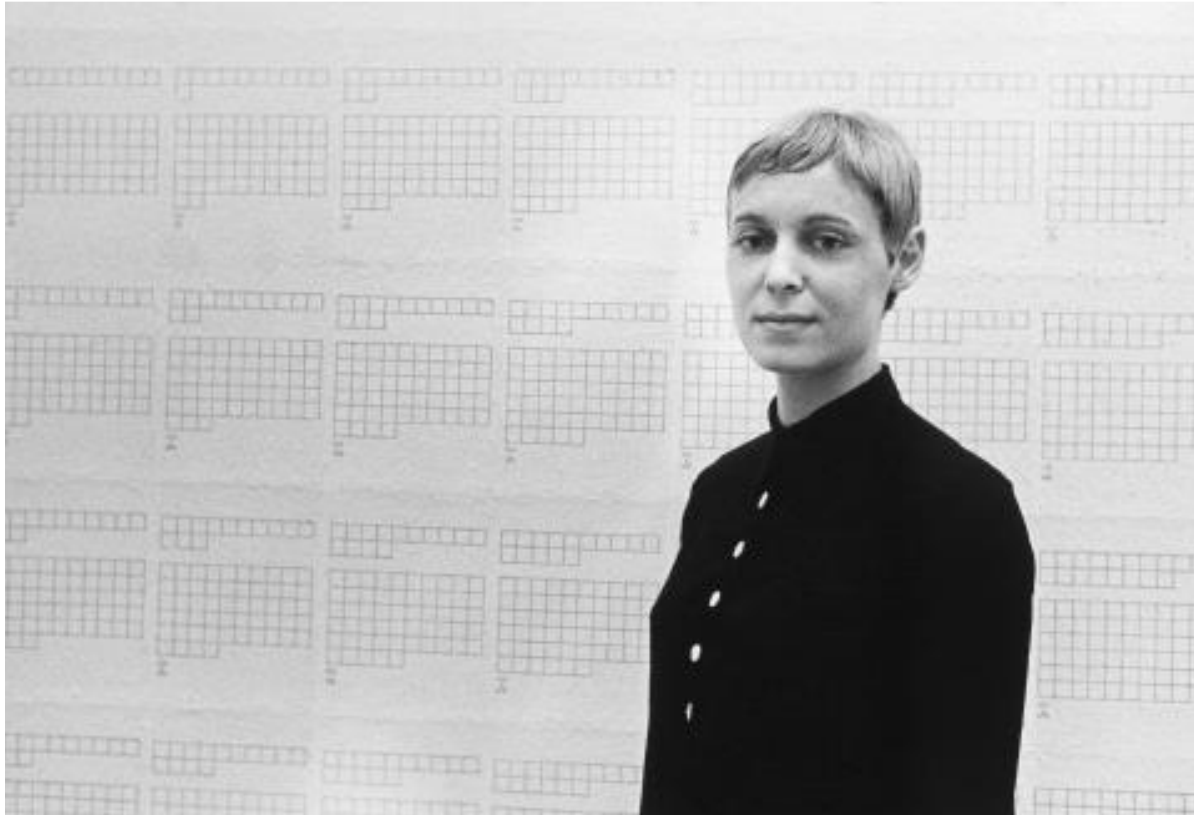


The Menil Collection Opens *Hanne Darboven—Writing Time* at the Menil Drawing Institute on October 27

Exhibition spans the entirety of Darboven's career, exploring the role of line, text, and drawing in her practice



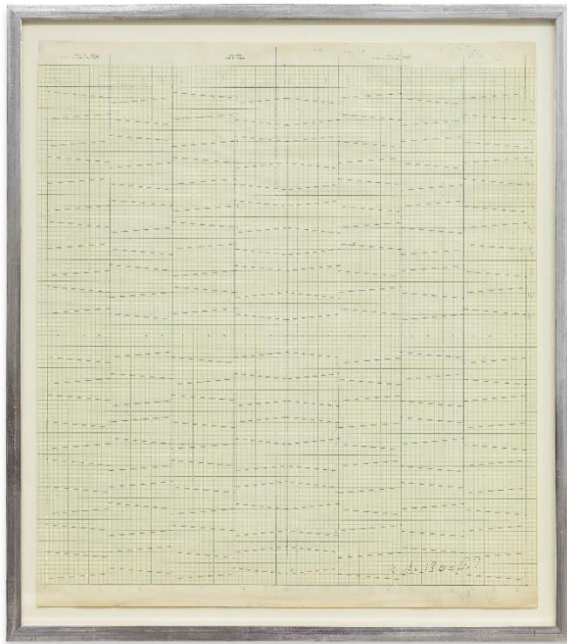
HOUSTON—*October 4, 2023*—The Menil Collection will open ***Hanne Darboven—Writing Time at the Menil Drawing Institute on October 27, 2023***. On view through February 11, 2024, this exhibition examines the breadth of the work created by German conceptual artist Hanne Darboven (1941–2009), best known for her immersive installations of individually framed sheets filled with text formulations and collaged images. Darboven's art overlaps line, drawing, text, and mathematical formulas which slip naturally into one another. At the heart of her practice is the question of how to picture the unfolding of history, the passage of time, and one's experience within both.

In 1973, Darboven sent her friend, the artist Sol LeWitt, a letter that is both correspondence and a manifesto. In it, she declares her use of writing, numbers, and dates to be her “field,” “unit,” and “desire,” and “as quiet as pencil and paper.” The sheet, however, bursts forth with wavy lines, numbers, dates, and elongated dashes that create positive and negative space and cross out words, an addition that suggests an inherent contradiction to the proclaimed “quiet” of the materials specific to writing and drawing. The note, and the wide variety and quantity of marks it contains, depicts the intertwining of writing and drawing that formed the core of Darboven's artistic method for over forty years.

Rebecca Rabinow, Director, The Menil Collection, said, “The Menil Collection is proud to present a survey of Hanne Darboven's drawings. Her thought-provoking and idiosyncratic serialized approach to mark-making was informed by her efforts to capture her own perception

of time, and her work offers a unique way of thinking about drawing and what it means to put a mark on paper.”

Kelly Montana, Assistant Curator, Menil Drawing Institute, said, “What brought me to Hanne Darboven’s work is how she enigmatically created an image of living through time. The act of drawing, in its immediacy, is already closely entangled with time; Darboven’s work allows for an expanded consideration of the relationship between line, drawing, and duration. These works are an elegant, immersive, and inscrutable puzzle, and I cannot help but be moved by the intensity of her vision when I look at them.”



The show is organized around three critical phases in her artistic career—abstract drawings, date calculations, and monumental installations. The show opens with examples of the artist’s earliest works, the *Constructions* series, abstract drawings based on fixed number patterns mapped onto graph paper. In *Construction/Perforation*, 1966/67, an arbitrary number sequence is translated into a series of diagonal lines that increase and decrease in length sequentially, starting at five graph squares long, then ten, then nine, and finally arriving back at five. The resulting horizontal bands of chevron-like patterns appear to bend toward and recede from the viewer.

The artist then began to analyze the reality of the calendar as a supposed objective instrument for measuring time. In 1968, Darboven experimented with the transformation of her abstract drawings into works that ambiguously visualize history and

the passing of time. She adapted her drawings into formulas that convert specific dates and durations into a single number that she then represented as a series of counted marks. *Six Books on 1968* is one of the earliest examples of Darboven’s method. Within the pages of each book, she represents every day of the year as a single number, what she termed the “K-value,” by adding up all the figures in a given date. This makes January 1, 1968 equal to 16K (1 + 1 + 6 + 8). Another example is *Untitled*, ca. 1970–73, in which Darboven uses her trademark line, akin to calligraphic handwriting, to depict a century in her calculations, with each set of wavelike marks separated by a semicolon. For the artist, the line was “a way of writing without describing.”

In the last decade of Darboven’s life, as her works on paper grew in number and scale, she made engulfing installations that systematically brought together hundreds—even thousands—of sheets. The Menil’s exhibition culminates with *Inventions that Have Changed Our World*, 1996, an expansive set of more than 1,300 individually framed sheets that has never before been exhibited in the United States. With grid formations, written calculations, transcribed text, found sculptures, and pasted images, this labor-intensive work incorporates all of the early hallmarks of her drawings alongside the evolutions of her practice. The primary subject is ten figurines of historic inventors and their most notable creations—from Johannes Gutenberg with the printing press to the Wright Brothers and their airplane. In bringing together the biographies of these figures—few of whom even lived past the year 1900—she stages a curious clash of time scales, questions technological progress, and stands in direct opposition to standard historical narratives. She attaches history to the idea of time moving forward and undermines the linear tools of order—grids, rows, and columns—effectively leveling the relative importance of the events and individuals. She further destabilizes chronology by ending nearly every sheet

by writing out “today” in English and German (*Heute*), then crossing out the text with a single line. The repetition and accumulation of the word “today” relentlessly connects this history of invention to the present, exploring how the impacts of these events may remain relevant to the contemporary moment. Crossing out the word “today,” however, acknowledges that time cannot be captured through words or on paper. The present moment is always there and not there, instantly receding into the past as soon as it is written.

Hanne Darboven—Writing Time is curated by Kelly Montana, Assistant Curator, Menil Drawing Institute. The show will be accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue that features essays by Kelly Montana, and Dieter Schwarz, independent curator, and former director of the Kunstmuseum Winterthur, Switzerland. The publication will be 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 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 Suzanne Deal Booth; Diane and Michael Cannon; Sheila Noeth and Ted Dohmen; John R. Eckel, Jr. Foundation; Janie C. Lee; and the City of Houston through Houston Arts Alliance.

Image Captions

1. Portrait Hanne Darboven at Konrad Fischer Gallery, Dusseldorf, 1968. Image courtesy of bpk Bildagentur / Angelika Platen / Art Resource, NY. © bpk
2. Hanne Darboven, *Construction/Perforation New York [Konstruktion/Perforation New York]*, 1966/67. Pencil and ballpoint pen on graph paper, 29 1/2 x 27 in. (75 x 68.7 cm). Hanne Darboven Foundation, Hamburg, and Sprüth Magers. © Hanne Darboven Stiftung, Hamburg / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York 2023. Photo Credit: Timo Ohler

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