneself with the real,” according to one tenet of the First Manifesto of Nouveau Réalisme, “one achieves transcendence, which is emotion, sentiment, and finally, poetry.”

Highlighting the temporality of a lesser-known avant-garde movement, the exhibition will demonstrate how New Realism actively engaged with other conceptual and performance-based

art as it was emerging in the United States. Along with Fluxus, Assemblage, and Pop Art, Nouveau Réalisme remains influential in the history of modern art.

Drawn from the Menil's archives and permanent collection, ***Leaps into the Void: Documents of Nouveau Realist Performance*** will include film, photographs, painting, collage, and other media, pertaining to the movement's ephemeral and performance-based projects.

The lasting influence of Nouveau Réalisme is epitomized by Yves Klein's *Leap into the Void*. These remarkable photographs – in which the elusive Harry Shunk captured the artist leaping from a Paris rooftop, seemingly launching himself into space – will be shown along with other documents of the act. Among these will be Klein's mock Sunday newspaper, a guerilla intervention played out on the streets of Paris that reported on the artist's gravity-defying feat, emblazoned with the headline, "A Man in Space! The Painter of space throws himself into the Void."

Shunk, who effectively served as Nouveau Réalisme's house photographer, created extensive records of the artists' work. He also photographed the artists themselves, including the Belgian surrealist René Magritte and American pop artist Roy Lichtenstein. After Klein's death in 1962, Shunk remained active on the scene, documenting the works of Tinguely, Saint Phalle, and Christo; steadily, however, he became more reclusive, not responding to publishers' letters or lucrative offers for his archive. (After Shunk's death in 2006 the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation acquired the collection of some 100,000 items.)

The exhibition will also feature works by Niki de Saint Phalle, well known for her "shooting paintings". Using plaster, paint, and a .22 caliber rifle, Saint Phalle would elevate her works onto a platform and open fire, exploding bags of pigment – thereby creating a work of art. Saint Phalle often collaborated with her husband, Jean Tinguely. A founding member of the group, Tinguely satirized the overproduction of material goods in industrialized society by constructing kinetic sculptures with junkyard scraps, a process he called metamechanics. Tinguely's machines stand as an embodiment of the Nouveau Realist philosophy -- in the words of Pierre Restany, "a poetic recycling of urban, industrial, and advertising reality."



Public Programs

Saturday, March 20, 2010, 3:00 pm

Michelle White on Harry Shunk's *Leaps into the Void*

FotoFest Gallery Talk

On October 23, 1960, photographer Harry Shunk's camera captured artist Yves Klein hurling himself from a Parisian rooftop. The now iconic photographs that capture this moment are shrouded in secrecy. Join exhibition curator Michelle White for a gallery talk about Shunk's photographs. Main foyer, The Menil Collection. Admission is free but seated is limited.

Sunday, March 21, 2010, 7:30 p.m.

Outdoor Film Screening

Yves Klein, la révolution bleue

(France, 2006) Directed by François Lévy-Kuentz Category : Documentary. France/2006/Betacam/colour, b&w/52 min/French

Lévy-Kuentz' "documentary fiction" is a remarkable introduction to abstract art through one of its most influential personalities. Yves Klein's career lasted only eight years, from 1954 to 1962, but he managed to shake the foundations of modern art. This portrait, featuring unreleased archival material (including Klein's own films), examines the artist's meteoric career and the mysterious correlations running through his work. Co-sponsored by the Consulate General of France in Houston and the Texan-French Alliance for the Arts.

Friday, April 9, 2010, 8:00 pm

Film Screening: From the Menil Archive: "Leaps Into the Void," with Andrea Grover

Andrea Grover, the founder of Aurora Picture Show, presents a program of newly discovered and largely unseen films and videos that resonate with the exhibition "Leaps into the Void."

Co-presented with Aurora Picture Show

***Leaps into the Void: Documents of Nouveau Realist Performance*, part of FotoFest 2010, is generously supported by Louisa Stude Sarofim, Mr. and Mrs. Harry Pinson, The Levant Foundation, Michael Zilkha, the Texan-French Alliance for the Arts and the Consulate General of France in Houston, and the City of Houston.**

Photo captions: Harry Shunk *Saut dans le vide (Leap into the Void)*, 1960, Oct. 23 Silver gelatin 13-7/8 x 10-3/4 inches The Menil Collection, Houston Shunk-Kender (c) Roy Lichtenstein Foundation

Jean Tinguely / Niki de Saint-Phalle *M.O.N.S.T.R.E.*, 1964 Motorized assemblage: cast steel and iron, painted newsprint and fabric over wire; electric motor, plastic, rubber and plastic toys, fabric and twine 92-7/8 x 60-3/4 x 40 inches w/base. (88-5/8 x 60-3/4 x 38 inches w/o base) The Menil Collection, Houston, gift of the artists

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**For further information and images,
please contact Gretchen Bock Sammons: tel 713.525.3170, or press@menil.org.
The Menil Collection, located within Houston's Museum District,
is open Wednesday through Sunday, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.
Admission and parking are always free.**

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