

The Menil Collection Opens *What drawing can be: four responses* at the Menil Drawing Institute

Presentation features site-specific installations by four leading contemporary artists



HOUSTON—*March 24, 2025*—On Friday, March 21, the Menil Collection opened *What drawing can be: four responses* at the Menil Drawing Institute. **On view through August 10, 2025**, the exhibition features site-specific installations by four artists: Jillian Conrad, Teresita Fernández, Tony Lewis, and Constantin Luser. Each artist was provided individual gallery space to respond to the prompt “What drawing can be,” while exploring the conceptual potential of the medium, its boundaries, and its connections with other art forms, such as sculpture and architecture.

Edouard Kopp, John R. Eckel, Jr. Foundation Chief Curator, Menil Drawing Institute, said, “The Menil Drawing Institute was established in 2008 in recognition of drawing’s crucial role in modern and contemporary artistic culture. We are proud to bring together four talented, yet very different artists to create installations based around their interpretations of the medium and its infinite possibilities.”



Austrian artist Constantin Luser (b. 1976)'s three-dimensional "spatial drawings" were constructed from multiple brass wires. These kinetic floating sculptures cast elaborate shadows across other works the artist made directly on the walls, creating a complex, visual exchange that amplifies the networks of lines and challenges visitors' perceptions. Luser joins other artists such

as Alexander Calder, Pablo Picasso, and Sol LeWitt in pushing the parameters of drawing beyond the sheet of paper to explore the idea of "drawing in space."



In this exhibition, Tony Lewis (b. 1986) brings together various forms of drawing, including a labor-intensive, structural drawing made with unconventional materials such as screws and nylon strings, and a massive graphite-laden sheet of paper weighing approximately fifty-pounds displayed in a vitrine set in a pile of crushed graphite. Here, Lewis not only brings his drawings off the page, but

he also brings them into unexpected dimensions.



Houston-based artist Jillian Conrad (b. 1970), primarily known as a sculptor, challenges perceptions of the tangible and the intangible. Exploring the motifs of nature, intimacy, and alchemy, Conrad creates minimal, yet playful works. In *Cetus*, the artist recreates the constellation Cetus, the Sea Monster, with pliable metals, jewelry chains, and hand-blown glass orbs depicting stars. For Conrad,

constellations represent some of the earliest known drawings.



Teresita Fernández (b. 1968) draws inspiration from landscape and mapping. For her installation, the artist uses materials such as sculptural charcoal to uncover and respond to narratives often rooted in colonialism and violence, and visibility and erasure. Fernández positions these concerns at the forefront of her work *Scorched Earth (Lament)* by creating an immersive environment for

the viewer that evokes a cross section of earth's strata—from the planet's inner core to its uppermost topography—unraveling alternative modes of viewing the landscape and imagining our place within it.

Kelly Montana, Associate Curator, Menil Drawing Institute, said, "Rejecting conventional limitations of material, scale, and permanence, the four artists in this exhibition make the case for the continuing relevance, agility, and vitality of drawing, and how it remains a generative area of investigation. It's been a joy to work with these artists for *What drawing can be* and to present each installation, though vastly different, in conversation with one another."

What drawing can be: four responses is curated by Edouard Kopp, John R. Eckel, Jr. Foundation Chief Curator, Menil Drawing Institute, and Kelly Montana, Associate Curator, Menil Drawing Institute.

About the Artists

Jillian Conrad explores questions of materiality and intangibility. Her sculptures and works on paper often engage aspects of the landscape and everyday materials with the goal of locating thresholds between the visible and invisible. Conrad lives and works in Houston.

Teresita Fernández is known for her public installations and large-scale sculptures. Her art offers an expansive view of the landscape, forefronting questions of geography, cartography, cosmology, and political states. Fernández lives and works in Brooklyn.

Tony Lewis, in an ever-expanding engagement with drawing, harnesses materials like graphite powder, torn paper, and digital projection to confront social and political topics including race, power, communication, and labor. Lewis lives and works in Chicago.

Constantin Luser employs kinetic wire sculptures that cast elaborate shadows and inspire delicate line drawings for installations that challenge and delight visitors' perceptions. Luser lives and works in Vienna.

Related Programs

Sound Activation by Constantin Luser

Saturday, March 22, 3 p.m., 4 p.m., and 5 p.m., Menil Drawing Institute

Artist Talk: Teresita Fernández

Thursday, April 24, 7 p.m., Main Building

A Memorial Lecture on Bernice Rose

Thursday, May 8, 7 p.m., Menil Drawing Institute

Artist Talk: Jillian Conrad

Thursday, May 15, 7 p.m., Menil Drawing Institute

Workshop: Drawing Space

Saturday, July 26, 11 a.m., Menil Drawing Institute

Curator Talk: Edouard Kopp

Sunday, August 3, 3 p.m., 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 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

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.

Images

1. Jillian Conrad; Teresita Fernández; Tony Lewis; and Constantin Luser. Photo: Lauren Marek
2. Constantin Luser with his installation in *What drawing can be: four responses*. Photo: Lauren Marek
3. Tony Lewis with his installation in *What drawing can be: four responses*. Photo: Lauren Marek
4. Jillian Conrad with her installation in *What drawing can be: four responses*. Photo: Lauren Marek
5. Teresita Fernández with her installation in *What drawing can be: four responses*. Photo: Lauren Marek

Funding

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