

The Menil Collection

NEWS RELEASE

The Menil Collection Receives Major Gifts of Paintings and Drawings by Cy Twombly from the Cy Twombly Foundation

Honoring the 30th anniversary of the Menil's Cy Twombly Gallery, gifts of two paintings and 121 drawings recognize the museum as a leading institution for the display and study of Twombly's art and legacy

Events with Tacita Dean for her new artist's book, Why Cy, a concert with Meredith Monk, and other special programs complement the anniversary celebration



Volubilis, 1953, in the Cy Twombly Gallery at The Menil Collection, Houston.

HOUSTON—*January 29, 2025*—Rebecca Rabinow, Director, The Menil Collection, today announced extremely significant donations of works by a single artist to the museum: two rare early paintings and 121 drawings by Cy Twombly (1928-2011), all given by the Cy Twombly Foundation. Underscoring the museum's importance as an international destination for the study, presentation, and appreciation of Twombly's work, the gifts celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Menil's Cy Twombly Gallery. Designed by architect Renzo Piano, the freestanding building was inaugurated in February 1995.

Rebecca Rabinow, Director, said, “With these generous gifts from the Cy Twombly Foundation, art lovers near and far will have even more reason to visit the Menil Collection. For thirty years, the Cy Twombly Gallery, with its soft filtered sunlight and classical proportions, has invited visitors to discover the work of one of the most important artists of the 20th century. Inside is a chronological presentation of paintings and sculptures by an artist who beautifully balanced the traditions of modern abstraction with a fascination for history, classical mythology, and poetry. The building and its installations are a testament to the power of inspired collaboration between an artist, architect, and museum. We could not be more grateful to the Foundation for entrusting us with these invaluable works and bringing renewed attention to a cherished space that continues to inspire visitors from around the globe.”



Untitled, 1954



Exterior view of the Cy Twombly Gallery

Gift of Paintings

The two gifted paintings, *Volubilis*, 1953, and *Untitled*, 1954, have been on long-term loan to the Menil. They are early keystones in the Cy Twombly Gallery’s presentation of five decades of Twombly’s paintings and sculptures, from the formative period of his career in the 1950s to the epic painting made toward the end of his life when he was investigating themes of loss and the passage of time.

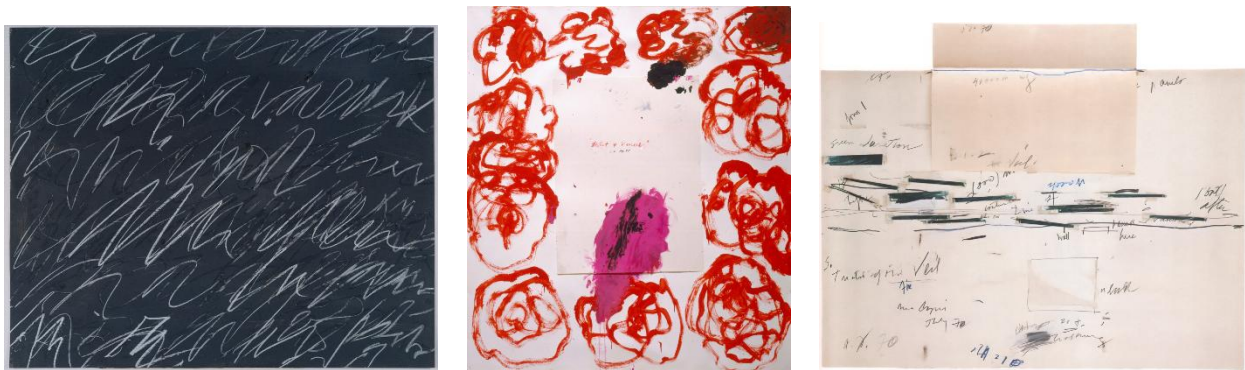
Volubilis, titled after the site of an ancient city that the artist visited in present-day Morocco, has arch-like forms drawn in the wet paint that recall Roman-era architecture. During his first visit to Europe, Twombly drew inspiration from ancient Mediterranean history and geography, Greek and Roman mythology, classical literature, and poetry. In this painting, to achieve the patina of age, he mixed dirt or tar into pigment to create what he referred to as “eroded surfaces.”

Untitled, 1954, a cream-colored painting with loose graphite scrawls scratched into the surface, comes from an experimental period. While Twombly was serving in the U.S. Army as a cryptologist, he began drawing in the dark to understand how a gesture could convey emotions. He explained that “the line is the feeling from a soft dreamy thing to something hard, something arid, something lonely, something ending, something beginning.”

Gift of Drawings

The Foundation’s landmark gift of 121 of Twombly’s drawings vastly expands the holdings and transforms the Menil’s ability to exhibit and study this aspect of the artist’s practice, while celebrating the museum’s nearly two decades of investment through the Menil Drawing Institute in elevating the visibility of drawing and its centrality in the lives of artists, as well as its crucial role in modern and contemporary artistic culture.

The gift covers fifty years, from 1954 to 2005, with some of the drawings sharing motifs and themes with paintings in the Menil’s holdings. Taken as a whole, the drawings offer enormous potential for display, teaching, and research. They are characteristic of Twombly’s oeuvre in that they feature a broad range of materials, from graphite to oil paint; techniques such as drawing and collage; and themes that are fundamental to his entire practice, such as classical antiquity, eroticism, and nature. His extensive body of drawing, remarkable for its versatility, sensitivity, and originality, makes him one of the most consequential draftspeople of the 20th century.



Highlights from the drawings include (left to right): *Untitled*, 1970; *Toilet of Venere*, 1988; and *Study for Treatise on the Veil*, 1970.

Nicola Del Roscio, President of the Cy Twombly Foundation, said, “The Cy Twombly Foundation is pleased to offer these gifts of art to the Menil Collection in celebration of the 30th anniversary of the artist’s eponymous gallery as a “Study Collection,” fostering the scientific research on Cy Twombly’s work and preserving his legacy. Making these key works accessible to scholars, researchers, and the public at a free museum will help achieve the Foundation’s goal of encouraging a deeper and broader appreciation of the artist.”

About the Cy Twombly Gallery

The nine-room Cy Twombly Gallery opened in February 1995 and houses the only permanent retrospective exhibition of the artist's work. It demonstrates how Twombly evoked the ineffable qualities of language and time through his exuberant approach to mark-making and expressionistic handling of paint.

The artist, along with Italian architect Renzo Piano, who had completed the Menil's main building seven years earlier, and then Menil Director Paul Winkler, worked closely on a simple architectural design based on Twombly's sketches that thoughtfully holds the works of art and responds to the surrounding neighborhood of bungalows and green spaces. Based on classical symmetry, the architectural elements produce a diffused natural lighting inspired by the Mediterranean. Unpainted plaster walls soften the overhead light, and the ceiling is distinguished by a floating roof of glass and a taut sail-like canopy below layers of filtration that dampen the Texas sun. Natural and local materials—concrete blocks made in San Antonio, sandstone quarried in Central Texas, and wide planks of white oak—were selected. Twombly selected the artworks and arranged the galleries, wanting each to have a shared “emotional and atmospheric” quality.

Piano used the poetic image of “a butterfly alighting on a firm surface” to describe how the gallery is a balance of delicacy and strength. When the building opened, a reporter wrote that the space had the effect of suspending time.

30th Anniversary Programs

The Menil Collection will celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Cy Twombly Gallery beginning in February with special programs about the work and legacy of the artist. To inaugurate the celebration, the Menil will host a book signing with artist Tacita Dean on February 9. Her book, titled *Why Cy*, stems from a night she spent alone in the Cy Twombly Gallery in early 2024 and is filled with hypnotic and colorful photographs that she took in response to the gestural and linear exuberance of the paintings on view. Dean's exhibition *Tacita Dean: Blind Folly*, currently on view at the Menil and curated by Michelle White, Senior Curator, features a number of new works inspired by her time in Houston, as well as her friendship with Twombly at the end of his life. This includes a film portrait of Twombly and a series of photographs Dean took of the artist's studio in Italy. She will also participate in a conversation with composer Thomas Adès, and Sarah Rothenberg, Artistic Director of DACAMERA, on February 10. Other anniversary events include a special two-night performance by Meredith Monk and her vocal ensemble; talks with scholars, conservators, and curators; and a Neighborhood Community Day.

Artist Book Signing

Why Cy by Tacita Dean

Sunday, February 9, 11 a.m.

Conversation

Composer Thomas Adès; Visual Artist Tacita Dean; and Sarah Rothenberg, Artistic Director of DACAMERA

Copresented with DACAMERA

Monday, February 10, 7:30 p.m.

Concert

Meredith Monk with Katie Geissinger and Allison Sniffin in Concert

Thursday, February 27, 7 p.m.

Friday, February 28, 7 p.m.

Lectures

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro on Cy Twombly

Thursday, March 13, 7 p.m.

Cy Twombly: Senses of Time

Charles "Mark" Haxthausen, Robert Sterling Clark Professor of Art History Emeritus, Williams College and Menil Drawing Institute Research Fellow

Thursday, March 27, 7 p.m.

Neighborhood Community Day

Saturday, April 5, 2025, 1 p.m.

Curator Talk

Michelle White on Cy Twombly

Sunday, April 13, 3 p.m.

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 a group of 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 welcomes all visitors free of charge to its buildings and surrounding green spaces. menil.org

Images

1. Installation view of Cy Twombly's *Volubilus*, 1953. House paint, oil, crayon, and charcoal on canvas, 55 x 76 in. (139.7 x 193 cm). The Menil Collection, Houston, Gift of the Cy Twombly Foundation in celebration of the 30th anniversary of the Cy Twombly Gallery. © Cy Twombly Foundation. Photo: Paul Hester
2. Cy Twombly, *Untitled*, 1954. House paint, crayon, and graphite on canvas, 68 ¾ x 86 in. (174.6 x 218.4 cm). The Menil Collection, Houston, Gift of the Cy Twombly Foundation in celebration of the 30th anniversary of the Cy Twombly Gallery. © Cy Twombly Foundation. Photo: Adam Neese and Paul Hester
3. Exterior view of the Cy Twombly Gallery, The Menil Collection, Houston. Photo: Peter Molick
4. Cy Twombly, *Untitled*, 1970. Oil paint, wax crayon, 27 9/16 x 34 ½ in. (70 x 87,6 cm). The Menil Collection, Houston, Gift of the Cy Twombly Foundation. © Cy Twombly Foundation.
5. Cy Twombly, *Toilet of Venere*, 1988. Collage: (drawing paper, staples), acrylic, wax crayon, pencil, 56 5/16 x 50 in. (143 x 127 cm). The Menil Collection, Houston, Gift of the Cy Twombly Foundation. © Cy Twombly Foundation.
6. Cy Twombly, *Study for Treatise of the Veil*, 1970. Collage: (drawing paper, transparent adhesive tape), pencil, wax crayon, colored pencil, 27 ¾ x 39 3/8 in. (70,5 x 100 cm). The Menil Collection, Houston, Gift of the Cy Twombly Foundation. © Cy Twombly Foundation.

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