

THE MENIL COLLECTION

1533 SUL ROSS STREET HOUSTON, TEXAS 77006
TEL 713-525-9400 FAX 713-525-9470 menil.org

News

DARIO ROBLETO: THE BOUNDARY OF LIFE IS QUIETLY CROSSED

Installation and public talks unite Houston's scientific, medical, and art communities



Exhibition on view at the Menil August 16, 2014 through January 4, 2015

HOUSTON, TEXAS, August 14, 2014 - "Dario Robleto: The Boundary of Life is Quietly Crossed" examines the psychological and emotional ramifications of crossing unknown boundaries whether in space, the sea, or through exploring the human body by linking two remarkable undertakings in the 1960s: the space race and development of the artificial heart. Commissioned and developed through a research residency with the Menil Collection and the Cynthia Woods Mitchell Center for the Arts at the University of Houston, the exhibition is the

culmination of Robleto's research realized as an installation that includes new sculptures by the artist, rare historical recordings, and objects from the Menil Collection and archives, along with a series of public programs.

"Robleto's fascinating inquiry led him to explore untapped aspects of our collection. The materials and objects that he has assembled complement and support his larger goals not only as an artist, but as a researcher who has worked closely with members of the medical and scientific community to realize this project," says Michelle White, curator of the exhibit.

The exhibition is anchored by "Things Placed in the Sea, Become the Sea," 2013-14. The sculpture is comprised of a remarkable assortment of sea urchin shells, melted vinyl records salvaged from the deep sea, stretched audiotape recordings, crystals, minerals, rock slabs, seashells, sea urchin teeth, planetary imagery, and news and magazine clippings. Evoking a sense of curiosity and wonder, the sculpture brings together the exhibit's cosmic, oceanic, and biologic themes.

As a part of his project, Robleto has brought together his research about how the heartbeat has been recorded in the 19th and 20th centuries. Visitors can examine early heartbeat recordings from a sphygmograph or "pulse writer" and hear five recordings of heartbeats while reading about their very intimate histories. Recordings include re-creations of early attempts to record the heart, heartbeat and EKG recordings onboard a NASA probe, and the sounds of recent and cutting-edge developments in artificial-heart research. The emphasis on recordings in the exhibition inspired a gallery guide designed as "liner notes" that one might find accompanying a vinyl record. Written by Robleto and Patrick Feaster, a historian of early sound media, entries describe stories of love, loss, and intimacy via the way scientists have studied the human heart.

Robleto's ability to raise profound questions through his work and his desire to facilitate dialogues are crucial components of the exhibition. White says

“Robleto’s goal is to challenge and augment the way in which the scientific and medical worlds understand the emotional ramifications of their role in perpetually extending the physical and theoretical boundaries of life.”

Robleto poses the idea that perhaps it is only through a conversation between art and science that certain questions can be asked – that an artist’s more poetic vocabulary is better suited to grappling with these shifting boundaries.

Robleto is known for his labor-intensive sculptural work that transforms materials and is layered with meaning. His work draws from science, music, popular culture, philosophy, war, and American history. His techniques in working with diverse materials have been compared to the work of disc jockeys who sample, mix, and weave together different sounds to create something entirely new. Born in San Antonio, Robleto is based in Houston. Since 1997, he has had more than thirty solo exhibitions. The recipient of several awards and fellowships, he was also the subject of exhibitions at the Frye Art Museum in Seattle and the Baltimore Museum of Art.

This exhibition was commissioned and developed in a joint research residency with the Menil Collection, Houston and the Cynthia Woods Mitchell Center for the Arts, University of Houston.

This exhibition is generously supported by Chinhui and Eddie Allen; Robert J. Card, MD and Karol Kreymer; Jereann and Holland Chaney; Allison and David Ayers; The Brown Foundation; Brad and Leslie Bucher; Anne and Jack Moriniere; Bridget and Patrick Wade; and the City of Houston.

Public Program Schedule

Opening Lecture: Dario Robleto*

Friday, September 12, 6:30 p.m.

Two scientific advancements—the race to put a man on the moon, and the development of an artificial human heart—are central to Dario Robleto’s current interests. These pursuits expanded how we define ourselves, challenging our understanding of what it means to be human. Robleto’s

line of inquiry brings together Houston's greatest scientific resources, the medical community and NASA, as part of his installation at the Menil Collection, developed in a joint residency with the Cynthia Woods Mitchell Center for the Arts at the University of Houston.

Conversation with the Artist – Ann Druyan and Dario Robleto

Tuesday, September 23, 6:30 p.m.

In 1977, Ann Druyan, an author and producer specializing in cosmology and popular science, became the creative director of the Golden Record. Formed by her soon-to-be-husband, astronomer Carl Sagan, the team of seven created a portrait of Earth from natural sounds, images, musical selections, spoken greetings, and recordings of Druyan's own heartbeat and brainwaves that was launched aboard the unmanned space probes Voyager 1 and 2 on a billion-year journey into space. Thirty-seven years later, Voyager 1 is just now exiting our solar bubble and entering interstellar space. In this program, Druyan joins Robleto in a discussion of the creation of the Golden Record and the relationship among science, art, emotion, and the human desire for long-term preservation.

Conversation with the Artist – Patrick Feaster and Dario Robleto

Tuesday, October 21, 6:30 p.m.

Prior to Thomas Edison's groundbreaking invention of sound recording and playback technology in 1877, the ephemerality of sound meant that it only existed in the moment of its creation. To "record" sound before this time meant it appeared as oral or written descriptions or musical scores. In 2008, Patrick Feaster, a researcher and educator specializing in the history and culture of early sound media, and his colleagues revolutionized the field of historical sound recording by suggesting that attempts to record sound waves as visual tracings almost two decades before Edison's breakthrough could be "played back" today as sound. In this discussion with Robleto, Feaster speaks about his work and their recent collaboration on "playing back" the earliest nineteenth-century attempts to visually record the human pulse and heart.

Film Screening: *Man, Art, Machines*

Tuesday, November 18, 6:30 p.m.

Quests such as visualizing the mysterious movements of the human pulse and heartbeat, building a mechanical heart from scratch, landing humans on the moon, or sending a vessel past the edge of the Solar System embody a sense of technological optimism and wonder that defined American idealism in the 1960s. It was also a driving force behind "The Machine as Seen at the

End of the Mechanical Age.” Organized by Pontus Hultén, the exhibition opened at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, before traveling to the Rice Museum, Rice University, in 1969. Featuring appearances by Dominique de Menil, Pontus Hultén, and sculptor Jean Tinguely, “Man, Art, Machines” explores the evolution of the exhibition in Houston.

Conversation with the Artist: Mimi Swartz and Dario Robleto

Tuesday, December 2, 6:30 p.m.

In her upcoming book, Mimi Swartz, an executive editor of Texas Monthly, traces the history of the artificial heart. The first artificial heart was implanted in 1969 at the Texas Heart Institute in Houston, and much of this tale of ambition and innovation focuses on the work of surgeons living and working in the city today. Robleto and Swartz have been in dialogue since the early stages of their respective projects and invite the public to join them in a layered conversation about the past, present, and future of this technology.

* The opening lecture will be held on Friday, September 12 at the University of Houston Dudley Recital Hall, Fine Arts Building at 4800 Calhoun. All other events held at the Menil Collection

About the Menil Collection

A legacy of the late philanthropists John and Dominique de Menil, the Menil Collection opened in 1987 in the Houston neighborhood where the de Menils created the Rothko Chapel in 1971. The Menil’s main museum building anchors a thirty-acre campus, which includes the Cy Twombly Gallery, a site-specific Dan Flavin installation, and outdoor sculpture. Presenting regular rotations of artworks from the growing permanent collection, the Menil also organizes special exhibitions and programs throughout the year, publishes scholarly books, and conducts research into the conservation of modern and contemporary art. The museum is open Wednesday through Sunday, 11 a.m. to 7p.m., and charges no admission fee.

Dario Robleto, *Things Placed In the Sea, Become the Sea*, 2013-14.

Sea urchin shells and spines cast and coated with hand-ground and melted vinyl records salvaged from the deep sea, stretched audiotape recordings of various probe and heartbeat signals, soft coral, various crystals and minerals, various rock slabs, homemade crystals, various seashells, sea urchin teeth, Van Dyke prints (lost probes, probe planetary imagery, news and magazine clippings), watercolor paper, beeswax, aqua resin, etymology pins, walnut, gold and bronze-mirrored Plexiglas, glass domes, brass, copper, light bulbs.

Courtesy of the artist and Inman Gallery, Houston.

Contact:

Menil Press Office

Vance Muse or Tommy Napier

press@menil.org

713-535-3170