

The Menil Collection Presents a Comprehensive Survey of Robert Motherwell's Drawings at the Menil Drawing Institute This Fall

More than 100 works from over two dozen public and private collections—spanning the artist's practice throughout his 50-year career—will be on view exclusively at the Menil Drawing Institute November 18, 2022–March 12, 2023

Exhibition celebrates the Dedalus Foundation's publication of the catalogue raisonné of Motherwell's drawings



HOUSTON—May 25, 2022— This fall, the Menil Collection will present the most comprehensive survey ever mounted of the drawings of Robert Motherwell (1915-1991), on view exclusively at the Menil Drawing Institute from November 18, 2022 through March 12, 2023. Spanning the artist's career from the 1940s through the 1980s, with more than 100 works, *Robert Motherwell Drawing: As Fast as the Mind Itself* is organized by the Menil with the support of the Dedalus Foundation, which was established by the artist in 1981. The exhibition celebrates the forthcoming publication of the catalogue raisonné devoted to Motherwell's drawings.

The youngest and most scholarly of the artists who came to be identified as Abstract Expressionists, Motherwell explored a personal, spontaneous language of mark-making throughout his life, creating drawings in a wide variety of techniques and styles that he sometimes used concurrently. *Robert Motherwell Drawing: As Fast as the Mind Itself* will bring together works from the Menil's own holdings and from two dozen public and private collections

to show the full range of the artist's practice—including his major series the Elegies to the Spanish Republic, Beside the Sea, Lyric Suite, Drunk with Turpentine, and the Opens—revealing the cohesiveness underlying Motherwell's remarkable array of motifs, styles, textures, and moods.

Rebecca Rabinow, Director of the Menil Collection, said, "The Menil Collection is proud to present the drawings of Robert Motherwell, whose lifelong fascination with drawing was at the core of his significant artistic achievements. John and Dominique de Menil first visited Motherwell's studio in 1952 and later acquired work by him. The museum has continued to collect works by Motherwell, most recently the painting *Sea of Sand*, 1973, and fourteen drawings that are promised gifts. From early Surrealist works to the artist's late drawings, this exhibition will provide an invaluable opportunity for visitors to experience the boldness and intensity of Motherwell's extraordinary career."

Edouard Kopp, John R. Eckel, Jr. Foundation Chief Curator of the Menil Drawing Institute, said, "Inspired by Surrealism and the practice of automatic drawing, Robert Motherwell embraced the suggestive potential of his drawing materials, blending the accidental and the intentional in the creative gesture, whether a stroke of the pen or brush or a tear in paper. He did not draw to imitate reality, but to give form to his intuition of the inner workings of the world, through a practice geared toward invention and variation. While the work evolved stylistically, it remained united by its continuities and his desire to draw 'as fast as the mind itself.'"



The exhibition will explore several aspects of Motherwell's practice, including his dialogue between the geometric and organic, and his diverse approach to calligraphic mark-making. Motherwell loved paper for the natural beauty of its surface and for its inherent resistance to corrections and second thoughts, which allowed him to be spontaneous.

Motherwell's early drawings from the 1940s show the influence of a broad range of artists whom he admired, including Henri Matisse, Roberto Matta, Joan Miró, Piet Mondrian, and Pablo Picasso. During this period, Motherwell explored figural structures and abstraction. This led him to the frieze-like compositional structure seen in his breakthrough series, the Elegies.

In the 1960s, Motherwell created additional series, including *Beside the Sea*, the *Lyric Suite*, and the *Opens*, each represented in the Menil's survey. As he wrote of his *Lyric Suite*, "it came to me in a flash: paint the thousand sheets without interruption, without *a priori* traditional or moral prejudices or *a posteriori* ones, without iconography, and above all without revisions or additions upon critical reflection and judgment. Give up one's being to the enterprise and see what lies within, whatever it is. Venture. Don't look back. Do not tire. Everything is open. Brushes and blank white paper!"

The artist's later works shifted toward a more formal restraint and an almost exclusive use of black. A large number of gestural works made in 1979 would come to be known as the Drunk with Turpentine series. Executed on paper in oil mixed with turpentine, these works are invariably marked by a yellowish halo around the black paint from the oil migrating through the paper over time. In the more concise examples, Motherwell pared down his compositions to freely drawn lines and simple shapes, such as triangles and rectangles.

Related Publications

A fully illustrated catalogue published by the Menil will accompany the exhibition. The show is organized with the support of the Dedalus Foundation on the occasion of the forthcoming publication of the catalogue raisonné devoted to Motherwell's drawings.

About Robert Motherwell

Robert Motherwell was born in Aberdeen, Washington, in 1915, and grew up in California. He received his BA in philosophy from Stanford University in 1937. He then pursued graduate studies in philosophy at Harvard University and in 1938–39 lived in France, studying French literature. In 1940 he moved to New York City to study art history at Columbia University under Meyer Schapiro. He traveled to Mexico with Roberto Matta in 1941. Motherwell had his first solo show at Peggy Guggenheim's Art of this Century Gallery in 1944, and a major retrospective in 1965 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, which subsequently traveled to five European cities. Important retrospectives followed in 1976 (Düsseldorf, Stockholm, Vienna, Edinburgh, and London), 1977 (Paris), 1980 (Madrid and Barcelona), and 1983 (Buffalo NY, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, Washington DC, and New York City). Two additional drawing-focused exhibitions are worth noting: *Robert Motherwell Drawings: A Retrospective, 1941 to the Present*, at the Janie C. Lee Gallery in Houston (1979); and *Robert Motherwell on Paper: Drawings, Prints, Collages*, curated by David Rosand for the Wallach Gallery, Columbia University in 1997, which traveled to two other university museums. Motherwell's drawings are held in numerous private and public collections, mostly in Europe and North America. The most significant North American institutional holdings include those of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; the Dedalus Foundation, New York; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; and the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. All are lenders to this exhibition.

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 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

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. menil.org/drawing-institute

Funding

This exhibition is generously supported by Angela and William Cannady; Mary Hale Lovett McLean; and the City of Houston through Houston Arts Alliance.

Image Captions

1. Robert Motherwell, *Lyric Suite*, 1965. Ink on paper, 9 x 11 in. (22.9 x 27.9 cm). Promised gift of Susanne and William E. Pritchard III. © 2022 Dedalus Foundation, Inc. / VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY
2. Robert Motherwell, *Untitled*, 1943. Watercolor and ink on paperboard, 15 x 11 in. (38.1 x 27.9 cm). The Menil Collection, Houston. © 2022 Dedalus Foundation, Inc. / VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

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