

The Menil Collection Opens *Meret Oppenheim: My Exhibition* March 25

Houston museum will be the first U.S. venue of this major transatlantic retrospective of Swiss artist Meret Oppenheim



HOUSTON—*January 18, 2022*—The Menil Collection is pleased to announce the opening of *Meret Oppenheim: My Exhibition*, the first major transatlantic retrospective of the Swiss artist, and the first in the U.S. in more than twenty-five years. The exhibition encompasses the work Oppenheim created throughout her five-decade career. *Meret Oppenheim: My Exhibition* will be **on view at the Menil from March 25–September 18, 2022**, after closing at the Kunstmuseum Bern in Switzerland in February. Following its U.S. debut in Houston, the exhibition will travel to The Museum of Modern Art, New York (MoMA) in October. The show is co-organized by the Menil; MoMA, New York; and the Kunstmuseum Bern.

Over the course of fifty years, Meret Oppenheim (1913–1985) produced witty, unconventional bodies of work that remain largely unknown in the U.S. From uncanny object constructions, geometric abstractions, and painted narratives to jewelry designs, public sculpture, and poetry, her diverse oeuvre is united by the singularity and force of her creative vision. Oppenheim’s thematic interests were equally diverse, ranging from the natural world and mythology to gender and selfhood. Her practice defies neat categorizations of style, medium, and historical movement. “Nobody will give you freedom,” she stated in 1975, “you have to take it.”

Rebecca Rabinow, Director of the Menil Collection, said, “*Meret Oppenheim: My Exhibition* is the result of a particularly close partnership between the Kunstmuseum Bern, MoMA, and the Menil. As a museum with a strong collection of Surrealist art, the Menil is proud to host the American debut of this important retrospective of Oppenheim’s wide-ranging and expansive career.”

Natalie Dupêcher, Associate Curator of Modern Art, the Menil Collection, said, “It has been a thrill to dive into Oppenheim’s boldly imaginative work, and to do so alongside the Menil’s curatorial partners in Bern and in New York. With this career-spanning retrospective, which brings many artworks to the U.S. for the first time, we look forward to introducing a new generation of art lovers and museum goers to this artist.”

The exhibition will be organized chronologically, with particular attention paid to key chapters in Oppenheim’s career: her formative years in Paris during the 1930s and return to Switzerland before World War II; her subsequent reengagement with Surrealist ideas and development of a new visual vocabulary alongside postwar art movements such as Nouveau Réalisme and Pop; and the last two decades of her life, in which her longstanding interests in nature, abstraction, and enchantment combined to forge a novel new style.

Arriving in Paris in 1932, the artist gained international fame in 1936, at only 23 years of age, with *Object*, a fur-lined teacup, spoon, and saucer. The first gallery brings together works from this period, including *The Night, Its Volume and What Endangers It (La nuit, son volume et ce qui lui est dangereux)*, 1934, from the Menil’s permanent collection. This section also highlights the artist’s object making, with captivating works such as *Ma gouvernante – My Nurse – Mein Kindermädchen*, 1936/1967, consisting of a pair of white heels trussed together on a silver platter, and *Fur Gloves with Wooden Fingers (Pelzhandschuhe)*, 1936.



After her early contact with the Surrealists in France, Oppenheim returned to her native Switzerland. She enrolled in courses on painting technique and restoration at Basel’s School of Design (Allgemeine Gewerbeschule), and created a number of fantastical narrative paintings in the late 1930s and early 1940s. In one, *Daphne and Apollo (Daphne und Apollo)*, 1943, Oppenheim depicted two figures transforming into trees, offering her own take on the Greek myth.

In the mid-1950s, after a period of diminished productivity, Oppenheim returned to intensive art-making. She rented a studio in Bern, where she continued to innovate new approaches and engaged with numerous postwar movements. Standing over five feet tall, *The Green Spectator (Der grüne Zuschauer)*, 1959, is a significant sculpture from this moment. Oppenheim had drawn



preparatory sketches for this work in Paris as a young artist, envisioning its eventual form. More than two decades later, she was finally able to realize the project in three dimensions.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the artist began to combine her career-long exploration of the natural world and enchantment. In the early 1960s, she developed a group of idiosyncratic sculptures and abstract paintings dedicated to the theme of clouds. Later that decade and into the 1970s, she made large-scale paintings like *The Secret of Vegetation* (*Das Geheimnis der Vegetation*), 1972, and innovative assemblage constructions, including the birdlike *Hm-hm*, 1969.

The exhibition concludes with works dating to the last years of Oppenheim's life. In *New Stars* (*Neue Sterne*), 1977-82, one of the largest paintings of her career, an evening sky served as the inspiration for an explosive scene of hard-edge, geometric abstraction. The last gallery includes a group of twelve drawings from 1983, collectively titled *My Exhibition*, in which the artist imagined a retrospective of her life's work, creating miniature sketches of the more than 200 works she selected for inclusion.

Meret Oppenheim: My Exhibition is co-organized by the Menil Collection, Houston; The Museum of Modern Art, New York (October 30, 2022–March 4, 2023); and the Kunstmuseum Bern (October 22, 2021–February 13, 2022). The exhibition is accompanied by a comprehensive, fully illustrated catalogue featuring new scholarly texts, and is co-curated by Natalie Dupêcher, Associate Curator of

Modern Art, the Menil Collection, Houston; Anne Umland, the Blanchette Hooker Rockefeller Senior Curator of Painting and Sculpture, The Museum of Modern Art, New York; and Nina Zimmer, Director, Kunstmuseum Bern / Zentrum Paul Klee.

About the Menil Collection

Philanthropists and art patrons John and Dominique de Menil established the Menil Foundation in 1954 to foster greater public understanding and appreciation of art, architecture, culture, religion, and philosophy. In 1987, the Menil Collection's main museum building opened to the public. Today, the Menil Collection consists of a group of five art buildings and green spaces located within a residential neighborhood in central Houston. The Menil remains committed to its founders' belief that art is essential to human experience and fosters direct personal encounters with works of art. The museum welcomes all visitors free of charge to its buildings and surrounding green spaces. menil.org

Funding

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Image Captions

1. Meret Oppenheim, *New Stars (Neue Sterne)*, 1977–82. Oil on canvas, 6 ft. 8 11/16 x 8 ft. 1 13/16 in. (205 x 248.5 cm). Kunstmuseum Bern. Meret Oppenheim Bequest. © Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / Pro Litteris, Zurich
2. Meret Oppenheim, *Ma gouvernante – My Nurse – Mein Kindermädchen*, 1936/1967. Metal plate, shoes, string, and paper, 5 1/2 x 13 x 8 1/4 in. (14 x 33 x 21 cm). Moderna Museet, Stockholm. © Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / Pro Litteris, Zurich
3. Meret Oppenheim, *Hm-hm*, 1969. Acrylic on canvas; oil and gold leaf on wood; bark; and carved wood, 6 ft. 6 1/4 in. x 37 3/8 x 3 9/16 in. (200 x 95 x 9 cm). Private collection, Bern. © Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / Pro Litteris, Zurich

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