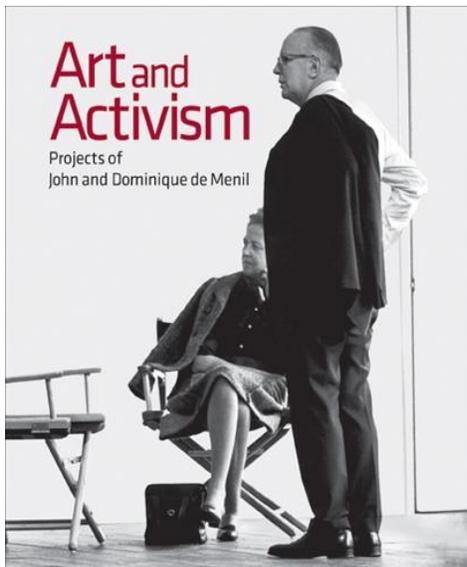


**Art and Activism
Projects of John and Dominique de Menil
Wins International Book Award**

Houston, June 30, 2011 – The jury of the International Art Book and Film Festival of Perpignan, France, has announced that **Art and Activism: Projects of John and Dominique de Menil** has been selected as 2010's best book on an art collection.



Josef Helfenstein, director of the Menil Collection in Houston and co-editor of the book with Laureen Schipsi, will accept the award at the festival this weekend.

From the jury's statement: "The de Menils moved to Houston, Texas from France, fleeing Nazism. They were friends with the finest artists of their time and built one of the most important collections of the XXth century. This book is the first monograph dedicated to them. It examines the de Menils' significant contributions to education, the building of the Rothko Chapel, their work with filmmakers such as Jean-Luc Godard, and how they amassed the great collection of art that is now housed in the Menil Collection, the Texas museum designed by Italian architect Renzo Piano. Enriched by personal documents and interviews, **Art and Activism: Projects of John and Dominique de Menil** brings the reader into

the artistic world of the second half of the XXth century, through the couple's life and passion for art."

The International Art Book and Film Festival of Perpignan (to be held June 30 – July 3), an annual event dedicated to art history and its teaching, carries a different annual theme. This year's is "Dreaming," which fits beautifully with the subjects of **Art & Activism**, who realized many of their dreams on behalf of art and activism. The festival aims to promote knowledge of art history to the general public, through books and the cinema. A jury composed of professionals from the art world, cultural institutions and universities selects the year's best books and films. During the festival, a book fair, meetings, projections of documentary features, and roundtables will take place in various parts of the city of Perpignan. The festival is free of charge and open to the public. <http://filaf.com>

John and Dominique de Menil, who arrived in Houston from France in 1941, built one of the world's great art collections, championed modern architects and filmmakers, and became passionately involved in human-rights causes. In the process they transformed the cultural landscape of their adopted city.

The lavishly illustrated ***Art and Activism: Projects of John and Dominique de Menil***, edited by Josef Helfenstein and Lauren Schipsi, is the first book to examine the couple's wide-ranging interests over half a century – from art and architecture to philanthropy and politics. The de Menils established university art and media-studies departments; gave early architectural commissions to Philip Johnson and Renzo Piano; funded scholarships and civil-rights campaigns; built an ecumenical chapel with the painter Mark Rothko; presented one of the nation's first exhibitions of racially integrated contemporary artists; brought filmmakers such as Roberto Rossellini to town; took the Surrealist master René Magritte to a rodeo; and introduced Max Ernst and Andy Warhol to an awed Houston.

All the while they were building the art collection that would one day be housed in the world-renowned museum that bears the family name – the Menil Collection.

Art and Activism: Projects of John and Dominique de Menil is a book of many voices – artists, activists, students, scholars, and family. The couple's accomplishments – as patrons, philanthropists and political activists who lived and worked along a Paris-Houston-New York axis – is told in lively texts and remembrances by contributors such as the artist Dorothea Tanning, architect Renzo Piano, film scholar Gerald O'Grady, architectural historian Stephen Fox, curators Bertrand Davezac and Walter Hopps, and Africanist Kristina Van Dyke. Illustrated throughout with works of art from the Menil Collection and rarely seen archival photographs, the large-format book also includes private correspondence and reminiscences from Marcel Duchamp, Jasper Johns, Man Ray, Barnett Newman, Robert Rauschenberg, Mark Rothko, Niki de Saint Phalle and other artists.

John and Dominique de Menil met in 1930 – at a ball at Versailles – and were married the following year. An heiress to the Schlumberger oil-field services fortune, Dominique held degrees in physics and mathematics from the Sorbonne; Jean (who would anglicize his name to John) hailed from a military family of more modest means.

Had it not been for World War II's approach, the young couple surely would have stayed in Paris. But John, who joined Schlumberger's Romanian office as supervisor of operations, was forced to flee Europe after aiding the Resistance. The family reunited in Houston, home of Schlumberger world headquarters.

Finding themselves in a new frontier, John and Dominique were determined to make a difference – and with the de Menils, making a difference began at home. To accommodate their expanding art collection and growing family, they commissioned Philip Johnson to design one of the first modernist houses in Texas.

The rapid growth of the de Menils' art collection was remarkable, given its modest beginnings: a Max Ernst portrait of Dominique that took her years to appreciate, followed by a small Cezanne watercolor John bought for \$300 and brought home in his briefcase. After the war the couple began to acquire more European paintings and American contemporary works. The de Menils were known to buy entire shows from their favorite New York and Paris galleries, including iconic examples of Pop Art, Minimalism, and Surrealism.

John died in 1973, shortly after the dedication of the Rothko Chapel. Dominique survived him by a quarter of a century, opening the Menil Collection in 1987. Sited in a leafy residential enclave in Houston's Museum District, the Menil – architect Renzo Piano's first U.S. commission – presents art in a tranquil setting. Piano has described the Menil as a portrait of his

client – “discreet, intelligent, welcoming, elegant.” Admission to the museum – and to all of its galleries, special exhibitions and programs – is always free of charge.

The institutions founded by the de Menils evolved into international forums that honor and further humanitarian causes. During her final decade, Dominique (who died in 1997) deepened her involvement in social causes, joining with former President Jimmy Carter to establish the Carter-Menil Human Rights Foundation. She created an award, sponsored by the Rothko Chapel, given to those who struggle against oppression, and established the Oscar Romero Prize in honor of the slain El Salvadoran bishop.

John and Dominique de Menil envisioned and executed a visionary program of art and activism. One of the themes that emerges from ***Art and Activism*** is the pioneering spirit with which the de Menils approached their projects. As Helfenstein and Schipsi write, “Building such a legacy required drive, determination, initiative, and a willingness to take risks... Such independence and confidence, as well as visionary foresight, is a constant theme of John and Dominique de Menil’s achievements. They set high standards for themselves and others, demonstrating the power and profundity of simple ideas executed with quality and passion. This book is a testament to the work they accomplished.”

Art and Activism: Projects of John and Dominique de Menil

Edited and with a Preface by Josef Helfenstein and Lauren Schipsi

350 pages. 210 b/w and 106 color illustrations; 9x12 inches; \$65.00

978-0-300-12377-7

Distributed by Yale University Press

For more information contact press@menil.org or visit www.menil.org