

The Menil Collection Opens *Tacita Dean: Blind Folly* October 11

With new works by the artist, this exhibition is the first major museum survey of Tacita Dean's work in the United States



Beauty, 2006

HOUSTON—*August 20, 2024*—The Menil Collection opens ***Tacita Dean: Blind Folly* on October 11, 2024**, the first major museum survey in the United States of work by British European visual artist Tacita Dean (b. 1965) who lives and works in Berlin and Los Angeles. The exhibition, organized in close collaboration with Dean, spotlights her career-defining approach to creating art through unmediated and chance-based drawing processes across a variety of mediums, from film to printmaking. ***Tacita Dean: Blind Folly* will be on view at the Menil October 11, 2024, through April 19, 2025.**

The show will include new works inspired by the artist's time in Houston, some following her residency at the Menil's Cy Twombly Gallery, alongside Dean's monumental blackboard drawings and groups of rarely shown drawings from her studio on paper, found postcards, and albumen photographs. A separate gallery will present a rotating group of her 16mm films.

Rebecca Rabinow, Director, The Menil Collection, said, "The Menil is proud to present this exhibition of work by Tacita Dean, an artist we deeply admire. Over the past seven years, during multiple visits to the Menil, Tacita and curator Michelle White have developed an extraordinarily beautiful and thought-provoking exhibition. I am particularly intrigued by the many ways in which Tacita has drawn inspiration from the Menil's permanent collection and green spaces, as well as from Houston more generally."

Michelle White, Senior Curator, The Menil Collection, said, “Weaving together an array of subjects, from classical mythological narratives to natural phenomena, Tacita Dean’s work presents a poignant and urgent reflection on experience in an increasingly virtual and ecologically volatile world. In this moment, she shows us the power of analogue through the act of drawing.”

Blind Folly, the show’s title, reflects Dean’s desire to let the behavior of her mediums dictate the results of her work. For the artist, the playful and old-fashioned phrase connoting foolishness, “blind folly,” represents the role chance and fate play in the creative act. The artist’s process, a route without a predetermined end, results in a work of art that brings this journey to the fore.



Blind Folly, 2024

The show opens with the artist’s new chalk drawings on found pieces of worn green slates: *Blind Folly*, *Blind and dusty*, *Green Folly*, *Wind-worms*, and *Hooker’s Green*. The snaking, spiraling forms, some she made by pulling her finger through the dust, reference her time in Texas in early 2024—her engagement with Cy Twombly’s works and her experience of the total solar eclipse.

The Menil’s exhibition continues with Dean’s large-scale “portraits” of trees. Dean has photographed trees since 2006, and in these drawings on photographic prints, she surrounds images of blossoming cherry trees, jacarandas, and ancient oaks with hand-drawn marks. Drawn with a brush or pencil, these isolate the powerful, ancient, or fragile trees. According to Dean, the small lines connect her to the past. As she worked, she was delighted by her “proximity to even the tiniest and most inaccessible of branches on these mighty trees.”

The second gallery presents monumental chalk drawings on blackboards, with subjects highlighting the flux of the natural world. Through a virtuosic application of chalk lines and erasures, Dean draws mountains, icebergs, clouds, and other geological and celestial formations that are constantly evolving. *The Montafon Letter*, 2017, and *The Wreck of Hope*, 2022, each twenty-four feet across, show geological forms that are in a perpetual state of change, and like Dean’s unfixed chalk lines, they teeter on the brink of erasure.



The Montafon Letter, 2017

The exhibition spotlights another ongoing form in the artist's work: clouds. *Delfern Tondo*, 2024, was inspired by the swift movement of clouds in the Houston sky. Dean laid on her back in the grass outside of the museum to photograph the action. In the chalk drawing, which maintains a distinctive looking-up vantage point, the moon sinks below a central cluster of billowing forms, ringed by wispy white marks that emulate the effect of beams of moonlight refracting off the clouds.

Blind Folly also includes many examples of drawings on found surfaces, such as vintage postcards, Victorian-era locomotive windows, and sepia-toned albumen prints that have a patina of age. Displayed alongside these works are Dean's photographs of Cy Twombly's studio in Gaeta, Italy, and the print series *More or Less*, 2022. The title comes from Twombly's response to a question Dean asked him. After recalling his anxieties around making art as a young artist, he said that his concerned mother would ask why he continued to paint. Dean then asked, "Does painting make you happy now?" He responded: "more or less."



Found Cy, Houston, 2024

Concluding the show is a small postcard titled *Found Cy, Houston, 2024*. The artist came across it while visiting an antique shop in Houston's Heights neighborhood in a drawer of vintage postcard's labeled "Interesting/Unusual—Foreign—Disaster." At random, she pulled out an early 20th century example depicting rows of wooden beams on the dirt ground, a vanished house torn from its foundation by a strong Midwestern wind. The word "cyclone" was written in white pigment with a brush in neat cursive. The sender's script looked quite like Dean's handwriting and the word "cyclone" was written in such a way that the first two letters of the word stood out: "Cy." The artist had "found Cy," continuing this story of chance encounters that is told through Dean's work in *Blind Folly*.

A separate gallery presents a selection of Dean's 16mm films (schedule below). On rotation will be *The Green Ray*, 2001; *The Friar's Doodle*, 2009; *Edwin Parker*, 2011; and her newest film, *Claes Oldenburg draws Blueberry Pie*, 2023.

- *Claes Oldenburg draws Blueberry Pie*, October 10–December 1, 2024
- *The Friar's Doodle*, December 1, 2024–January 12, 2025
- *Edwin Parker*, January 15–March 9, 2025
- *The Green Ray*, March 12–April 19, 2025

Published in conjunction with the exhibition's opening in October 2024 is *Blind Folly or How Tacita Dean Draws* by Michelle White, Senior Curator, The Menil Collection. The book considers the unique and timely implications of how Dean draws. Covering more than three decades of work, White proposes that the way the artist approaches drawing is an indeterminate journey of fate and folly, chance and medium. The text, illustrated with more than forty images, is based on seven years of conversation between the author and the artist.

In early 2025, for the 30th anniversary of the opening of the Menil Collection's Cy Twombly Gallery, the museum will publish an artist book by Dean. *Why Cy* will be filled with hypnotic and colorful images conceived by the artist following a residency at the gallery and in response to the gestural and linear exuberance of the paintings on view by the late American artist.

About the Artist

After completing a BA in art from the Falmouth School of Art, England, Tacita Dean received her postgraduate studies at the Slade School of Fine Art, London, in 1992. The Hugo Boss winner, primarily known for her work in film, has established a prolific body of work with a variety of analogue mediums. She has worked to preserve celluloid film and was a founding member of savefilm.org, following the production of her work *FILM*, shown in the Turbine Hall of Tate Modern, London, in 2011-12. In 2018, her career retrospective was shown concurrently in three venues in London: the National Gallery, the National Portrait Gallery, and the Royal Academy. Major exhibitions of her work have also been organized at the Schaulager, Basel, Museo Tamayo, Mexico City, and the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney, among many other institutions. Dean was commissioned to create the set design and costumes for the ballet, *The Dante Project*, which debuted at the Royal Opera House, London, and Opéra de Paris in 2021-22.

Related Programs

Lecture: Drawing According to Tacita Dean
George Baker, Professor and Chair, Department of Art History at UCLA
Copresented with the University of Houston Art History Program
November 1, 2024, 7–8 p.m.

Music: DACAMERA Stop, Look, and Listen!
Copresented with DACAMERA
November 9, 2024, 3–4 p.m.

Curator Talk: *Tacita Dean: Blind Folly*
Michelle White, Senior Curator, The Menil Collection
December 8, 2024, 3–3:30 p.m.

Conversation and Film Screening: Saving Cinema
Mark Toscano, film preservationist, and Tish Stringer film scholar and curator
Screening of Tacita Dean's film Kodak, 2006
January 16, 2025, 7–9:30 p.m.

Book Launch: *Why Cy* by Tacita Dean
Signing with the artist
February 9, 2025, 11 a.m.–1 p.m.

Artist Talk: Tacita Dean in conversation with Thomas Adès and Sarah Rothenberg
Thomas Adès, British composer, and Sarah Rothenberg, musical artist
Copresented with DACAMERA
February 10, 2025, 7:30–9 p.m.

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

Funding

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Images

1. Tacita Dean, *Beauty*, 2006. Gouache on black and white fibre-based photograph mounted on paper, 141 × 147 in. (358.1 × 373.4 cm). San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Purchase through a gift of Raoul Kennedy in memory of Patricia A. Kennedy. © Tacita Dean. Photo: Tenari Tuatagaloa
2. Tacita Dean, *Blind Folly*, 2024. Spray chalk, white gouache, and charcoal pencil on found painted slate, 48 × 51 1/8 in. (121.9 × 129.9 cm). Courtesy of the artist. © Tacita Dean. Photo: Fredrik Nilsen Studio
3. Tacita Dean, *The Montafon Letter*, 2017. Chalk on blackboard, 144 × 288 in. (365.8 × 731.5 cm). Glenstone Museum, Potomac, Maryland. Image courtesy of the artist, Frith Street Gallery, London, and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York/Paris/Los Angeles. © Tacita Dean. Photo: Fredrik Nilsen
4. Tacita Dean, *Found Cy, Houston*, 2024. Found postcard, 3 1/2 × 5 3/8 in. (8.9 × 13.7 cm). The Menil Collection, Houston, Gift of the artist. © Tacita Dean

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