

**The Menil Collection Opens
The Curatorial Imagination of Walter Hopps March 24**

Exhibition features recent and promised gifts that spotlight the Houston museum's history of deep relationships with artists, highlighting the career of the Menil's Founding Director Walter Hopps



HOUSTON—March 8, 2023—The Menil Collection is pleased to announce the opening of *The Curatorial Imagination of Walter Hopps* on March 24, 2023. The exhibition features some 130 artworks by seventy artists, many of which are recent or promised gifts to the museum from Caroline Huber and the Estate of Walter Hopps. The show will explore the influential curatorial vision of the Menil Collection's Founding Director Walter Hopps (1932–2005) and his appreciation for art from the 1930s to the early 2000s. *The Curatorial Imagination of Walter Hopps* will be **on view at the Menil from March 24–August 13, 2023** and coincides with the publication of *Artists We've Known: Selected Works from the Walter Hopps and Caroline Huber Collection*, which highlights works by fifty artists with whom the couple was close.



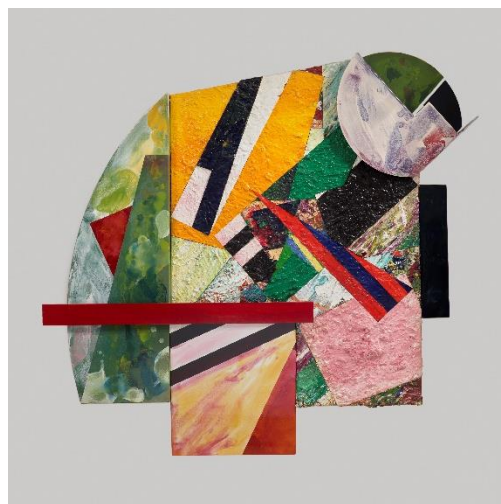
Artists **Larry Bell, George Herms, and Ed Ruscha** will participate in an **Artist Talk at the Menil on Friday, March 24, 6–7 p.m.** The conversation will explore the artists' pivotal role in the 1960s Los Angeles art scene and their engagement with Hopps during these years. The following month on **Thursday, April 13, 7–8 p.m., artist Robert Longo will visit** to speak about his large-scale work *Master Jazz*, 1982-83, on view in the exhibition.

Once dubbed “the marvelous mad maven of modern art in America,” Hopps estimated that he had curated some 250 exhibitions in his fifty-plus year-long career. He started out in Los Angeles where, in 1952, he organized his first shows while still in college and a few years later opened the Ferus Gallery with artist Edward Kienholz. He was appointed director of the Pasadena Art Museum (now the Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena) in

1964 and went on to serve as the director of the Corcoran Gallery of Art and as the curator of modern art at the National Collection of Fine Arts (now the Smithsonian American Art Museum), both in Washington, D.C. Hopps met John de Menil while curating an exhibition on Jasper Johns for the Pasadena Art Museum in the late 1960s and met Dominique de Menil in 1971 at an opening for a Barnett Newman exhibition in New York City. In 1980, she invited Hopps to direct the museum she and John had built at Rice University and to join the board of the Menil Foundation. The following year, Hopps was appointed Founding Director of the Menil Collection, a museum that opened to public in 1987.

Rebecca Rabinow, Director, The Menil Collection, said, “*The Curatorial Imagination of Walter Hopps* and the Menil Collection’s new publication *Artists We’ve Known* celebrate a promised gift of more than 500 works to the museum from Menil Foundation trustee Caroline Huber and the Estate of Walter Hopps. While Director of the Menil, Hopps worked with Dominique de Menil to curate landmark exhibitions of artists Joseph Cornell, Marcel Duchamp, Edward Kienholz, Robert Rauschenberg, James Rosenquist, and Andy Warhol. She deeply valued his ‘infallible eye’ and ‘understanding of current trends.’ Two years after the museum opened, Hopps relinquished his directorial role so that he could return to his true love: working with artists and curating exhibitions.”

Clare Elliott, Associate Research Curator, The Menil Collection, said, “This exhibition explores the achievements of one of the most talented and influential curators of the 20th century. The wide scope of Hopps’s interests and his embrace of artworks across forms and styles are demonstrated in the range of movements and media on display. On view are artists like Jay DeFeo, Sam Gilliam, and William Eggleston, as well as figures who remain underrecognized today like Gretchen Bender, Louis Faurer, and Carroll Sockwell.”



The Curatorial Imagination of Walter Hopps opens with a room dedicated to artwork showcased in the early years of the Los Angeles-based Ferus Gallery, a gathering spot for young Californian artists like Wallace Berman, Bruce Conner, and Jay DeFeo. Ferus also brought artists active in New York, such as Jasper Johns and Barnett Newman, to the West Coast and was the first gallery to show Andy Warhol's *Campbell's Soup Can* paintings. While still active at Ferus, Hopps began curating exhibitions at the Pasadena Art Museum, including *New Paintings of Common Objects*, the first museum survey of Pop Art in 1962, and the first museum exhibition of Frank Stella in 1966.



The exhibition celebrates Hopps's lifelong interest in photography, which was reignited when he met William Christenberry, who in turn introduced him to two foundational figures in American photography, William Eggleston and Walker Evans. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Hopps drew attention to emerging artists such as Gretchen Bender, Robert Longo, and Haim Steinbach. Subsequent sections of the show highlight the retrospectives Hopps organized at the Pasadena Art Museum focused on three pioneering figures of Dada and Surrealism: Joseph Cornell, Marcel Duchamp, and Kurt Schwitters. It concludes with a selection of work by Robert Rauschenberg, a friend for nearly fifty years.

The Curatorial Imagination of Walter Hopps is organized by Clare Elliott, Associate Research Curator.

A related publication, *Artists We've Known: Selected Works from the Walter Hopps and Caroline Huber Collection*, highlights fifty works from the couple's personal collection that have been gifted to the Menil, many of which will be on view in this exhibition. The book is available for purchase at

the Menil Collection Bookstore and online at menil.org/bookstore.

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

Funding

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Shannon Sasser; Mark Wawro and Melanie Gray; Leslie Field and Morris Weiner; Nina and Michael Zilkha; and the City of Houston through Houston Arts Alliance.

The *Artist Talk* series is generously supported by the Cockrell Family Fund.

Image Captions

1. Jerry McMillan, *Walter Hopps, Jerry McMillan Wants to See You*, 1965. Photograph, 16 x 19 1/4 in. (40.6 x 48.9 cm). The Menil Collection, Houston, Promised gift of Caroline Huber and the estate of Walter Hopps. © Jerry McMillan. Courtesy of Craig Krull Gallery
2. Edward Ruscha, *Hurting the Word Radio #1*, 1964, oil on canvas, 59-1/8 x 55-1/8 in. (150.2 x 140 cm), The Menil Collection, Houston. © Ed Ruscha. Photo: Paul Hester
3. Sam Gilliam, *The Saint of Moritz Outside Mondrian*, 1984. Acrylic on canvas and metal, 59 x 63-1/2 x 5 in. (149.9 x 161.3 x 12.7 cm). The Menil Collection, Houston. © Sam Gilliam / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo: Caroline Philipponne
4. William Eggleston, *Untitled from William Eggleston's Guide*, ca. 1969-1971, published 1976. Dye imbibition (dye transfer) print, 21 x 13 5/8 in. (53.3 x 34.6 cm). The Menil Collection, Houston, Gift of Walter Hopps. © Eggleston Artistic Trust, Courtesy Eggleston Artistic Trust and David Zwirner

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