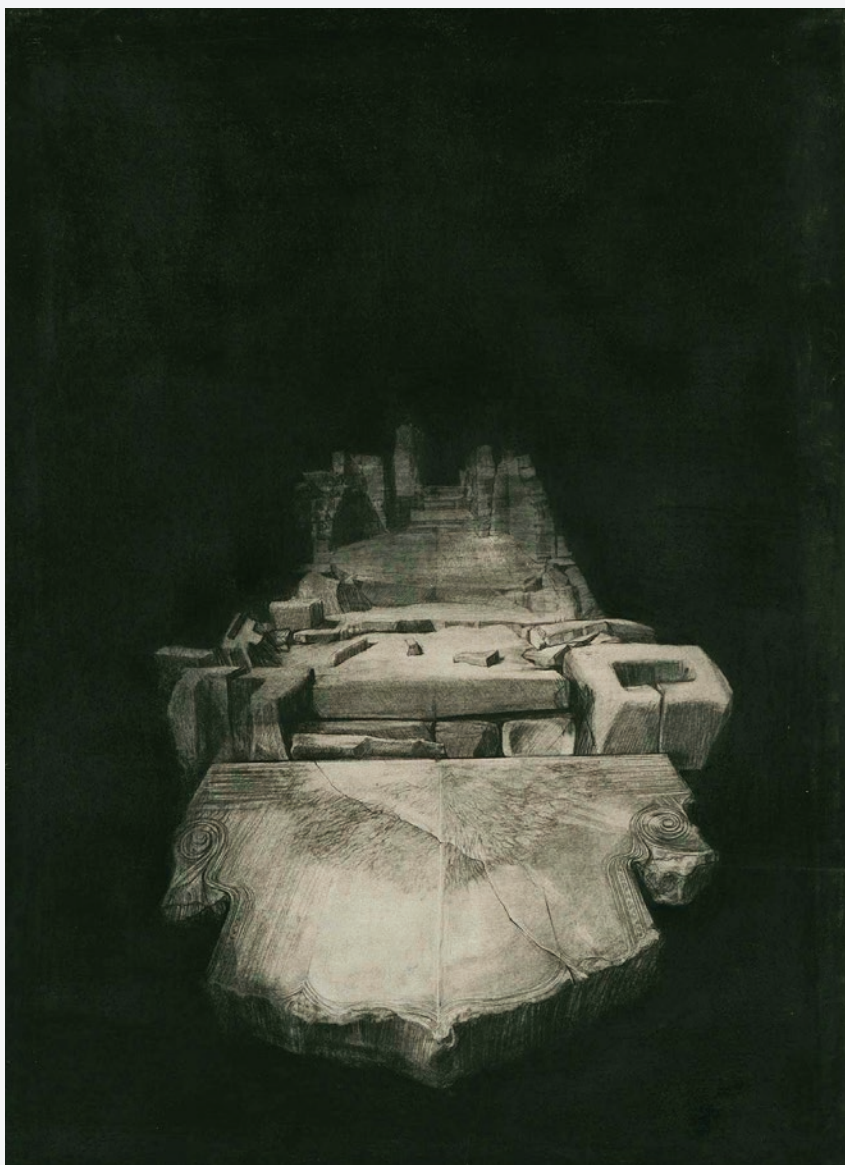


DREAM
MONUMENTS:
Drawing in the
1960s and 1970s



Dream Monuments: Drawing in the 1960s and 1970s presents artworks that challenge the conventional idea of the monument as a permanent, grand, or commemorative structure. The monument is typically understood as a form of great size and dedicated to a person or event of perceived historical importance. This exhibition examines how the provisional character of drawing helped visual artists—in this case, those born in the United States or working there during these decades—radically depart from that definition through envisioning forms in improbable scales and for impossible conditions. These works, monumental in measurement or significance, grapple with the weight of the past and propose alternative futures for the social unrest and ecological concerns of this period. Scaled to the dimensions of the page but enormous in ambition, the drawings on view render environments at times absurd, surreal, and subjective.

This show takes its inspiration from the unrealized exhibition *Dream Monuments* planned by Dominique and John de Menil in the late 1960s. Letters, interviews, and notes indicate the potential directions the couple contemplated when developing their theme. One idea, inspired by the Menil Foundation's 1967 presentation of fantastical 18th-century French drawings (FIG. 1) in *Visionary Architects: Boullée, Ledoux, Lequeu*, was for a display focusing on "strange monuments, either allegorical or historical," in which "drawings and models by contemporary artists" would be shown alongside those from the 19th century and early 20th century. As the couple's research progressed, they added representations of archaeological sites, tombs, and ruins. By 1969, the project involved plans for large-scale, site-specific sculptures (or, in Dominique de Menil's words, "monuments") intended for parks and other public spaces in the greater Houston area. They considered including figures such as Christo, Richard Long, Robert Morris, and Claes Oldenburg. Ultimately, it seems, pursuing the commissions would have been too expensive and too logistically difficult to realize. Today, what remains of the project are archival

traces, drawings, and, in some cases, models. *Dream Monuments: Drawing in the 1960s and 1970s* revisits and expands upon this unfinished project by including artworks ranging from proposals and documents to forms fully realized on paper and in sculptural dimensions. Here, works commissioned and considered for the original exhibition are placed in dialogue with those by contemporaries who also investigated the theme of monumentality in drawn form.

The exhibition opens with drawings for works to be made in other media that require expansive tracts of land, revealing how ideas of the monument and monumentality became entangled in art during the period. As the selections in this gallery make clear, for the de Menils, the “dream monuments” of the late 1960s were primarily site specific and made directly in the landscape—a mode of art-making then known as Earthworks but now more commonly called Land Art. Importantly, the concepts on view here were not realized as depicted or were only produced using impermanent strategies. Christo, for example, never built a colossal mastaba, a structure derived from an ancient Egyptian funerary form, alongside a Texas highway, as proposed in *One Million Stacked Oil Drums, Project for Houston, Galveston Area*, 1970. Walter De Maria also could not raise the funds for a pair of mile-long walls placed merely feet apart, as imagined in *Desert Walk/Walls in the Desert*, 1964. Instead, he later drew temporary lines on the desert floor half of the length he initially suggested and documented himself between them in photographs and film—a very different project in both look and concept (FIG. 2). Hence, works like the drawings in this section become the enduring sites for these monumental forms.

Alongside these ideas for manipulating the earth, the next grouping highlights drawings of implausible constructions that render common objects and iconic structures animate, anthropomorphic, and at times highly gendered. Two of Claes Oldenburg’s *Proposed Colossal Monuments*, 1966–67, depict larger-than-life bowling balls and pool balls that are simultaneously whimsical and threatening

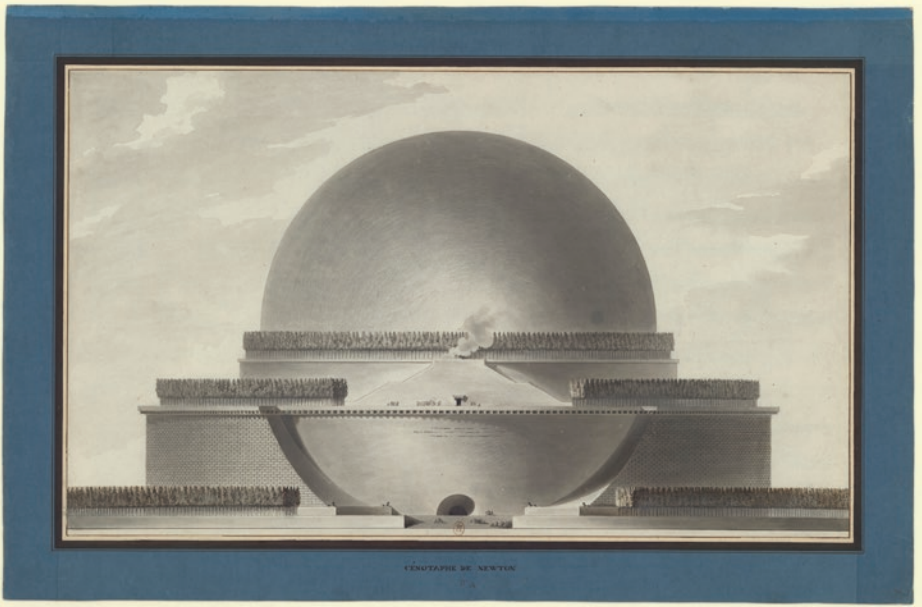


FIG. 1 Etienne-Louis Boullée, *Newton's Cenotaph Number 14 (Geometric Elevation)* [*Cénotaphe de Newton No. 14 (élévation géométrale)*], 1784. Graphite on paper, 26 × 15 ¾ in. (66 × 40 cm). Courtesy of Bibliothèque nationale de France



FIG. 2 Photograph of Walter De Maria, *Mile Long Drawing*, 1968. Chalk on the Mojave Desert, two parallel lines spaced 12 ft. (3.56 m) apart, each 0.5 mi. × 4 in. (1.6 km × 10.2 cm). Courtesy of the Walter De Maria Archive. © Estate of Walter De Maria

as they roll through Central Park and down Park Avenue, turning New York City into both playground and hazard. In contrast, Mary Beth Edelson looked to ancient ritual sites to propose a witty and modern interpretation of a sacred, matriarchal space, capping the uranium mines in Wyoming with mounds built in the shape of the female form. Marta Minujín also envisioned placing a massive sculpted body into the landscape; her proposal, however, involved repurposing a recognized landmark. *Statue of Liberty Lying Down II (With People Walking through It)* [*Estatua de la Libertad acostada II (con público que la recorre)*], 1979, (FIG. 3) satirizes the symbolism attached to such national monuments by laying a replica of the sculpture on its side so that viewers could explore its hollow core. The artist wanted the reproduction eventually to be covered with McDonald's hamburgers for visitors to eat—a humorous but pointed critique that deflates the monument's lofty ideals.

Another gallery focuses on artists who adopted styles of technical drawing to imagine fictive cities and built systems that befit—and subvert—a monument for their moment and beyond. Alice Aycock, Agnes Denes, Jackie Ferrara, and Will Insley devised labyrinths, pyramidal structures, and elaborate metropolises that are neither purely utopian nor dystopian. Instead, the environments created in these enormous drawings are ambiguous (FIG. 4). Their strange and disorienting spaces provide complex perceptual experiences that complicate the common purposes of architectural features like walls and stairs. For example, Jackie Ferrara's *A200 AJUT* sculpture and drawing from 1979 employ techniques like section drafts and scale models in order to build a towering series of steps. The results may recall ancient monumental forms, yet they defy any definitive associations beyond the logic of their assembled parts.

In the easternmost gallery, a selection of drawings suggests that, for some artists working at this time, monumentality entailed neither permanence nor immensity but rather material and temporal flux. Robert Smithson, for example, was fascinated by entropy, the breakdown of



FIG. 3 Marta Minujin, *Statue of Liberty Lying Down II (With People Walking through It)* [*Estatua de la Libertad acostada II (con público que la recorre)*], 1979. Ink on vellum paper, 34 1/2 x 45 in. (87.6 x 114.3 cm). Private collection. Courtesy of Henrique Faria, New York. © Marta Minujin. Photo: Arturo Sanchez

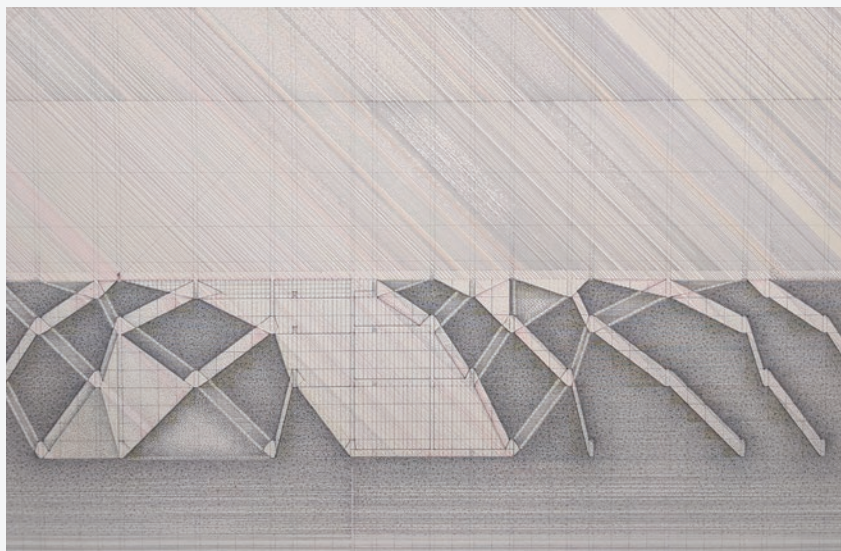


FIG. 4 Detail of Will Insley, */Building/ No. 41, Volume Space Interior Swing Section Through*, 1973–81. Ink on ragboard, 40 x 60 in. (101.6 x 152.4 cm). Will Insley © WESTWOOD GALLERY NYC

systems, structures, and energies. In a pair of drawings, he proposed using heaps of unprocessed sulfur deposited in a pool of tar to map the colossal continents and oceans of the Earth approximately 500 million years ago. Beverly Buchanan, too, captured the weathering of time and nature, particularly through the textures of demolished or decaying buildings that she encountered on city walks. Her sketchbook drawings and concrete sculptures, which she called frustula, question what constitutes a memorial and which histories—whether natural, personal, or political—it represents. “One of my dreams,” she wrote in an artist statement for a 1978 gallery show, is “to place fragments in tall grass where a house once stood but where, now, only the chimney bricks remain.” Barbara Chase-Riboud’s art offers yet another perspective on commemorative forms as the remains of an enigmatic past. Her carefully rendered drawings of rocks, cords, and ruins evoke honorific statuary like stelae, but they are arranged in tenuous, even surreal, formations that resist being located in time and space beyond the page. Proposing new relationships between landscape, dreamscape, and “pagescape,” this group of works stages various processes of decomposition—and erosion of easily accessed meaning—across time scales as vast as human history and the formation of the Earth itself.

ARTISTS

Alice Aycock	Michael Heizer*
Beverly Buchanan	Will Insley*
Barbara Chase-Riboud	Richard Long*‡
Mel Chin	Marta Minujín
Christo*‡	Robert Morris*‡
Walter De Maria*	Claes Oldenburg*
Agnes Denes	Dennis Oppenheim*
Mary Beth Edelson	Robert Rauschenberg
Ericson and Ziegler	Robert Smithson*‡
Jackie Ferrara	Michelle Stuart
Gray Foy	

* Artist on John and Dominique de Menil’s *Dream Monuments* list (c. 1969)

‡ Unrealized proposal for original *Dream Monuments* exhibition

Dream Monuments: Drawing in the 1960s and 1970s is cocurated by Erica DiBenedetto, guest curator, and Kelly Montana, Assistant Curator at the Menil Drawing Institute.

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For additional information and articles about this project written by the exhibition curators, please visit menil.org/read.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Wednesday, June 16, 1 p.m. CDT

Artist Talk: Alice Aycock

*In conversation with Erica DiBenedetto
and Kelly Montana, cocurators*

Online

Friday, August 27, 8 p.m. CDT

Outdoor Film Screening: A Selection
of Short Films on Land Art

*Presented in collaboration with
Aurora Picture Show*

Menil Lawn

All programs are free and open to everyone.

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