

Silence

**On view at the Menil Collection July 27 – October 21, 2012,
exhibition explores the realm of silence in modern and contemporary art**

Co-organized by the Menil and Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive

**Featuring works drawn from the museum's permanent collection plus loans from
U.S. and European public and private collections – and a special film and video
series, "The Sounds of Silence"**

Exhibition Preview: Thursday, July 26, 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.

Houston, June 29, 2012 – Whether experienced as a source of inspiration, enigmatic force, or unsettling limbo zone, silence is elusive in today's world. Inspired by John Cage's 1952 groundbreaking composition 4'33" (and the 100th anniversary of the composer's birth), ***Silence*** – co-organized by the Menil Collection and the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAM/PFA) – offers a thorough and stirring exploration of the exhibition's subject.

Conceived by Toby Kamps, Menil curator of modern and contemporary art, the exhibition means to "examine a few of the many attempts in which artists have employed the absence of sound or speech over the last century." These attempts, Kamps added, have embraced silence as phenomenon, metaphor, force – and as an environmental state expressed in performance. Silence can also possess and convey powerful political meaning.

Ranging from uncanny to incantatory to experiential, the broad range of works on view in the exhibition are not all without sound, but all reflect the many ways in which artists invoke silence to shape space and consciousness.

Silence opens at the Menil on Friday, July 27 (with a public preview and wine reception the previous evening, starting at 7:00 p.m.). The exhibition will remain on view in

Houston through October 21, then travel to BAM/PFA (Berkeley exhibition dates: January 30 – April 28, 2013).

Beginning with forebears Giorgio de Chirico and René Magritte, the exhibition advances to a number of artists who came of age in the 1950s and 60s, including Robert Rauschenberg and Ad Reinhardt, and such European contemporaries as Josef Beuys (*The Silence of Marcel Duchamp is Overrated*) and Yves Klein (*Untitled, Monogold*).

Described by Kamps as “the silent big bang” at the heart of the exhibition – Cage’s *4’33”* stands as perhaps the most legendary deployment of avant-garde silence. This three-part piano piece, first performed in 1952 by virtuoso David Tudor, contains no actual playing of music. It instead calls attention to the ambient sounds surrounding the audience, corroborating Cage’s assertion that there is “no such thing as silence” – that the natural world is continually generating new forms of music. (Many audience members walked out of that debut performance; the piece has since become a cult classic and a staple in music programs worldwide.)

Cage cited Rauschenberg’s White Paintings as a prime stimulus for *4’33”*, calling the flat white canvases “airports for the lights, shadows, and particles.” One work from that series – *White Painting (Two Panel)*, from 1951 – will be on view in the exhibition.

Among the show’s paintings, sculptures, performances, sound, and video works are the iconic *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making* (1961) by Robert Morris, a small wooden cube containing the three-and-one-half-hour audio recording of its fabrication; a work by Bruce Nauman, *Violence Violins Silence* (1981-82), flashing the words of its title in neon; and documentation of the performance piece *One Year Performance* (1978-79) by Tehching Hsieh, for which the artist spent a year in a cage without speaking, reading, writing, listening to the radio, or watching television.

Silence builds on selections from 20th-century masters with challenging recent work by younger artists. Mark Manders, a Dutch sculptor working in Belgium and the Netherlands, has made two new installations for the show. *Silent Head on a Concrete Floor* (2011) depicts a vertical slice of a head bound by straps between piano key-like wooden slats, all resting on a newspaper of the artist’s invention that uses every word in the English language in random order. Another noteworthy piece is Kurt Mueller’s *Cenotaph* (2011), a neon-festooned Rock-Ola Legend jukebox filled with 100 CD recordings of historical, commemorative moments of silence.

Other contemporary innovators include Manon de Boer, Jennie C. Jones, Jacob Kirkegaard, Christian Marclay, Amalia Pica, Doris Salcedo, Tino Sehgal, Stephen Vitiello, and Martin Wong.

The BAM/PFA film and video component of the exhibition, “The Sounds of Silence” – developed by that institution’s video curator, Steve Seid, and to be presented at the Rice Media Center in September – features a selection of groundbreaking films that investigate the influence of sound on moving images and also the sometimes–intertwined sources of sound and images. The three-part film and video program includes works by 21 filmmakers, videographers, and intermedia artists, ranging from Maya Deren’s *Meshes of an Afternoon* and Joseph Cornell’s *Rose Habart*, abstractions by Stan Brakhage and Nam June Paik, work by video pioneer Steina, and pieces by young artists who work across genres and mediums.

Works by Steve Roden and Stephen Vitiello – on view in the museum and to be performed at the Rothko Chapel the day after the exhibition opening, on Saturday, July 28 at 2:00 p.m. – form a bridge between the visual art and moving-image components of **Silence**.

Silence is accompanied by a comprehensive exhibition catalogue, whose publication is generously supported by L&M Arts. Interpretive essays – by exhibition curator Toby Kamps; Steve Seid, video curator at BAM/PFA; and art historian Jenni Sorkin – explore silence as both subject and medium. The volume also includes more than forty full-color plates and as well as comprehensive information on the exhibited works and artists.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Four public programs – featuring performances by sound artists, “music for silence”, film, and dance – will be presented in conjunction with the exhibition. See **Silence** Public Programs calendar, following.

This exhibition is generously supported by Louisa Stude Sarofim, Fayez Sarofim, The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Leslie and Shannon Sasser, Michael Zilkha, The Four Seasons Hotel Houston, Paul and Janet Hobby, Ann and Henry Hamman, Lea Weingarten, proceeds from Men of Menil, and the City of Houston

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SILENCE PUBLIC PROGRAMS

CONCERT

Saturday, July 28, 2012, 2:00 p.m.

The Rothko Chapel

As If They Were Not There: Sound Art in the Rothko Chapel

Three sound artists—Jacob Kirkegaard; and Steve Roden working with Stephen Vitiello—perform in the Rothko Chapel.

Jacob Kirkegaard: *A Capella*

Kirkegaard will create a work during the chapel program built from ambient sound. The room's unheard resonant tones will be recorded, then played back and re-recorded in layer on layer over 30 minutes.

Steve Roden and Stephen Vitiello: *The Spaces Contained in Each*

Roden and Vitiello will collaborate in an improvised performance that uses recordings of relative silence—pauses and silences on published recordings, for example, as well as field recordings made by both artists. Sources include North African 78-rpm records; famous rock records; and LP recordings of performances of John Cage's 4'33". Additional recordings made by each artist in relation to silence and 4'33" will also be used. The material will be manipulated in realtime, electronically, and will speak to the meditative character of the space.

FILM

Mondays in September, 2012

Rice Media Center

The Sounds of Silence: Three Evenings of Film

Steve Seid, video curator at the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, presents a three-part screening series of experimental films and video works dating back to 1936. *A Kind of Hush* examines the aesthetics of silence in avant-garde practice; *Sonic Slippage* and *Sourcing Sound* emphasize the use of sound as a subversive tool and subject of study.

***A Kind of Hush* (91 minutes)**

Monday, September 10, 2012, 7:00 p.m.

Opening reception, 6:00 p.m.

Includes works by Stan Brakhage, Maya Deren and Alexander Hammid, and Nam June Paik, with an introduction by Steve Seid

***Sonic Slippage* (76 minutes)**

Monday, September 17, 2012, 7:00 p.m.

Includes works by Rebecca Baron and Douglas Goodwin, Bruce Conner, and Steina

***Sourcing Sound* (76 minutes)**

Monday, September 24, 2012, 7:00 p.m.

Includes works by Rudy Lemcke, Semiconductor, and Scott Wolniak

CONCERT

Tuesday, October 9, 2012, 7:00 p.m.

Music For Silence

Sarah Rothenberg, artistic director of Da Camera, performs works for the piano including John Cage's 1952 modernist milestone 4' 33". During those 4 minutes and 33 seconds, the piano at which the pianist sits remains silent; and Cage's work instead frames the random environmental sounds of each performance. Rothenberg's piano recital includes work by Cage's musical heroes, Satie and Schoenberg.

DANCE

Saturday, October 13, 2012. Noon and 3 p.m.

Dan Flavin Installation, 1500 Richmond Avenue

Deborah Hay: *Richmond Hall*

Deborah Hay and six other dancers perform her site-specific work *Richmond Hall* at the museum's permanent Dan Flavin installation. A member of the Judson Dance Theater, Hay participated in the founding of postmodern dance. In October, 1966, she took part in the legendary 9 Evenings: Theater and Engineering, at New York's 69th Regiment Armory. Winner of a 2004 Bessie, she was among the twenty-one American performing artists who recently received the first Doris Duke Artists award. Deborah Hay has lived in Austin since 1976.