

The Menil Collection Presents *Out of Thin Air: Emerging Forms* at the Menil Drawing Institute This Fall

Exhibition explores drawings from the permanent collection that are evocative portals into the imagination



HOUSTON—May 6, 2024—This fall, the Menil Collection will present *Out of Thin Air: Emerging Forms*, on view at the Menil Drawing Institute September 20, 2024–January 26, 2025. Selected from the museum’s permanent collection, twenty-nine works dating from the late 1930s to the present are united by a visual concept: emerging forms. Not fully resolved or strictly defined, the selected works are open, suggestive images that seem as though they are still in the process of becoming. Artists represented include Lee Bontecou, John Cage, Gustavo Díaz, Hiroyuki Doi, Sonia Gechtoff, Gregory Masurovsky, Alan Saret, and Hedda Sterne, among others. The show will include drawings acquired by John and Dominique de Menil as early as the 1950s, several gifts to the collection, and a recent acquisition.

Kirsten Marples, Curatorial Associate, Menil Drawing Institute, said, “This exhibition brings together a few museum favorites with some remarkable works that have never been on view before at the Menil. *Out of Thin Air: Emerging Forms* is a show about discovery, openness, and possibility. It is a presentation that, I hope, empowers each viewer to look closely, imagine, and draw their own connections between a diverse group of drawings.”

In the first gallery, visitors will encounter a group of works on view for the first time at the Menil by artist Gregory Masurovsky (1929–2009), who used drawing to investigate the forces animating the universe. The marks comprising his delicate ink drawings hover between materialization and imminent dispersal. Described by the artist as “a sort of ambiguity rendered with precision,” they suggest fleeting swarms, vibrations, or cloud formations.

Acquired by the museum in 2023, Gustavo Díaz’s (b. 1969) *Imaginary Flight Patterns V*, 2021, explores the notion of complexity through an intricate network of marks that recalls electrical currents, aerial maps, or flocks of birds in flight, prompting viewers to make associations between distinct phenomena. Similarly precise and painstaking are the drawings of Japanese artist Hiroyuki Doi (b. 1946), which are formed through the incremental accumulation of minute circles—each symbolic of the universe. They call to mind celestial galaxies, rapidly multiplying cells, or cresting waves.

As if shaped by a gust of wind, the wispy lines in a large, gestural graphite drawing by Sonia Gechtoff (1926–2018) create order out of chaos, coalescing into a figural shape that straddles representation and abstraction. Gechtoff’s drawing will be presented in the second gallery alongside works by Alan Saret (b. 1944), in which similar bursts of linear gesture seem endowed with a sense of spiritual life force.

Exploring the possibilities of automatism, Hedda Sterne (1910–2011) generated her ink drawings out of a private meditation practice, which she described as an inward spiraling. Her unfurling masses of line—which suggest leafy vegetables and dark galactic voids—never fully resolve as distinct images, instead inviting many associations. Lee Bontecou’s (1931–2022) cosmic architectures hover, suspended at the center of large sheets, opening worlds beyond that seem as if they are perpetually coming into view.

Out of Thin Air: Emerging Forms is curated by Kirsten Marples, Curatorial Associate, 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. menil.org/drawing-institute

Funding

This exhibition is generously supported by Sheila Noeth and Ted Dohman and the City of Houston through Houston Arts Alliance.

Image Caption

Hiroyuki Doi, *Untitled*, 1990. Ink on paper, 25 1/4 x 39 in. (64.1 x 99.1 cm). The Menil Collection, Houston, Gift of Stephanie and John Smither. © Hiroyuki Doi; all rights reserved.
Photo: Paul Hester

Press Contacts

The Menil Collection
Jennifer Greene, Communications Manager
713-525-9477 / jgreene@menil.org

Polskin Arts
Tommy Napier, Vice President
212-715-1694 / tommy.napier@finnpartners.com