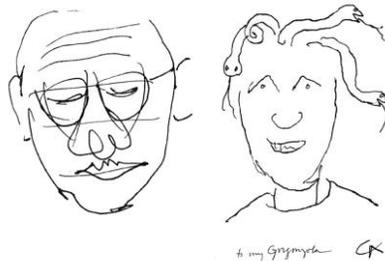


# Menil<sup>25</sup>

## ***“Dear John & Dominique” Letters and Drawings from the Menil Archives***

On View at the Menil Collection August 10, 2012 – January 6, 2013

**Exhibition – the first to be drawn entirely from Menil Archives – inaugurates museum's 25th anniversary year – and launches “Voices of the Menil,” a cell-phone walk around the Menil neighborhood**



Houston, July 11, 2012 – Architect Philip Johnson referred to the couple as “my first clients, my best clients, the clients who found all my other clients, founders of my career, good friends, good critics, and courageous appreciators of art.” This handwritten tribute is among the archival treasures available for perusal in ***Dear John & Dominique*** – organized by Menil Curator Michelle White and Menil Archivist Geraldine Aramanda – which commemorates the Menil’s 25th anniversary and celebrates the lives and vision of founders John and Dominique de Menil.

The story is told through the couple’s many decades of correspondence – letters, notes, and drawings – with their close friends: artists, curators, museum directors, architects, and scholars from across the country, and around the world. Conveying excitement, delight, and gratitude, the assembled exchanges – all drawn from the Menil Archives – provide an intimate look at the ideas and passions that formed the collection, and led to the building of the museum, opened in 1987, that now houses it.

The letters will be displayed in a gallery designed as a reading room, complete with the comfortable chairs and table lamps. Here visitors will be able to spend time with the letters, which will be augmented by a selection of photographs, drawings, sketches, and various keepsakes from the archives.

Together, words and images – from Victor Brauner, Alexander Calder, William Copley, Max Ernst, Fred Hughes, Louis Kahn, Mickey Leland, Jim Love, Roberto Matta, Jermaine MacAgy, Renzo Piano, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Man Ray, Larry Rivers, Roberto Rossellini, Dorothea Tanning, Andy Warhol, and many others – reveal the complexity and intrigue, high-stakes and playfulness of the dynamic art world the de Menils inhabited across seven decades, as well as the range of the couple’s interests, the depth of their patronage, and their love of living artists.

The feelings were mutual and reciprocated. As Mark Rothko wrote to the couple in 1966, about their collaboration on the Rothko Chapel, “The magnitude, on every level of experience and meaning, of the task in which you have involved me, exceeds all my preconceptions, and it is teaching me to extend myself beyond what I thought possible for me. For this I thank you.”

And as Robert Rauschenberg expressed that same year:

*I personally, and the world specifically, will and do celebrate your devotions, dedication and accomplishments. I am grateful that your acceptance of my artwork— marking your unique contributions—can be a contract to our future services to continue our unveering care.*

*Let’s get on with our joyous work. We are needed as never before—again. Thank you from the depths of my mind, body and heart.*

Opening August 10, the exhibition will remain on view through January 6, 2013.

Said Michelle White: "*Dear John & Dominique* presents a fascinating way to look back at the museum's history. This intimate correspondence offers rare and revealing glimpses into the ideas that formed the soul of what would become the Menil Collection."

### ***VOICES OF THE MENIL: A cell-phone walk around the Menil neighborhood***

When John and Dominique de Menil set out to design a space to house their growing art collection it resulted in not just a building, but in a new “neighborhood of art,” as it was described by the late architecture critic, Reyner Banham. With the help over the years of architects Louis Kahn, Howard Barnstone, Philip Johnson, and Renzo Piano, the de Menils started the process of transforming the early-twentieth-century residential blocks of Sul Ross and Branard, creating what is now the ever-expanding Menil campus. From the museum buildings to the gray bungalows, outdoor sculpture and green space, the neighborhood is conducive to the type of “chance encounters” with art that define the Menil experience.

In celebration of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary – and as a special audio component of the exhibition ***Dear John & Dominique*** – the Menil is launching a cell-phone walk in August. Utilizing the latest interactive technology, the walk will highlight the vision of the founders and the diversity of the museum neighborhood.

Listeners will be able to create their own experience on the walk, which includes some 17 sites and stops, directed by their own curiosity (and aided by a small printed map and cell phone) as

they discover anecdotes from the past and ideas for the future of the institution. Drawn from rare audio recordings from Menil Archives, the voices include John and Dominique de Menil, who share stories about the installation and dedication of Barnett Newman's *Broken Obelisk*; and Renzo Piano, discussing Dominique as an exacting client who exerted a powerful influence over the design of the museum. Karl Kilian, the Menil's director of public programs and longtime de Menil family friend, offers a history of the color gray that characterizes not only the museum exterior but also the surrounding bungalows. Toby Kamps, curator of modern and contemporary art, will address the idea and importance of tranquility (which informs another current exhibition, "Silence"). Other voices – from the past and of the present – include those of architectural historian Stephen Fox, speaking about Louis Kahn's original site plan for the museum; Fredericka Hunter, recalling the de Menils' involvement at the University of St. Thomas art department; the late artist Max Neuhaus on his "sound sculpture" installed at the museum's main entrance; and architect William F. Stern, who discusses the design of the Cy Twombly gallery and its relationship to the surrounding architecture. Menil Director Josef Helfenstein elaborates on the idea of the Menil as "a neighborhood of art".

In sum, the walk offers an opportunity to discover the Menil through the direct words of the artists, curators, architects, historians, and others who have played an integral role in the founding and growth of the museum.

"The audio walk offers a new and different experience of the campus," said Michelle White. "The format offers a way to share with our visitors the rich audio resources from the archives, a combination of the voices of the past with those of the present. The walk, a group of personal stories and historical facts, not only reflects on the past but highlights our plans for the future."

*This exhibition is generously supported by Baker Botts L.L.P., William F. Stern and the City of Houston.*

Captions: Alexander Calder, *Sketch caricature of Dominique de Menil, 1964* © 2012 Calder Foundation, New York / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Menil Archives, Manuscript Collection.

Alexander Calder, *Sketch caricature of John de Menil, 1959* © 2012 Calder Foundation, New York / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Menil Archives, Manuscript Collection.

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