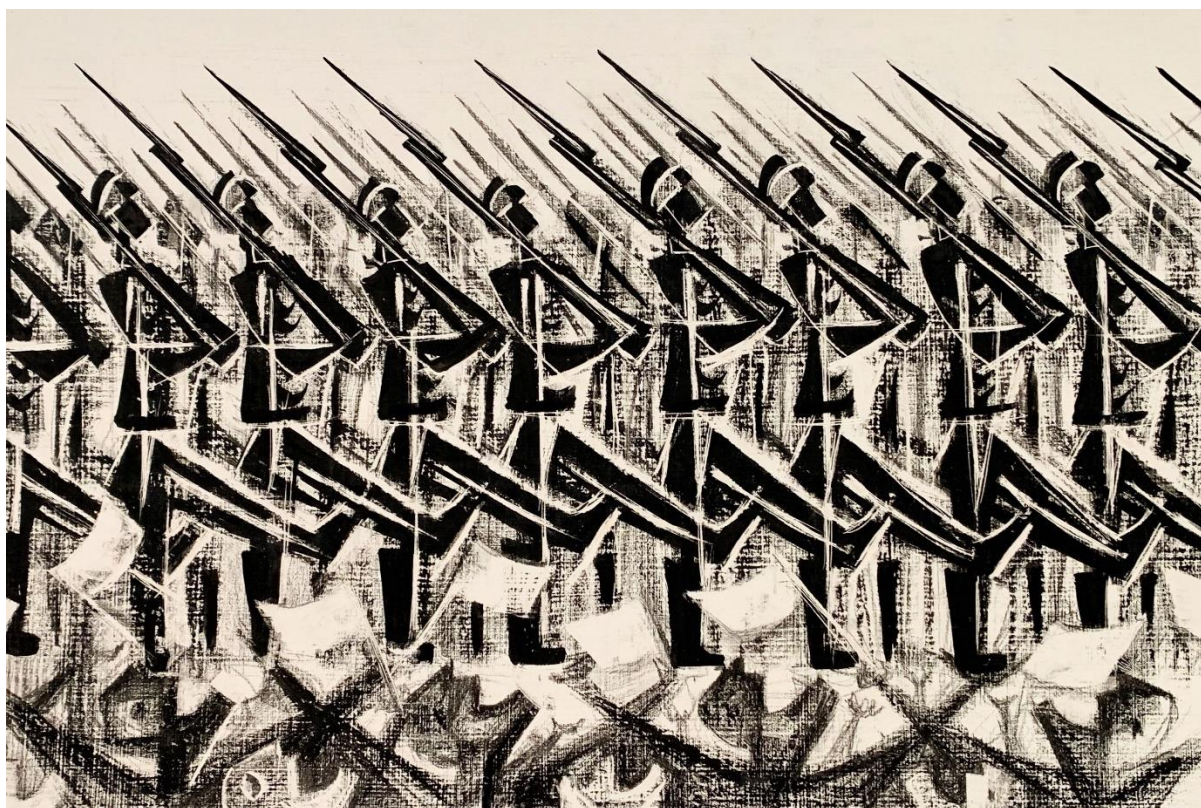


The Menil Collection Opens *Si Lewen: The Parade* at the Menil Drawing Institute on April 21

Exhibition is the first in the United States to bring together the complete set of original works by artist Si Lewen



HOUSTON—*April 4, 2023*—The Menil Collection will open an exhibition of drawings by Polish-born American artist Si Lewen (1918–2016) **at the Menil Drawing Institute on April 21**. On view through September 3, 2023, *Si Lewen: The Parade* presents drawings by the artist made in preparation for his groundbreaking graphic novel about the never-ending cycle of war, *The Parade*, 1957. All fifty-five original drawings reproduced in the book will be exhibited, along with eight additional related works. The complete set has never before been exhibited in the United States.

Without a single written word, *The Parade* speaks to cycles of war, the seductive glory and pomp, followed by soldier enlistment, community deprivation, devastating destruction, death, and heartbreak. When the war ends, the cycle repeats. The artist was born during the final days of World War I; the armistice parades after that conflict, the rise of Nazism, and the brutal violence of World War II, all inform his haunting tale.

The Parade begins with images of children and families making their way towards a celebration. After watching a military parade, children wearing paper hats pretend to fight one another. All too soon, they are given deadly weapons, and what once seemed like play morphs into a nightmare. The drawings represent devastation, desolation, and death. Menacing shadows and

a dark, ominous tone convey the shock and horror of war. The series unfolds cinematically, sequentially connecting one image to another to create one powerfully moving work of art.

Rebecca Rabinow, Director, The Menil Collection, said, “For decades, John and Dominique de Menil worked to promote social justice and world peace. At a 1991 dinner honoring Nelson Mandela, Mrs. de Menil said, ‘We live in dramatic times. Violent confrontations are erupting in all parts of the world. Instinctively we feel that it does not have to be so. That confrontation could give way to cooperation.’ Like the de Menils, the artist Si Lewen was deeply disturbed by the cycles of violent rhetoric and militarism that produce excitement and pride before giving way to terror and destruction. It is this cycle of horror that is the subject of *The Parade*.”

Each drawing in the series is a technical tour de force of mark-making, combining lines and incisions into the surface of the illustration board. Lewen used a limited tonal range, reflecting the darkest moments of war when all color seems to vanish. In the July 2005 *ART TIMES* article “The Artist and War,” Lewen remembered, “The sky, which a moment ago was blue, appeared washed out into a bony whiteness and all else appeared as an almost monochrome range between black and white. Even the color of blood was not red but black.”



Kelly Montana, Assistant Curator, Menil Drawing Institute, said, “*Si Lewen: The Parade* evokes the destruction and despair surrounding World War II in Europe as authoritarian violence built and lives were lost. Inspired by the traditions of visual narrative by artists like Frans Masereel, Lewen created a deeply affecting set of works that carry a message as potent today as it was in the 1950s when the book was published.”

A Polish Jewish refugee, Si Lewen grew up in Germany, where he observed the political and cultural upheaval happening around him. In 1933, when Hitler came to power, he fled to France with his brother and later immigrated to the United States. After enlisting in the U.S. Army and joining an elite unit of German-speaking special forces called “The Ritchie Boys,” he saw action in Normandy and visited the Buchenwald concentration camp shortly after its liberation in 1945. The artist was devastated by atrocities of the Holocaust.

Although Lewen transformed his personal memories into these drawings, he knew they could not express the real-life terrors he witnessed. Lewen said, “Did I succeed? Can others now see what I saw? The answer is ‘no’. No matter how well articulated or skillfully created, ‘horror,’ for instance, means little except to those who have also experienced it.” The book received numerous accolades when it was published in 1957. Lewen sent an early mock-up of *The Parade* to Albert Einstein, who replied, “I find your work, *The Parade*, very impressive from a purely artistic standpoint... It has often been said that art should not be used to serve any political or otherwise practical goals. But I could never agree with this point of view... Our time needs you and your work!”

Si Lewen: The Parade is organized by Kelly Montana, Assistant Curator at the Menil Drawing Institute.

Related Programs

Menil programs are free and open to everyone. Learn more at menil.org/events.

In Conversation: Art Spiegelman on Si Lewen and Graphic Novels

Thursday, May 4, 6 p.m.

Art Spiegelman (b. 1948), who won the Pulitzer Prize in 1992 for his masterful Holocaust narrative, *Maus*, discusses Si Lewen's art and the history of graphic novels with Rebecca Rabinow, Director, The Menil Collection.

About the Menil Collection

Houston 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. 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 Leslie Field and Morris A. Weiner; Jacquelyn Barish; Rice University's Boniuk Institute for Religious Tolerance; Barbara and Michael Gamson; Heidi and David Gerger; Caroline Huber; Lois and George Stark; and the City of Houston through Houston Arts Alliance.

Image Caption

Untitled drawing from Si Lewen, *The Parade*, ca. 1950. Crayon, ink, paint and graphite on gessoed board, sheet: 12 x 18 inches (30.5 x 45.7 cm). Collection of the International Institute for Restorative Practices. © International Institute for Restorative Practices

Press Contacts

The Menil Collection

Jennifer Greene, Communications Manager

713.525.9477 / jgreene@menil.org

Polskin Arts & Communications Counselors

Tommy Napier, Senior Account Supervisor

212.715.1694 / tommy.napier@finnpartners.com