

Out of Thin Air
Emerging Forms



What does it mean for a form to emerge?
To gradually become visible or known?
Might some images exist in a perpetual
state of forming, hovering between
resolution and dispersal?

Out of Thin Air: Emerging Forms examines drawing as a meditative process of finding form, whether abstract or representational. Artists have embraced this type of practice for reasons that range from unlocking the subconscious to exploring nature's most complex systems, including vast cosmic realms and immaterial energies. The artworks on display are open, suggestive images that invite viewers to engage in close looking and call on their own associative discovery and interpretations.

These evocative artworks selected from the Menil's permanent collection share a visual language of emerging forms. They date from the late 1930s to the present day. Some were acquired by the museum's founders, John and Dominique de Menil, others were gifts to the museum, and a few are recent acquisitions.

On view for the first time at the Menil are a group of drawings by the artist Gregory Masurovsky (1929–2009), who sought to “express the forces that animate the universe” with pen and ink on paper. “A variety of marks were emerging as I worked,” the artist recalled in an interview, “visions that seemed to appear and disappear at the horizon, a sort of ambiguity rendered with precision.” Masurovsky's delicate marks coalesce into transient swarms, vibrations, or cloud formations on the verge of materializing.

Nearby, a recently acquired graphite drawing by Argentinian artist Gustavo Díaz (b. 1969), *Imaginary Flight Patterns V*, 2021, renders an intricate network of lines that elicits phenomena that might occur in the air: flocks of birds in flight, fields of energy, or sound waves. While exploratory, Díaz's drawings are nevertheless highly intentional and considered. Also executed with precision and born of a meditative drawing practice are the minute orbs of Japanese artist Hiroyuki Doi (b. 1946). His compositions are not guided by preconceived ideas; rather, as the artist stated, "each picture evolves naturally, spontaneously, and finds its form." They may call to mind celestial galaxies, rapidly multiplying cells, or cresting waves.

Hedda Sterne (1910–2011) also generated her ink drawings out of a private meditation practice that she described as a spiraling inward. Her unfurling masses of line—which can suggest leafy vegetables or dark intergalactic voids—never fully resolve as distinct images but instead invite multiple overlapping associations in scales both miniature and immense. She welcomed this multivalency and viewed drawing as an act of conjuring, "permitting visions that want to take shape to do so."

For Lee Bontecou (1931–2022), drawing was "closest to poetry," the medium in which she felt free, her forms indefinite, her thoughts speculative. One becomes aware of the suspended nature of her cosmic lacunae and dream architectures, which drift, tentatively, at the center of large sheets. Also poised in space are the wispy graphite lines of a large, gestural drawing by Sonia Gechtoff (1926–2018), seemingly shaped by a gust of wind into a figural form that straddles representation and abstraction. Gechtoff's drawing is presented in the second gallery alongside works by Alan Saret (b. 1944), in which similar bursts of linear expression—both in pencil on paper and in wire manipulated in space—seem endowed with a life force.

Consider the artworks in *Out of Thin Air: Emerging Forms* as portals, each its own point of entry to personal reflection. Notice how mindful looking can be an introspective, even revelatory encounter, one that parallels the act of drawing.

Out of Thin Air: Emerging Forms is curated by Kirsten Marples,
Curatorial Associate, Menil Drawing Institute.

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PUBLIC PROGRAMS

*All programs will be held at the Menil Drawing Institute unless
otherwise stated.*

ARTIST TALK

Gustavo Díaz

Thursday, October 17, 7–8 p.m.

CURATOR TALK

Kirsten Marples

Sunday, November 10, 3–3:30 p.m.

WORKSHOP

Drawing Workshop

This event has limited capacity. Register at menil.org.

Saturday, January 11, 11 a.m.–1 p.m.

All public programs are free and open to everyone.

Additional programming information can be found at menil.org/events.

Menil members enjoy additional events. To learn more and join,
please visit menil.org/support.

Exhibition Dates

September 20, 2024–January 26, 2025