

## ***Cy Twombly: Treatise on the Veil***

**Epic painting to be shown for the first time with related drawings from the artist's private collection**

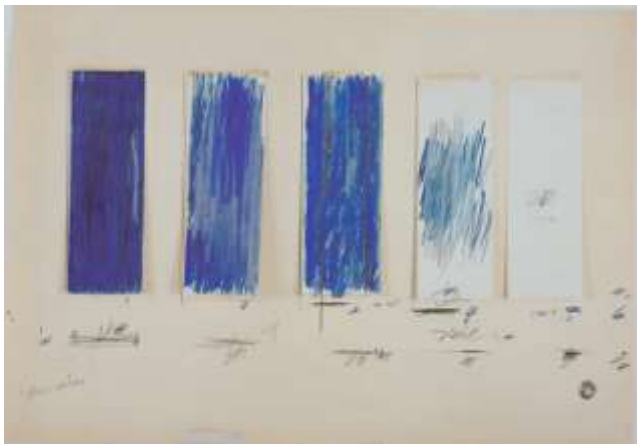
On View at The Menil Collection October 30, 2009 - February 14, 2010

Houston, September 14, 2009 -- Painted in Rome in 1970, *Treatise on the Veil (Second Version)* marks a critical period in the career of Cy Twombly. One of the American artist's largest canvases, measuring nearly 35 feet in length, the work, which the Menil acquired in 1998, is rarely on public display. ***Cy Twombly: Treatise on the Veil*** will showcase this monumental painting, following its year-long loan to the acclaimed Tate Modern retrospective, *Cycles and Seasons*.

The Menil exhibition, conceived by Bernice Rose, chief curator of The Menil Drawing Institute and Study Center, marks the first time that the painting will be shown with a significant group of related drawings on loan from the artist's private collection. Together, the painting and the drawings reveal the making of a modern masterwork.

The Menil, home to the Cy Twombly Gallery, is the ideal venue for this extraordinary exhibition and collaboration with the artist. ***Cy Twombly: Treatise on the Veil*** will be on view from October 30 through February 14.

In the twelve *Veil* drawings on display, Twombly's painterly gestures take shape in assemblages of readily available household materials -- ranging from cardboard and scotch tape to photographic reproductions and notebook paper. Created in 1970, these preliminary renderings build upon the subtle themes of an earlier *Veil* painting by the



artist. Assembled across each drawing, orderly rectangular strips of paper reference the six-segment composition of that first version of the painting. Horizontal creases and scrapes disrupt the repeated vertical blocks of paper, revealing the artist's physical engagement in creating these works as

well as his meditations on the passage of time.

Born in Lexington, Virginia in 1928, Twombly studied at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and later at New York's Art Students League. Like many artists of the time, he spent several summers at the renowned Black Mountain College in North Carolina, where he studied under Abstract Expressionists Robert Motherwell and Franz Kline. After travelling throughout Europe and North Africa on a grant from the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Twombly moved away from Abstraction Expressionism towards his now highly-recognizable style inspired by classical poetry, mythology, and literature. The artist relocated to the Mediterranean in 1957 and currently divides his time between Rome and Virginia.

*Treatise on the Veil (Second Version)* highlights the final years of Twombly's seminal "grey-ground" or "blackboard" period -- a creative detour from the scribbles and white backgrounds that made him one of the most important artists to emerge in the wake of Abstraction Expressionism. In a 1967 exhibition at New York's Leo Castelli Gallery, Twombly set aside his trademark splashes of Mediterranean color, opting instead for lines of white crayon over flat grey house paint. For the next five years, these blackboard paintings offered a more calculated and controlled alternative to the sporadic, painterly compositions of earlier works such as *The Age of Alexander* (1959-60) and *Leda and the Swan* (1962). Writing in 1976, French philosopher Roland Barthes noted the coexistence of two distinct types of written communication in Twombly's work, both emerging from the grey-ground era: the swirling lines of an indecipherable form of handwriting, and numbers and measurements that suggest a more formal type of technical communication.

The second of two related paintings -- the first of which, from 1968, resides at the Ludwig Museum in Cologne -- *Treatise on the Veil (Second Version)* draws its inspiration from the visual mechanics of a late 19th-century photographic study by Eadweard Muybridge. A gift to Twombly from fellow artist and early collaborator Robert Rauschenberg, the photograph records the movements of a veiled bride walking in front of a train. Though one of the most minimal of Twombly's paintings, *Treatise on the Veil (Second Version)* maintains a dynamic sense of movement as visual cues pull viewers' eyes from left to right.

Both versions of the *Veil* paintings refer to the musique concrète piece "Le Voile d'Orphee," a 1951-53 cantata by composer Pierre Henry for Pierre Schaeffer's avant-garde ballet *Orphee 53*. The musical work reimagines the mythical journey of Orpheus and his wife Eurydice from Hades, using recordings of tearing fabric to depict the moment Orpheus mistakenly gazes upon his bride before leaving the Underworld. Like Henry's composition, Twombly's *Veils* capture a sense of motion and time in a manner found in the works of Italian Futurists like Giacomo Balla and Umberto Boccioni or in Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase, No.2* (1912). Twombly's

investigations into the fracturing of space and time have been cited as a response to early 20th-century philosopher Henri Bergson, whose ideas on the intangibility of time influenced many modernists seeking to represent feelings of displacement in contemporary society.

### **PUBLIC PROGRAM**

Lecture and Reading: Josef Helfenstein and Edward Snow

“Cy Twombly/Painting Poems”

Tuesday, December 8, 2009, 7 p.m.

In a literary program accompanying this rare showing of Cy Twombly's *Treatise on the Veil (Second Version)*, Menil Director Josef Helfenstein will speak briefly about the artist's use of the words of poet Rainer Maria Rilke in his canvases. Rice Professor Edward Snow, recipient of an American Academy of Arts and Letters Award for his Rilke translations and the Academy of American Poets Harold Morton Landon Translation Award, will read from his newly released bilingual edition of *The Poetry of Rilke*. A book signing will follow.

This exhibition is generously supported by the Taub Foundation; Nina and Michael Zilkha, and the City of Houston.

**Photo caption:** Cy Twombly, Untitled, 1970, Crayon, pencil, colored pencil and ink on cut, torn and folded papers with tape on paper 27-7/16 x 39-3/16 inches © Cy Twombly

**For further information and images,  
please contact the press office, 713.525.9469, or [press@menil.org](mailto:press@menil.org)  
The Menil Collection, located within Houston's Museum District,  
is open Wednesday through Sunday, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.  
Admission and parking are always free.  
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