

**THE MENIL COLLECTION PRESENTS THE FIRST COMPREHENSIVE  
 U.S. MUSEUM EXHIBITION OF THE WORK OF WILLIAM N. COPLEY,  
 FEBRUARY 19 – JULY 24, 2016**



HOUSTON, TX, February 9, 2016 – The Menil Collection is proud to present the first retrospective in any U.S. museum devoted to the work of the American artist William N. Copley (1919-1996), creator of madcap narrative paintings, drawings, and installations in playful, ribald styles of his own invention. Organized in collaboration by the Menil Collection and Fondazione Prada and accompanied by a major publication, *William N. Copley: The World According to CPLY* will be shown in the U.S. exclusively at the Menil, from February 19 through July 24, 2016, before continuing to its only other presentation in Milan, Italy, from October 20, 2016, through January 8, 2017.

The exhibition includes 122 works by Copley from the Menil’s own holdings and public and private collections in the United States and Europe. Representing every phase of Copley’s work while illuminating the political and psychosexual themes, visual puns, and vaudevillian Americana to which he repeatedly returned, the exhibition traces the artist’s career from the late 1940s, when he began teaching himself to paint and was introduced to Surrealism and the Surrealists, into the 1990s. While the exhibition is on view at the Menil, the permanent collection galleries and museum foyer will feature a selection of Surrealist works that entered the museum from Copley’s own collection, including important paintings, drawings, and sculptures by artists **such as Max Ernst, René Magritte, Man Ray, and Jean Tinguely.**

Toby Kamps, curator of modern and contemporary art at the Menil Collection, originated the exhibition and has co-curated it with Fondazione Prada’s Germano Celant. Kamps said, “It is long past time for a U.S. museum to look deeply at the career

of this unusual and particularly American artist. As a painter, Copley put forward an irreverent alternative to the reigning abstraction of the 1940s and 50s, becoming a prized artist's artist. As a patron, collector, and sometime publisher, he was similarly influential, becoming a personal bridge between the European Surrealists and a younger generation of U.S. artists. We hope this exhibition and its catalogue will introduce Copley to many new viewers, who we expect will admire and savor his antics. We are deeply grateful to the Fondazione Prada for joining with us to at last give Copley the retrospective he deserves."

*William N. Copley: The World According to CPLY* begins with early works, many of them made in the 1950s during a long sojourn in France. These were years when the artist tutored himself in painting, taking inspiration from sources including Surrealism, Mexican folk art, American comic strips, and silent-film comedy as he developed his distinctively guileless, heart-on-sleeve storytelling style. Later works include exuberantly satirical works of the 1960s, many featuring the vaguely autobiographical figure described by critic and artist Anne Doran as a "nattily dressed and deeply ridiculous Everyman in mad pursuit of liberty, poetry, and sex"; the pornography-inspired "X-Rated Paintings" of the early 1970s; the "Noun" paintings of the same period (each depicting a single everyday object against a bright, patterned background); the schematic, figurative canvases made in homage to Copley's Surrealist idol Francis Picabia; and the story cycles and morality tales from the 1980s and 90s, including a painting from the installation project *The Tomb of the Unknown Whore*. Also included in the exhibition are all six of the S.M.S. (Shit Must Stop) portfolios that Copley published in 1968 from an office on New York's Upper West Side, offering affordable editions of works by established figures including Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray, and Meret Oppenheim and younger artists including Yoko Ono, Bruce Nauman, Walter de Maria, LaMonte Young, H.C. Westermann, Sue Braden, and Nancy Reitkopf.

A lavishly illustrated, 384-page catalogue, *William N. Copley*, published by Fondazione Prada in association with the Menil Collection, accompanies the exhibition. Edited by Germano Celant, it includes an exhaustive chronology of the artist's life and career as well as essays by Gwen L. Allen, Celant, Paul B. Franklin, Alison M. Gingeras, Jonathan Griffin, and exhibition co-curator Toby Kamps. The texts explore Copley's life not only as an artist but also as a dealer, collector, writer, journalist, and publisher. The book includes nearly 600 full-color illustrations and will be distributed worldwide.

*William N. Copley: The World According to CPLY* is co-organized by the Menil Collection and Fondazione Prada, Milan. The international tour sponsor is the Terra Foundation for American Art, dedicated to fostering exploration, understanding, and enjoyment of the visual arts of the United States for national and international audiences. In Houston,

this exhibition is generously supported by Skadden, Arps; The Brown Foundation, Inc. / Nancy and Mark Abendshein; Eddie and Chinhui Allen; Suzanne Deal Booth; Adelaide de Menil Carpenter; John R. Eckel, Jr. Foundation; Marilyn Oshman; Susanne and William E. Pritchard III; and the City of Houston.

### **About the Menil Collection**

A legacy of the late philanthropists John and Dominique de Menil, the Menil Collection opened in 1987. Housed in the first United States building designed by the Italian architect Renzo Piano, the Menil Collection's main museum building anchors the 30-acre campus, which 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 and expected to open in 2017 will be the first freestanding facility in the United States designed expressly for the exhibition and study of modern and contemporary drawings. Presenting regular rotations of artworks from the growing permanent collection, the Menil also organizes special exhibitions and programs throughout the year, publishes scholarly books, and conducts research into the conservation of modern and contemporary art. The museum is open Wednesday through Sunday, 11am to 7pm, and charges no admission fee.

[www.menil.org](http://www.menil.org)

[www.facebook.com/menilcollection/](https://www.facebook.com/menilcollection/)

[www.twitter.com/menilcollection](https://www.twitter.com/menilcollection)

[www.instagram.com/menilcollection/](https://www.instagram.com/menilcollection/)

# # #

*Image: William N. Copley, Remember the Day, 1961. Oil on canvas, 57 1/2 × 45 1/4 in. (146.1 × 114.9 cm). Courtesy of William N. Copley Estate and Paul Kasmin Gallery New York. © 2016 Estate of William N. Copley / Copley LLC / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York*

### **Press Contact:**

*Menil Press Office*

Tommy Napier

713 535 3170 / [press@menil.org](mailto:press@menil.org)

[www.menil.org](http://www.menil.org)

*Polskin Arts & Communications Counselors*

Julia Esposito

212 715 1643 / [julia.esposito@finnpartners.com](mailto:julia.esposito@finnpartners.com)