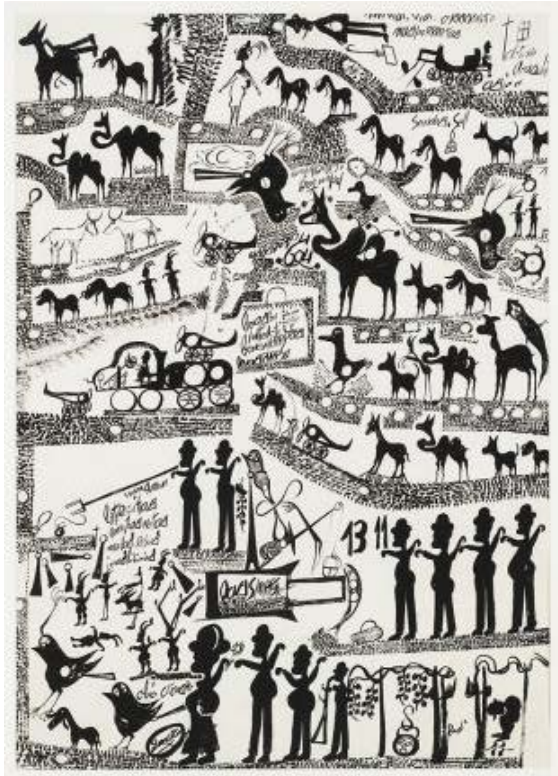


**AS ESSENTIAL AS DREAMS: SELF-TAUGHT ART FROM  
 THE COLLECTION OF STEPHANIE AND JOHN SMITHER  
 TO BE SHOWN AT THE MENIL COLLECTION JUNE 10-OCTOBER 16**



**HOUSTON, TX, April 28, 2016—** Selections from an outstanding collection of visionary and outsider art, assembled over the course of more than thirty years, will be the subject of the exhibition *As Essential As Dreams: Self-Taught Art from the Collection of Stephanie and John Smither*, on view exclusively at the Menil Collection from June 10 through October 16, 2016. Comprising more than 80 drawings, watercolors, sculptures, paintings, and works in mixed media by 37 artists active from the early 20th century through today, *As Essential As Dreams* is the first presentation to the public of these holdings, many of which are part of a remarkable promised gift to the Menil Collection.

Michelle White, Curator at the Menil Collection, has organized the exhibition and

edited the accompanying catalogue. She said, “We are deeply grateful to Houston-based collectors Stephanie and John Smither for their extraordinary generosity in making many of these works a promised gift to the Menil. Since the early 1980s the Smithers have traveled and researched with an intrepid spirit, often forming lasting friendships with artists along the way, as they have lovingly brought together this important personal collection. We feel honored to exhibit these works and look forward to bringing them into the Menil Collection, where they will resonate powerfully with our core holdings.”

Among the recognized strengths of the Menil Collection is its body of works by the Surrealists, who sought to explode social norms and conventional thinking by drawing on the subconscious. The Surrealists were among the first to prize what they saw as the

raw, authentic imagination expressed in the works of artists who had neither academic training nor ties to the art market. As collectors, Stephanie and John Smither have passionately championed the work of these artists and affirm that the desire to create and collect is deeply human and as essential as dreams.

Among the highlights of the exhibition are boisterous and colorful works on paper and neo-expressionist assemblages of paint and found objects by Thornton Dial (1928-2016); wooden models of fantastical architectural structures by Oscar Hadwiger (1891-1989); spiritual paintings of flying angels by Sister Gertrude Morgan (1900-1980); and narrative drawings by Carlo Zinelli (1916-1974) illustrating his life in the Italian countryside in the aftermath of the Second World War.

Other notable works include figurative ceramics by Georgia Blizzard (1919-2002); dense, swirling ink drawings by Hiroyuki Doi (b. 1946); fanciful pictures of floating figures, beasts, and vegetation by Solange Knopf (b. 1957); drawings of horses and riders by Martin Ramírez (1895-1963); paintings evoking a life of sharecropping on a Texas cotton farm by the Reverend Johnnie Swearingen (1908-1993); and carved wood sculptures by the Navajo medicine man Charlie Willeto (1897-1964).

The exhibition will be accompanied by a richly illustrated scholarly catalogue of the same title, published by the Menil Collection and distributed by Yale University Press. The 112-page, hardcover book features 114 illustrations, an overview by Michelle White, and explorations of 12 featured artists by Lynne Adele, Brooke Davis Anderson, Haley Berkman, David Breslin, Víctor M. Espinosa, William Fagaly, Edward M. Gómez, Jo Farb Hernández, Lee Kogan, Colin Rhodes, and Leslie Umberger.

*As Essential As Dreams: Self-Taught Art from the Collection of Stephanie and John Smither* is generously supported by The Brown Foundation, Inc. / Nancy and Mark Abendshein; Susan and Francois de Menil; and the City of Houston.

## **Public Opening and Programs**

### **Public Opening**

*As Essential As Dreams: Self-Taught Art from the Collection of Stephanie and John Smither*

Thursday, June 9, 7–9pm

The Menil Collection Foyer

The public is invited to celebrate the opening of the exhibition, and a selection of art cars featured in the world-famous Houston Art Car Parade will circle the main museum building to kick off the night.

### **Visionary and Self-Taught Art in the Community**

Wednesday, June 15, 7pm

The Menil Collection Foyer

Susanne Theis, programming director of Discovery Green, moderates a panel discussion with Smither Park designer Dan Phillips, author Pete Gershon, and curator William Fagaly about the intersections of art and community. Co-presented with the Orange Show Center for Visionary Art.

### **Self-Taught Artists at Discovery Green: An Outdoor Celebration**

Friday, June 24, 7:30–10:30pm

Discovery Green, 1500 McKinney Street

This evening of visionary art and music includes a concert by Lonnie Holley at 8pm and a screening of the 2007 documentary *Mr. Dial Has Something to Say* at 9pm. Co-presented with Discovery Green; see [menil.org](http://menil.org) for full schedule.

### **Exhibiting and Curating Self-Taught Art**

Thursday, September 29, 7pm

The Menil Collection Foyer

Curator Michelle White moderates this exploration of the role of museums in shaping conceptions of and conversations about self-taught art with curator Lee Kogan; Matthew Higgs, director of the alternative art space White Columns, New York; and other special guests. Co-presented with the Orange Show for Visionary Art.

### **Authentic, Raw & True: A Weekend Celebrating Visionary and Self-Taught Artists**

Saturday and Sunday, October 1 and 2

Smither Park, the Orange Show, the Beer Can House, and the Menil Collection host a series of concerts, readings, and other performances. Co-presented with the Orange Show Center for Visionary Art; see [menil.org](http://menil.org) for schedule of events.

*The Menil Collection also gratefully acknowledges the support of the Discovery Green Conservancy for these programs.*

### **About the Menil Collection**

A legacy of the philanthropists John and Dominique de Menil, the Menil Collection opened in 1987. The museum presents regular rotations of artworks from its growing permanent collection, organizes special exhibitions and programs throughout the year, publishes scholarly books, and conducts research into the conservation of modern and contemporary art. The Menil Collection's main museum building, the first building in the United States designed by Renzo Piano, anchors a parklike 30-acre campus, which also includes the Cy Twombly Gallery, a site-specific Dan Flavin installation, the Byzantine Fresco Chapel—now a venue for long-term installations by contemporary artists—and outdoor sculpture. A new building for the Menil Drawing Institute by Johnston Marklee, expected to open in 2017, will be the first freestanding facility in the United States designed expressly for the exhibition and study of modern and contemporary drawings. The museum is open Wednesday through Sunday, 11am to 7pm, and charges no admission fee.

### **Also at the Menil**

*The Secret of the Hanging Egg: Salvador Dalí at the Menil*  
On view through June 19, 2016

*The Precarious*  
On view through May 1, 2016

*William N. Copley: The World According to CPLY*  
On view through July 24, 2016

*Life is Once, Forever: Henri Cartier-Bresson Photographs*  
On view through July 24, 2016

*Francis Alijs: The Fabiola Project*  
May 21, 2016 – January 28, 2018

*Andy Warhol: Sunset*  
August 19, 2016 – January 8, 2017

*Picasso: The Line*  
September 16, 2016 – January 8, 2017

**Find the Menil Online**

[www.menil.org](http://www.menil.org)

[www.facebook.com/menilcollection](https://www.facebook.com/menilcollection)

[www.twitter.com/menilcollection](https://www.twitter.com/menilcollection)

[www.instagram.com/menilcollection](https://www.instagram.com/menilcollection)

[www.youtube.com/themenilcollection](https://www.youtube.com/themenilcollection)

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*Image: Carlo Zinelli, Untitled, 1969. Tempera on paper, 34 1/2 x 26 3/4 x 1 5/8. The Menil Collection, Houston, Promised Gift of Stephanie and John Smither. © Fondazione Culturale Carlo Zinelli*

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