

## The Menil Collection Opens *Hyperreal: Gray Foy* at the Menil Drawing Institute on April 21

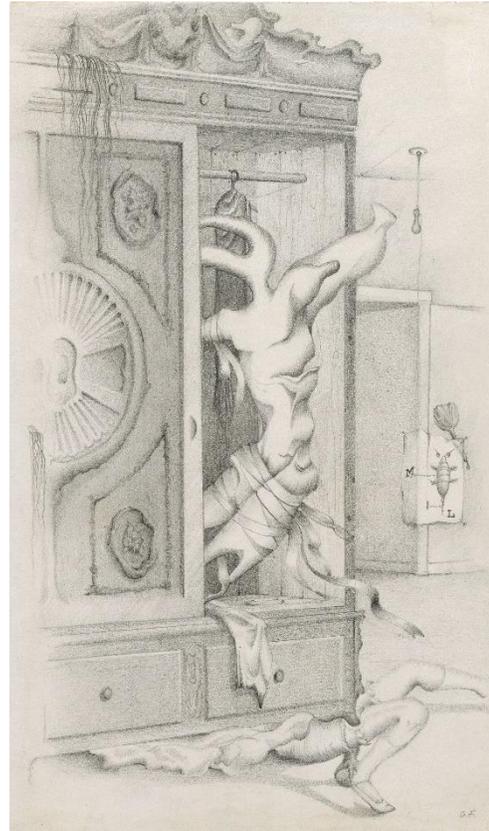
*Exhibition celebrates two recent gifts of drawings, spanning the entirety of the artist's career*

HOUSTON—April 4, 2023—The Menil Collection will open *Hyperreal: Gray Foy*, a presentation of the astonishingly meticulous and imaginative drawings by midcentury American artist Gray Foy (1922–2012), at the Menil Drawing Institute on April 21, 2023. On view through September 3, 2023, the exhibition spans the artist's career from the 1940s to the 1970s, and celebrates two recent gifts of nearly 80 drawings, a selection of which will be on display. Drawn primarily from these new acquisitions, and complemented by key loans from public and private collections, *Hyperreal: Gray Foy* is the first solo museum exhibition of Foy's art.

Foy's early works were influenced by Surrealism and often featured contorted bodies in ambiguous exterior or domestic settings. His extraordinary attention to detail, as well as a sense of wartime tension, are evident in *Untitled [Interior with Woman Standing at a Dresser]*, 1946, and *Dimensions*, ca. 1945–46, the most ambitious drawing from the first half of his career. Though Foy's art of the 1940s aligned with Surrealism, the artist preferred to describe his work in terms of "hyper-realism." "Please don't put me down as a surrealist," Foy requested in 1948, "I may turn out to be a realist...After all, hyper-realism...actually becomes the supernatural." This notion of exceeding reality is a through line within his body of work. Foy's later drawings such as *The White Flower*, 1949, and *Untitled [Cluster of Leaves]*, ca. 1957, demonstrate his shift away from the human figure to natural motifs, which he favored until the mid-1970s. The artist found inspiration in nature's transitional and transformative states and explored botanical and ecological subjects with a sense of wonder and inventiveness.

In the late 1940s, Foy began creating commercial illustrations alongside his independent drawings. Some of the artist's original designs for book jackets and magazine illustrations will be on view for the first time in this exhibition. Notable examples include his 1961 cover design for J. R. Salamanca's *Lilith* and his 1966 illustration "Perfume: The Secret Garden" for *Mademoiselle Magazine*. Foy's work began to taper off in the late 1960s, as he began to subordinate his art to his busy life with his partner Leo Lerman, a writer and editor at Condé Nast Publications. By 1975, Foy effectively ceased drawing.

Rebecca Rabinow, Director, The Menil Collection, said, "Gray Foy's unusual talent caught the eye of some of the savviest drawings connoisseurs of the mid-20th century, but because Foy



stopped working mid-career, he is not well remembered today. This exhibition is selected from recent gifts to the Menil Collection, now an important repository of Foy's drawings."



Kirsten Marples, Curatorial Associate, Menil Drawing Institute, said, "The marvelous minutiae in Gray Foy's graphite drawings required significant time and focus to create, not to mention frequent sharpening of the artist's hard pencil. Foy claimed to have rarely worked from life, instead generating his subjects from his memories and rich artistic imagination. These drawings truly reward close, sustained looking, revealing new forms upon repeat viewings. Visitors will leave the galleries with an appreciation for Foy's considerable technical skill."

Born in Dallas, Texas, in 1922, Foy grew up in Los Angeles and developed an interest in theater set design. He started drawing routinely in the evenings during World War II, while he worked at a military aircraft plant. He then returned to Dallas in 1946 to study art at Southern Methodist University. It was not until after he moved to New York in 1947 and enrolled at Columbia University that Foy's drawings were shown publicly in gallery and museum exhibitions, and he found critical success.

After Foy's death in 2012, many of his works were found in his apartment. An extensive research project prompted by these findings ensued, which culminated in the publication of a significant monograph, *Gray Foy: Drawings 1941–1975*, edited by Don Quaintance, and an exhibition at Francis M. Naumann Fine Art in the fall of 2018. Foy's works have elicited much passion among collectors, and *Hyperreal: Gray Foy* promises to introduce his remarkable drawings to an expanded audience.

*Hyperreal: Gray Foy* is curated by Kirsten Marples, Curatorial Associate, Menil Drawing Institute.

### **About the Menil Collection**

Houston 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. 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](http://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](http://menil.org/drawing-institute)

### **Funding**

This exhibition is generously supported by Sheila Noeth and Ted Dohmen; Barbara and Michael Gamson; Caroline Huber; Marley Lott; Curtis & Windham Architects; Nina and Michael Zilkha; and the City of Houston through Houston Arts Alliance.

### **Image Captions**

1. Gray Foy, *Untitled [Interior with Distorted Figures and Armoire]*, ca. 1944. Graphite on paper, 8 × 4 3/4 in. (20.3 × 12.1 cm). The Menil Collection, Houston, Gift of the estate of Gray Foy. © Estate of Gray Foy. Photo: Graham S. Haber
2. Gray Foy, *Untitled [Cluster of Leaves]*, ca. 1957. Graphite, watercolor, and opaque watercolor on paper, 7 1/4 × 10 7/8 in. (18.4 × 27.6 cm). The Menil Collection, Houston, Anonymous gift. © Estate of Gray Foy. Photo: Graham S. Haber

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