

“Walter De Maria: Trilogies” is curated by Josef Helfenstein, director of the Menil Collection.

This exhibition is generously supported by Houston Endowment Inc., The Eleanor and Frank Freed Foundation, Olive McCollum Jenney, David and Anne Kirkland, William F. Stern, Clare Casademont and Michael Metz, the City of Houston, and by proceeds from Men of Menil. Exhibition underwriter United Airlines is the Preferred Airline of the Menil Collection.

PUBLIC PROGRAM

Friday, October 14, 7:00 p.m.

“The Permanent Installations of Walter De Maria”

Director Josef Helfenstein joins Assistant Curator Clare Elliot and Chief Conservator Brad Epley in an illustrated discussion of Walter De Maria’s permanent works, which range from *The New York Earth Room*, 1977, to the recent *Large Red Sphere*, 2010, in Munich.

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

Available 2012 at the Menil Bookstore

Contributions by Clare Elliott, Josef Helfenstein, and Neville Wakefield
This fully illustrated catalogue documents the new Menil installation and related works.
96 pp., 40 color illustrations, \$50

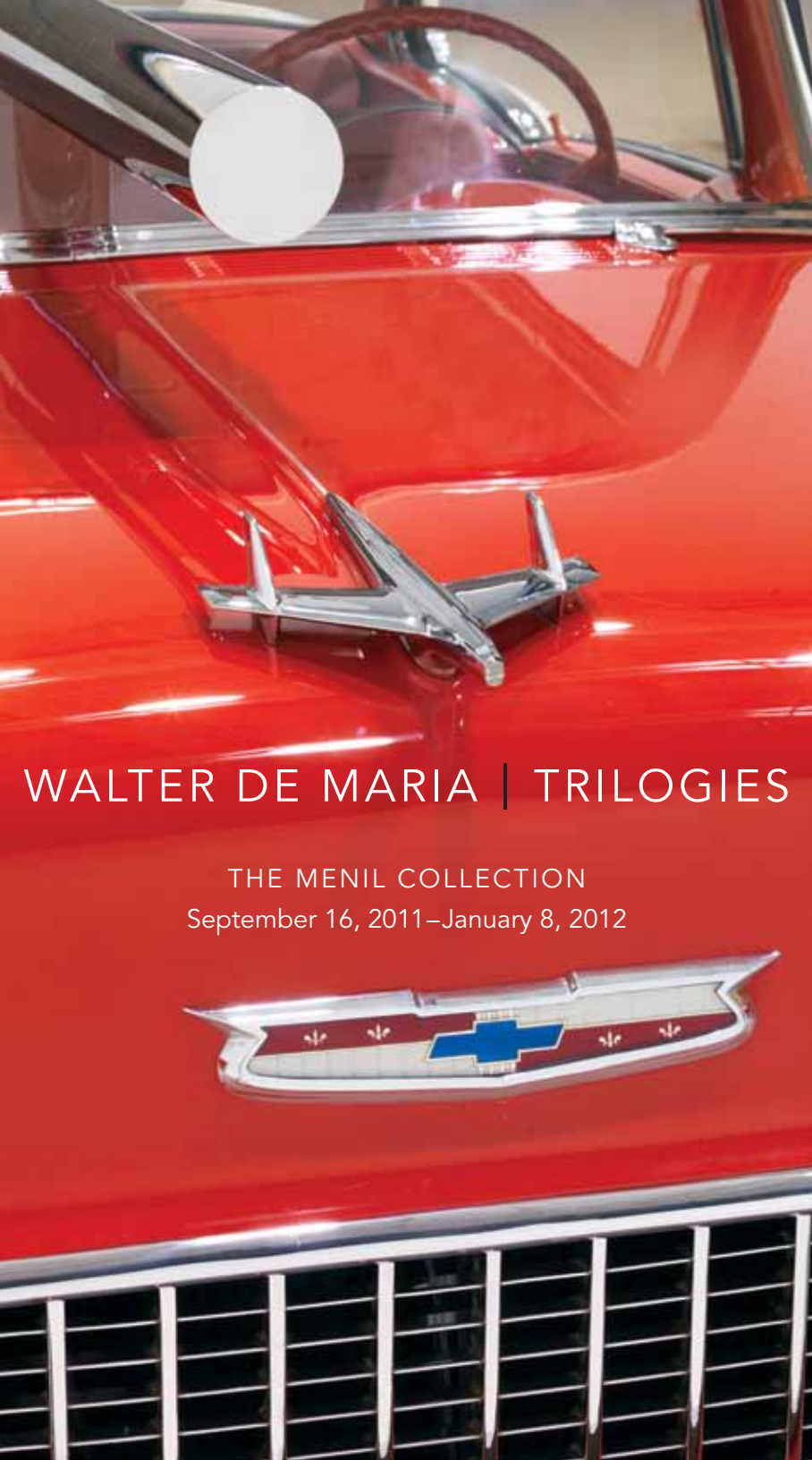
cover:
Bel Air Trilogy: Circle Rod (detail), 2000–11
Stainless steel rod with 1955 Chevrolet Bel Air
two-tone hardtop
Rod: 4 inches (dia.) x 12 feet; automobile: 5 x 6 x 16 feet
Courtesy the artist and Gagosian Gallery
Photo: Robert McKeever

All artworks © 2011 Walter De Maria

THE MENIL COLLECTION

1515 Sul Ross Street Houston, Texas 77006 713-525-9400 menil.org

Printed with low VOC (Volatile Organic Compound) inks on recycled paper containing at least 40% post-consumer waste.



WALTER DE MARIA | TRILOGIES

THE MENIL COLLECTION
September 16, 2011–January 8, 2012



The Statement Series: Yellow Painting
(*The Color Men Choose When They Attack the Earth*), 1968
Oil on canvas with stainless steel plaque
82 x 238 inches
The Menil Collection, purchased with funds contributed by the Estate of Mary Kathryn Lynch Kurtz
Photo: Paul Hester

Organized by the artist and Josef Helfenstein, director of the Menil Collection, “Walter De Maria: Trilogies” is the artist’s first major museum exhibition in the United States. The exhibition features three series of related works: one painting series and two sculpture series, each comprised of three parts.

The Statement Series, which occupies the museum’s foyer, consists of three large horizontal, monochrome paintings: *Red Painting*, *Yellow Painting*, and *Blue Painting*. Spanning the interior walls, these fourteen- to twenty-foot long works create a unified, site-specific installation. In addition to acting as a dramatic spatial ensemble, each painting has a prominent rectangular plate of polished stainless steel engraved with a singular statement at its center. *Yellow Painting*, originally titled *The Color Men Choose When They Attack the Earth*, 1968, which is the phrase on its steel plate, is in the permanent collection of the museum. Comparable in their large scale, *Red Painting* and *Blue Painting*, both 2011, were created for this exhibition.

The exhibition continues in the museum’s largest west gallery with the *Channel Series: Circle, Square, Triangle*, 1972, part of the Menil’s permanent collection. In this trilogy, basic

geometric shapes are outlined by lengths of metal with raised sides that form U-shaped channels. Each channel contains a solid stainless steel sphere equal in width to the passageway. The spheres are movable, and an element of randomness is introduced by their variable locations.

Also occupying the west gallery is the third series of works, the *Bel Air Trilogy*, 2000–11. This new sculptural installation consists of three 1955 Chevrolet Bel Air automobiles, meticulously restored with only minor customizations by the artist. Highly popular because of its crisp, clean design and classic lines, this renowned Chevrolet model often featured a signature two-tone color scheme; the three cars exhibited here are each painted in Gypsy Red and Shoreline Beige. The Bel Air has retained the respect of automobile collectors and historians for more than fifty years.

While he considers each sixteen-foot long car a beautiful object in itself, the artist has intervened with a component familiar within his work: a highly polished metal rod. The front windshield of each car has been seamlessly pierced by a twelve-foot long stainless steel rod that runs through the interior of the passenger compartment, parallel to the chassis, and exits



above:
 Channel Series: Circle, Square, Triangle, 1972
 Brushed stainless steel
 Circle: 3¾ x 39¾ inches (dia.); square: 3¾ x 39¾ x 39¾ inches; triangle: 3¾ x 39½ x 45½ inches
 The Menil Collection, Houston
 Photo: Paul Hester

center:
 Bel Air Trilogy: Circle Rod, 2000–11
 Stainless steel rod with 1955 Chevrolet Bel Air two-tone hardtop
 Rod: 4 inches (dia.) x 12 feet; automobile: 5 x 16 x 6 feet
 Courtesy the artist and Gagosian Gallery
 Photo: Robert McKeever



through the rear window. A defining feature of early hardtop car design is the absence of a center window post, which here allows an unobstructed side view of the rod's transversal path. Each rod has a distinct geometric shape, again the primary forms of a square, circle, and triangle. The long minimalist rods, with their reflective surfaces and classic linear, three-dimensional form, share some of the same qualities as the 1955 Chevy Bel Air. The interaction of these two elements creates a stunning and complex new sculpture, unprecedented in De Maria's long career.

Born in Albany, California, and now seventy-five years old, Walter De Maria attended the University of California at Berkeley where he studied history and art, completing a master's degree in 1959. He moved to New York the following year, where he has lived and worked ever since. Although trained as a painter, De Maria soon turned to sculpture. He also began to participate in happenings and to use other media, making recordings, films, and music (most notably as an early member of the Velvet Underground, formed by Lou Reed and John Cale). His first three-dimensional works, sparsely designed and constructed wooden boxes, anticipated minimalism. Over the last fifty years,

he has played an important ongoing role in the development of four major art movements: minimalism, conceptual art, land art (earthworks), and installation art. He has had seven solo European museum exhibitions in Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Sweden, and France.

By the late 1960s, De Maria had started to conceive of the earth itself as a site and medium for artworks of immense scale, free of the limits of a gallery or museum. In 1968 he created *Mile Long Drawing*, two parallel white chalk marks set twelve feet apart that ran for a mile across one of the vast, dry salt lakes of California's Mojave Desert. De Maria is perhaps best known for *The Lightning Field*, 1977, a geometrically precise arrangement of 400 pointed stainless steel poles, averaging twenty feet tall, set in a grid of one mile by one kilometer in the remote desert of western New Mexico.

By the end of the 1970s, De Maria had created three enduring urban works. As complementary pieces, *The Vertical Earth Kilometer*, 1977, and *The Broken Kilometer*, 1979, address the idea of unseen or abstracted distance. *The Vertical Earth Kilometer* is a one-kilometer long brass rod, two inches in

diameter, that has been drilled into Friedrichsplatz Park in Kassel, Germany. The rod's circular top, which is flush with the earth's surface, is framed by a two-meter square plate of red sandstone. *The Broken Kilometer*, a permanent indoor installation in New York, consists of five hundred two-meter long brass rods of equal diameter (totaling one kilometer in length) laid on the floor in precise rows of one hundred rods each. In contrast to the hard metal of both *Kilometer* pieces, the third of these urban works, *The New York Earth Room*, 1977, is a 3,600-square-foot room filled with 250 cubic yards of earth, a depth of twenty-two inches. The piece is a permanent iteration of the temporary installation *Munich Earth Room*, 1968. Throughout the following decades De Maria has continued to create permanent, and often monumental, installations; eleven such works are currently on view in France, Germany, Japan, and the United States.

De Maria's complex investigations—using rigorous mathematical principles, natural materials and environments, and precisely manufactured elements—do not lead to a vision of rational materialism, but to one of enduring mystery. "Trilogies" expresses some of the defining features of De Maria's work in installations that explore the conceptual, the monumental, the minimal, and the real.



The Broken Kilometer, 1979. 500 solid brass rods, 2 (dia.) x 78¾ inches each; 45 x 125 feet overall. Long-term installation at Dia Art Foundation, 393 West Broadway, New York City. Photo: John Abbott © 2011 Dia Art Foundation