

**THE MENIL COLLECTION CELEBRATES  
RETURN OF BYZANTINE FRESCOES WITH  
PUBLIC EVENTS HONORING SACRED WORKS**

**Byzantine Fresco Chapel, Home to the Frescoes,  
Will Close Sunday, March 4, 2012**

**Bidding farewell to the frescoes, the Menil presents special programs on consecutive  
Sundays: a musical tribute on February 12<sup>th</sup> and a panel discussion February 19<sup>th</sup>**

**Final Divine Liturgy with His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios of America:  
Saturday, March 3, 2012**



Houston, TX – January 30, 2012 – The Menil Collection announced that March 4, 2012 will be the final day to see the Byzantine frescoes currently housed on its campus in the Byzantine Fresco Chapel, after which time they will be returned to the Orthodox Church of Cyprus. In celebration of the frescoes, their time in Houston, and the purpose-built Chapel that has been their home for fifteen years; the Menil will present special public events commemorating the return of this sacred art.

The works, the largest intact Byzantine frescoes in the Western hemisphere, have been on long-term loan to the Menil from the Orthodox Church of Cyprus following their rescue by the Menil Foundation twenty-eight years ago. They are being returned to Cyprus following the conclusion of the loan agreement between the two parties.

At the heart of the Menil's mission is the belief that art and spirituality are powerful forces in contemporary society and central to a shared human experience—and that institutions have a responsibility to preserve and present objects as stewards, safeguarding their future.

“We are honored to have been entrusted as stewards of these extraordinary frescoes and to have exhibited them for the people of Houston and the world in a remarkable building,” said Menil Director Josef Helfenstein. “The return of the frescoes to Cyprus is just one chapter in their long history. I hope everyone will join us for these programs as we celebrate the frescoes’ time in Houston and their return to their home country.”

**Public Programs**

**Sunday, February 12, 2012 at 5:30pm**

Menil Collection Foyer

*Chant · Sonata · Duet*

*A Musical Tribute to the Byzantine Frescos*

Gather in the Menil foyer to join members of the St. Paul's Methodist Choir in a chanting procession – inspired by medieval traditions – to the Byzantine Fresco Chapel. The music continues inside the chapel with performances of J.S. Bach's *Cello Suite #2 in D Minor* (BWV 1008), and Osvaldo Golijov's *Mariel* (1999), a duet for marimba and cello.

Sunday, February 19, 2012 at 7pm

Menil Collection Foyer

*Constructions of Art & Faith: The Byzantine Fresco Chapel and the Menil Collection*

Marking the momentous occasion of the Chapel closing, a panel discussion will examine how art and spirituality inform the entire Menil campus. Joining Menil Director Josef Helfenstein will be:

- Annemarie Weyl Carr, University Distinguished Professor of Art History at S.M.U.
- Pamela Smart, Professor of Anthropology and Art History, SUNY Binghamton
- William Vendley, Secretary General of the World Conference of Religions for Peace

Saturday, March 3, 2012

Byzantine Fresco Chapel (4011 Yupon Street)

8:30 a.m. Matins

9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy

Final Divine Liturgy with His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios of America in the Byzantine Fresco Chapel. Following the service, a reception with concluding remarks and music will be held at the Menil Collection.

**Admission for all events is free; seating is available on a first come, first served basis.**



### **About the Byzantine Fresco Chapel**

In 1983 Dominique de Menil was presented with the opportunity of purchasing two frescoes dating from the 13<sup>th</sup> century, which had been dismantled into 38 pieces. The exceptional quality and spiritual significance of the works immediately struck Mrs. de Menil, who resolved to rescue the frescoes, which were purportedly being sold on behalf of an art dealer. Provenance research revealed Cyprus as their place of origin and, with this knowledge in hand and permission from the Orthodox Church of Cyprus, the Menil purchased the frescoes on behalf of the Church. The Menil subsequently entered into a formal agreement with the Church, which granted permission to restore the frescoes (a three-year process), resulting in a long-term loan of the works so they might be exhibited in Houston.

A key aspect of the shared vision of the Menil Foundation and the Orthodox Church of Cyprus was that the original spiritual purpose of the frescoes be restored. To this end, a consecrated chapel was constructed on the Menil campus especially for the exhibition of the works—a space that honors the spiritual significance of the frescoes without creating a mere replica of their original home. Designed by architect Francois de Menil, the Byzantine Fresco Chapel opened to the public in 1997; hundreds of thousands have visited since. As announced last September, the frescoes will be returned to Cyprus following the conclusion of the loan agreement. The Byzantine Fresco Chapel has served as a place of peace and contemplation, as well as host to liturgical ceremonies, sacred music performance, and education programs. The Menil is currently exploring options for the Chapel's continued use within the larger context of the Menil campus master site plan.

More information on the Byzantine Fresco Chapel may be found at [www.byzantinefrescochapel.org](http://www.byzantinefrescochapel.org)

Images © Paul Warchol

###

#### **For media in Houston, TX:**

Vance Muse

Menil Collection

713-525-9404

[vmuse@menil.org](mailto:vmuse@menil.org)

#### **For media outside Houston, TX:**

Sascha Freudenheim / Isabel Sinistore

Resnicow Schroeder Associates

212-671-5172 / 212-671-5175

[sfreudenheim](mailto:sfreudenheim) / [isinistore@resnicowschroeder.com](mailto:isinistore@resnicowschroeder.com)