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## Preface [to *Franta : Paintings /Works on Paper/Sculptures*]

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## PREFACE

From the time of the Romans to the present, the Cotes d'Azur region of the south of France has attracted the imaginations of conquering generals, pleasure seekers, and artists. Major artists throughout the twentieth century from across the world have immigrated to this area. Pablo Picasso established a home and studio in Antibes, now a museum featuring the works of Picasso, in what had been the residence of the Prince of Antibes. Joan Miró also lived in the region, where his presence is documented handsomely in the collection of Foundation Maeght located in Saint Paul de Vence. Marc Chagall, Henri Matisse, Raoul Dufy, and later Jean Dubuffet and Max Ernst also worked in Vence. Auguste Renoir, Pierre Bonnard, Ferdinand Léger, and Picabia, as well as Francis Bacon were in the neighboring region around Nice, Antibes, and Monte Carlo. An earlier generation of artists such as Paul Cézanne, Vincent van Gogh, and Paul Gauguin had lived and worked nearby in Arles and Saint Remy.

The initial impetus for the present exhibition of Franta's paintings, drawings, and sculpture arose from a curiosity about the current state of art in the South of France. What indeed is happening at the present time in a region that provided the physical environment for so much of modern art? Given the past history of this area as a home for artists, including native French artists and those living in exile, from a variety of nations, it was not surprising to find a continuation of this practice. Rather than look to names familiar to American audiences such as Arman, we have chosen to consider other notable if lesser known artists. There were many names to choose from: Scarpa from France, Bjørn Hansen from Denmark, and Alex Katz from the U.S.A., to mention a few who live and maintain studios in the region.

After examining works by various artists of the region, it was decided to concentrate on the work of Franta, who was born in Czechoslovakia in 1930 and immigrated to southern France in 1958, where he later became a French citizen. His work embodies the spirit of artistic and social freedom of his predecessors who worked in the region, such as Picasso, and also reflects a transcultural awareness shaped by experiences in Eastern and Western Europe as well as Africa where he has spent extensive time periods over the past 10 years.

My first encounter with Franta was at his studio in Vence not far from Nice in 1991. At that time, he showed a range of paintings, drawings, and sculptures made over the past 20 years, beginning in 1972. From these works approximately 16 paintings, 11 drawings, and two sculptures were selected for display at the Haggerty Museum in Milwaukee.

The works in the exhibition express the major themes of Franta's art: the body as a symbol of political and cultural manipulation and resistance, and the encounters of the human spirit with nature and technology in the late twentieth century. Franta's early works depict the body and its parts engaged in a struggle with the dominating forces of modern machines, in danger of being subsumed. His recent work is concerned with the celebration of life. They express a sense of liberation from repressive political and technological forces that seek to dominate the human spirit. Although there are few if any site specific references in Franta's works, these new images from 1985 to the present are based in part on the artist's observations of Africans and African Americans in their respective tribal and urban environments.

C.L.C.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This exhibition has benefited substantially from the cooperation of Franta who has lent works from his personal collection and made new works especially for this exhibition. Richard Yoder and Jeanne Doornbos first brought Franta's work to my attention. They have provided generous support and assistance, including loans from their collection. The staff of the Haggerty Museum of Art has worked on all aspects of the exhibition. Jim Mazur, assisted by Brad Killam, designed and installed the exhibition, Kit Basquin coordinated the invitation, Marcia Eidel coordinated promotion, Xiuqin Zhou served as registrar, Irene Juckem and Marilyn Meissner assisted with manuscript production. All of these efforts have contributed substantially to the success of the exhibition.