ART INSTITUTE ANNOUNCES MAJOR GIFT OF IMPORTANT CONTEMPORARY DRAWINGS FROM CHICAGO COLLECTOR IRVING STENN JR.
Collection of 105 Works by Renowned Artists Is One of the Most Significant Gifts of Drawings Ever Given to the Museum

CHICAGO – Douglas Druick, President and Eloise W. Martin Director of the Art Institute of Chicago, announced today that Chicago attorney Irving Stenn Jr. has given the museum more than 100 drawings from his exceptional collection of seminal works produced in the 1960s. The drawings, by a who’s-who of contemporary artists, represent a foundational period in the history of drawing when the way works on paper were made, used, and appreciated was undergoing radical change.

The gift includes works by Mel Bochner, Sol LeWitt, Brice Marden, and Fred Sandback, as well as pieces by Agnes Denes, Jasper Johns, Donald Judd, Nam June Paik, and Ellsworth Kelly. The 105 drawings not only showcase Stenn’s personal taste, vision, and passion as a collector but also offer a window into an era when artists reconsidered and reinvented the medium of drawing. This gift is one of the most significant and collection-enhancing bodies of contemporary works on paper ever given to the museum.

“‘Irv has a discerning eye for art and tremendous stamina for searching it out, and this makes his generous and enlightened support of the museum especially potent,’” said Druick. “‘His remarkable gift greatly enriches our holdings of contemporary prints and drawings and will animate the Art Institute’s galleries for many years to come.’”

Stenn began building an impressive collection of contemporary painting and sculpture with his wife, Marcia, in 1971. Determined to continue adding to the collection after Mrs. Stenn’s death in 1999, he shifted his
focus to drawings, which can illustrate an artist’s course of thought and method of work. The sense of process and intimacy they suggested greatly appealed to Stenn, as did their relatively small scale, which allowed him to display his entire collection on the walls of his home.

Over his years of collecting, Stenn developed close personal relationships within the artistic community – including a long friendship with Mel Bochner – which provided him with a deep understanding of the broader sweep of art history. Though he did not set out with strict parameters for the collection, he was drawn to works from the 1960s that had an organic connection in style and content.

“I am so grateful to the people who have helped me by providing advice and introducing me to artists I might not have found on my own,” said Stenn. “The collection has benefited enormously from the guidance and friendship of Art Institute curator Mark Pascale, from dealers I have worked with – Donald Young, Rhona Hoffman, and others in Chicago and New York – as well as from friends and collectors, such as Gerry Elliot, Stefan Edlis, and Lew Manilow. I might never have put these works together if not for their input.”

The resulting body of work makes visible a definitive shift in artists’ approach to drawings. While continuing the early modern practice of making drawings as artistic expressions in their own right, innovators of the 1960s employed drawing in ways previously not considered art – as diagrams, instructions for fabrication, caprices suggesting movement in performance, or markers of space and time. A selection of these types of drawings, which enabled spatial and tactile perception to be recorded and conceptual concerns of a larger project to be explored, are among the items in the Stenn collection.

**About Irving Stenn Jr.**

Irving Stenn Jr. is an attorney in private practice in Chicago. He is a graduate of the University of Michigan, from which he also received his law degree in 1955. He is a life trustee and Honorary Governing Member of the Art Institute of Chicago and serves on the Committee for Prints and Drawings and the Committee for Contemporary Art. The Irving Stenn Jr. Family Gallery, on the second floor of the Modern Wing, is named in his honor.

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