

The Menil Collection Opens a Comprehensive Survey of Robert Motherwell's Drawings at the Menil Drawing Institute on November 18

More than 100 works from two dozen public and private collections—spanning the artist's practice throughout his 50-year career—will be on view exclusively at the Menil Drawing Institute November 18, 2022–March 12, 2023

Exhibition celebrates the Dedalus Foundation's publication of the catalogue raisonné of Motherwell's drawings

HOUSTON—November 4, 2022—

The Menil Collection will open the most comprehensive survey ever mounted of the drawings of Robert Motherwell (1915-1991) on November 18, 2022. The show will be on view exclusively at the Menil Drawing Institute through March 12, 2023. With more than 100 works spanning the artist's career from the 1940s through the 1980s, *Robert Motherwell Drawing: As Fast as the Mind Itself* is organized by the Menil with the support of the Dedalus Foundation, established by the artist in 1981. The exhibition celebrates the publication of [Robert Motherwell Drawings: A Catalogue Raisonné](#), a two-volume publication devoted to Motherwell's drawings.

The youngest and most scholarly of the artists who came to be identified as Abstract Expressionists, Motherwell explored a personal, spontaneous language of mark-making throughout his life, creating drawings in a wide variety of techniques and styles that he sometimes used concurrently. *Robert Motherwell Drawing: As Fast as the Mind Itself* will bring together works from the Menil's own holdings and from two dozen public and private collections to show the full range of the artist's practice—including his major series the Elegies to the Spanish Republic, *Beside the Sea*, *Lyric Suite*, *Drunk with Turpentine*, and the *Opens*—revealing the cohesiveness underlying Motherwell's remarkable array of motifs, styles, textures, and moods.

Rebecca Rabinow, Director of the Menil Collection, said, "The Menil Collection is proud to present the drawings of Robert Motherwell, whose lifelong fascination with drawing was at the core of his significant artistic achievements. John and Dominique de Menil first visited Motherwell's studio in 1952 and later acquired work by him. The museum has continued to collect works by Motherwell, most recently the painting *Sea of Sand*, 1973, and fourteen drawings that are promised gifts. From early Surrealist works to the artist's late gestural abstractions, this exhibition will provide an invaluable opportunity for visitors to experience the boldness and intensity of Motherwell's extraordinary career."

Edouard Kopp, John R. Eckel, Jr. Foundation Chief Curator of the Menil Drawing Institute, said, "Inspired by Surrealism and the practice of automatic drawing, Robert Motherwell embraced the



suggestive potential of his drawing materials, blending the accidental and the intentional in the creative gesture, whether a stroke of the pen or brush or a tear in paper. He did not draw to imitate reality, but to give form to his intuition of the inner workings of the world, through a practice geared toward invention and variation. While the work evolved stylistically, it remained united by its continuities and his desire to draw 'as fast as the mind itself.'"

The exhibition will explore several aspects of Motherwell's practice, including his dialogue between the geometric and organic, and his diverse approach to calligraphic mark-making. Motherwell loved paper for the natural beauty of its surface and for its inherent resistance to corrections and second thoughts, which allowed him to be spontaneous.

Motherwell's early drawings from the 1940s show the influence of a broad range of artists whom he admired, including Henri Matisse, Roberto Matta, Joan Miró, Piet Mondrian, and Pablo Picasso. During this period, Motherwell explored figural structures and abstraction. This led him to the frieze-like compositional structure seen in his breakthrough series, the Elegies.



In the 1960s, Motherwell created additional series, including *Beside the Sea*, the *Lyric Suite*, and the *Opens*, each represented in the Menil's survey. As he wrote of his *Lyric Suite*, "it came to me in a flash: paint the thousand sheets without interruption, without *a priori* traditional or moral prejudices or *a posteriori* ones, without iconography, and above all without revisions or additions upon critical reflection and judgment. Give up one's being to the enterprise and see what lies within, whatever it is. Venture. Don't look back. Do not tire. Everything is open. Brushes and blank white paper!"

The artist's later works shifted toward a more formal restraint and an almost exclusive use of black. A large number of gestural works made in 1979 would come to be known as the *Drunk with Turpentine* series. Executed on paper in oil mixed with turpentine, these works are invariably marked by a yellowish halo around the black paint from the oil migrating through the

paper over time. In the more concise examples, Motherwell pared down his compositions to freely drawn lines and simple shapes, such as triangles and rectangles.

In Motherwell's 1970 essay "Thoughts on Drawing," republished in the Menil Collection's exhibition catalogue, the artist wrote, "Drawing satisfies our sense of definition, even if we cannot define "drawing" itself. Drawing is a racing yacht, cutting through the ocean. Painting is the ocean itself."



Related Publications

A [fully illustrated catalogue](#) published by the Menil accompanies the exhibition and is available in the Menil Collection Bookstore and online at menil.org/bookstore. The show is organized with the support of the Dedalus Foundation on the occasion of the publication [Robert Motherwell Drawings: A Catalogue Raisonné](#), devoted to Motherwell's drawings.

The Menil will host a panel discussion about the making of the catalogue raisonné with art historian Katy Rogers of the Dedalus Foundation, the Menil Drawing Institute's Chief Curator Edouard Kopp, and the Menil's Director of Publishing Joseph N. Newland on Friday, November 18, 6–7 p.m., at the Menil Drawing Institute. Details are available at menil.org/events.

About Robert Motherwell

Robert Motherwell was born in Aberdeen, Washington, in 1915, and grew up in California. He received his BA in philosophy from Stanford University in 1937. He then pursued graduate studies in philosophy at Harvard University and in 1938–39 lived in France, studying French literature. In 1940 he moved to New York City to study art history at Columbia University under Meyer Schapiro. He traveled to Mexico with Roberto Matta in 1941. Motherwell had his first solo show at Peggy Guggenheim's Art of this Century Gallery in 1944, and a major retrospective in 1965 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, which subsequently traveled to five European cities. Important retrospectives followed in 1976 (Düsseldorf, Stockholm, Vienna, Edinburgh, and London), 1977 (Paris), 1980 (Madrid and Barcelona), and 1983 (Buffalo NY, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, Washington DC, and New York City). Two additional drawing-focused exhibitions are worth noting: *Robert Motherwell Drawings: A Retrospective, 1941 to the Present*, at the Janie C. Lee Gallery in Houston (1979); and *Robert Motherwell on Paper: Drawings, Prints, Collages*, curated by David Rosand for the Wallach Gallery, Columbia University in 1997, which traveled to two other university museums. Motherwell's drawings are held in numerous private and public collections, mostly in Europe and North America. The most significant North American institutional holdings include those of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; the Dedalus Foundation, New York; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; and the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. All are lenders to this exhibition.

About the Menil Collection

Philanthropists and art patrons John and Dominique de Menil established the Menil Foundation in 1954 to cultivate greater public understanding and appreciation of art, architecture, culture, religion, and philosophy. In 1987, the Menil Collection's main museum building opened to the public. Today, the Menil Collection consists of a group of five art buildings and green spaces located within a residential neighborhood in central Houston. The Menil remains committed to its founders' belief that art is essential to human experience and fosters direct personal encounters

with works of art. The museum welcomes all visitors free of charge to its buildings and surrounding green spaces. menil.org

About the Menil Drawing Institute

The Menil Drawing Institute was established in 2008 in recognition of drawing's centrality in the lives of artists and its crucial role in modern and contemporary artistic culture. The Drawing Institute has since developed an international profile for exhibitions, scholarship, and collaboration. In 2018, a dedicated building for the Menil Drawing Institute, designed by Johnston Marklee, was inaugurated. It is now the site of regular drawings exhibitions, an annual monumental wall drawing commission, public programs, and study. menil.org/drawing-institute

Funding

This exhibition is generously underwritten by Kathy and George Britton.

Additional support comes from Angela and William Cannady; Diane and Michael Cannon; Julie and John Cogan, Jr.; Cindy and David Fitch; Barbara and Michael Gamson; Linda and George Kelly; Dillon Kyle and Sam Lasseter; Janie C. Lee; Mary Hale Lovett McLean; Carol and David Neuberger; Susanne and William E. Pritchard III; Leslie and Shannon Sasser; Mark Wawro and Melanie Gray; Ann and Mathew Wolf Drawing Exhibition Fund; and the City of Houston through Houston Arts Alliance.

Image Captions

1. Robert Motherwell, *Rimbaud Series No. 3*, 1967. Tusche ink on parchment, 14 x 11 in. (35.6 x 27.9 cm). Maxine and Stuart Frankel Foundation for Art, Bloomfield Hills, MI. © 2022 Dedalus Foundation, Inc. / Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY
2. Robert Motherwell, *Three Figures Shot*, 1944. Pen and ink and ink wash on paper, 11 7/16 x 14 3/8 in. (29.1 x 36.5 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, Purchase, with funds from the Burroughs Wellcome Purchase Fund and the National Endowment for the Arts. © 2022 Dedalus Foundation, Inc. / Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY
3. Robert Motherwell, *Drunk with Turpentine*, 1979. Oil on paper, 20 x 30 in. (50.8 x 76.2 cm). Collection of the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Museum purchase, The Friends of Art Endowment Fund. © 2022 Dedalus Foundation, Inc. / Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

Press Contacts

The Menil Collection

Sarah Hobson, Associate Director of Marketing and Communications
713.535.3170 / shobson@menil.org

Polskin Arts & Communications Counselors

Tommy Napier, Senior Account Supervisor

212.715.1694 / tommy.napier@finnpartners.com