

The Menil Collection Presents *Abstraction after Modernism: Recent Acquisitions,* Opening April 26, 2024

Exhibition spotlights recent museum acquisitions while showcasing the breadth of artists' approaches to abstraction since the mid-20th century



HOUSTON—March 26, 2024—The Menil Collection is pleased to announce *Abstraction after Modernism: Recent Acquisitions*, on view April 26–August 25, 2024. The exhibition highlights work made by artists who have forged new paths in their approaches to non-representational art. The Menil has actively grown its collection through acquisitions, promised gifts, and bequests, acquiring significant works by women and artists of color. Bringing together acquisitions made by the Menil over the past fifteen years, the display includes work by Agnes Denes, Suzan Frecon, Sam Gilliam, Leslie Hewitt, Dorothy Hood, Ellsworth Kelly, Rick Lowe, and Richard Serra, among others.

The show opens with four mixed media works from Sam Gilliam's *Jail Jungle* series of the late 1960s. The series—three-dimensional assemblages that reference self-portraiture and are uniquely positioned among Gilliam's oeuvre—were created from found

objects and ephemera that surrounded Gilliam's studio practice and highlight his penchant for exploration. Gilliam belonged to a generation of Black artists who ignited impactful conversations around race and abstraction, and his work was included in *The De Luxe Show*, a breakthrough 1971 Houston presentation underwritten by the Menil Foundation.

The Menil's founders, John and Dominique de Menil, believed that abstract art offers alternative and spiritual ways of approaching reality. "In a world cluttered with images," Dominique said, "only abstract art, can bring us to the threshold of the divine." Abstract Expressionism, a modernist movement that rose to prominence in the United States during the 1940s and 1950s, was a particular interest of theirs. They collected major paintings by Barnett Newman and Mark Rothko, as well as by subsequent generations of artists who continued the legacy.

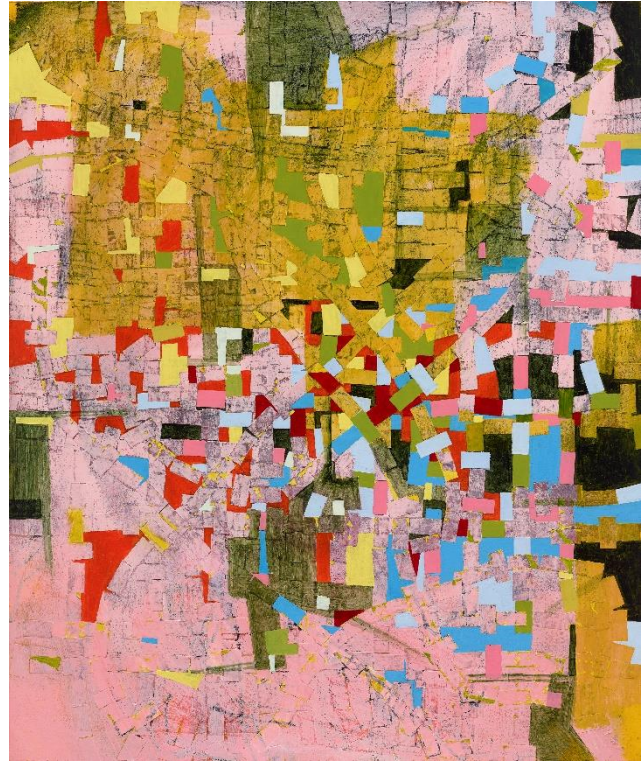
Michelle White, Senior Curator, The Menil Collection, said, "This exhibition is a celebration of how the museum's holdings have grown and evolved, and it reflects the conviction of our founders that modern art, especially abstraction, can illuminate the ineffable and create a place

for the spiritual after World War II. The works on view reflect this enduring belief, shared by many contemporary artists, that the language of abstraction can be a deep and direct expression of the world around us.”

Two galleries of the exhibition will be devoted to individual artists—Leslie Hewitt and Richard Tuttle—both of whom will install their pieces at the Menil for this presentation.

Kelly Montana, Assistant Curator, The Menil Drawing Institute, said, “A suite of recent acquisitions evidence the museum’s longstanding and stalwart commitment to artists, both deepening existing relationships as well as opening new paths to support contemporary artistic vision.”

Abstraction after Modernism is curated by Michelle White, Senior Curator, and Kelly Montana, Assistant Curator, The Menil Drawing Institute.



About The Menil Collection

Philanthropists and art patrons John and Dominique de Menil established the Menil Foundation in 1954 to foster greater public understanding and appreciation of art, architecture, culture, religion, and philosophy. In 1987, the Menil Collection’s main building opened to the public. Today, the Menil Collection consists of art buildings and green spaces in a residential neighborhood in central Houston. The Menil remains committed to its founders’ belief that art is essential to human experience and welcomes all visitors free of charge to its buildings and surrounding green spaces. menil.org

Funding

This exhibition is generously supported by Nora and Bob Ackerley; Bettie Cartwright; Hilda Curran; Barbara and Michael Gamson; Linda and George Kelly; Franci Neely; Carol and David Neuberger; Scott and Judy Nyquist; Bill Stewart and Johanna Brassert; and the City of Houston through Houston Arts Alliance.

Image Captions

1. Dorothy Hood, *Clouds*, 1970. Oil on canvas, 120 × 96 in. (304.8 × 243.8 cm). The Menil Collection, Houston, Purchased with funds provided by Janet and Paul Hobby, Linda and George Kelly, Franci Neely, Westwood Wealth Management, Poppi Massey, Mark and GERALYN Kever, and Susanne and William E. Pritchard III. © Dorothy Hood. Photo: James Craven
2. Rick Lowe, *Untitled*, 2020. Acrylic paint and paper collage on canvas, 72 × 60 in. (182.9 × 152.4 cm). The Menil Collection, Houston, purchased with funds provided by the John R. Eckel, Jr. Foundation. © Rick Lowe Studio

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