

THE MENIL COLLECTION PRESENTS
BETWEEN LAND AND SEA: ARTISTS OF THE COENTIES SLIP
ON VIEW THROUGH AUGUST 6, 2017

Installation of Early Abstract Paintings by Ellsworth Kelly Hang in the Museum's
Foyer in Dialogue with the Exhibition



HOUSTON, TEXAS, May 2, 2017 – Chryssa (1993- 2013), Robert Indiana (b. 1928), Ellsworth Kelly (1923-2015), Agnes Martin (1912- 2004), Lenore Tawney (1907-2007), and Jack Youngerman (b. 1926) were among a group of artists, writers, filmmakers, and poets who lived, worked, or spent time on the Coenties Slip. The small, funnel-shaped street led to the East River in the old seaport on the lower tip of Manhattan, and it offered views of the Brooklyn Bridge, cheap rents, and distance from the bustle of the city center. The artist's studios were the defunct eighteenth-century sail-making lofts and industrial spaces facing the water. Known as "the Slip," the street's remove and its proximity to nature proved formative for its inhabitants, as did their influence on each other. The paintings, sculptures, and drawings they produced constitute an important but overlooked facet of abstraction in postwar American art.

Said Curator Michelle White, "The artists of Coenties Slip were interested in using the natural world as a touchstone for formal exploration. This community of colleagues, friends, and lovers exchanged ideas and influences. Notable are formal similarities between Lenore Tawney's woven threads and Martin's diaphanous compositions of taut marks of graphite and paint."

While the works in the exhibition are stylistically and materially distinct, the selection is united by the artists' desire to discover new forms of abstraction. Each artist began her

or his career during the height of Abstract Expressionism, a movement that stemmed from a belief that a work's impact was achieved through a correlation to the artist's psyche rather than through a representation of the world. In contrast, the artists of the Slip approached abstraction with a quieter palette, a willingness to let the world around them seep into their respective compositions, and an interest in the emotional weight of refined lines and nuanced gestures. Additionally, their formally reductive work from this time anticipates the tenets of Minimalism in the years to come.

Ellsworth Kelly Foyer Installation, on view through February 2018

As a complement to *Between Land and Sea* and *The Beginning of Everything: Drawings from the Janie C. Lee, Louisa Stude Sarofim, and David Whitney Collections*, concurrent exhibitions that highlight early work by Ellsworth Kelly, White has organized an installation in the main building's foyer of seven of Kelly's rarely exhibited early paintings. Produced while he lived in Coenties Slip, these temporary loans from the artist's estate showcase his pioneering approach to abstraction in the mid-to-late 1950s.

Said Menil Director Rebecca Rabinow, "As we begin our 30th anniversary celebrations, we are delighted to showcase these vibrant early canvases by Ellsworth Kelly. Not only do they link two current exhibitions, but also they underscore the Menil's longstanding commitment to the artist and his work."

This exhibition is generously supported by Suzanne Deal Booth; Mike and Diane Cannon; H-E-B and H-E-B Tournament of Champions; Frost Bank; Clare Casademont and Michael Metz; Scott and Judy Nyquist; and the City of Houston.

United Airlines is the exclusive travel partner of the Menil Collection.

About the Menil Collection

A legacy of the philanthropists John and Dominique de Menil, the Menil Collection opened in 1987. The museum presents regular rotations of artworks from its growing permanent collection, organizes special exhibitions and programs throughout the year, publishes scholarly books, and conducts research into the conservation of modern and contemporary art. The Menil Collection's main museum building, the first building in the United States designed by Renzo Piano, anchors a parklike 30-acre campus, which also 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, opening October 7, 2017, will be the first freestanding facility in the United States designed expressly for the exhibition and study of modern and

contemporary drawings. On December 2, 2017, the Menil will mark its 30th anniversary with a celebratory fundraising gala, only the fourth to be held in the museum's history. The Menil is open Wednesday through Sunday, 11am to 7pm, and charges no admission fee.

Also on view at the Menil

The Beginning of Everything: Drawings from the Janie C. Lee, Louisa Stude Sarofim, and David Whitney Collections – On view through June 18, 2017

ReCollecting Dogon – On view through July 9, 2017

The Condition of Being Here: Drawings by Jasper Johns – Inaugural exhibition of the Menil Drawing Institute opening October 7, 2017

Mona Hatoum: Terra Infirma – Opening October 13, 2017

Think of Them as Spaces: Brice Marden's Drawings – Opening January 12, 2018 in the Menil Drawing Institute

Roni Horn: When I Breathe, I Draw – Opening April 27, 2018 in the Menil Drawing Institute

Francis Alijs: The Fabiola Project – On view through May 13, 2018 in the Byzantine Fresco Chapel

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Image: Agnes Martin, Horizon, 1960. Oil on canvas, 15 x 15 inches (38.1 x 38.1 cm). Collection of Katherine Kaim Kitchen. © 2017 Agnes Martin / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

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