

Bank of America Art Conservation Project Grant to Fund Restoration of John Chamberlain Sculptures in Menil Collection

Grant awarded as the Menil enters its 25th year and as two of the museum's Chamberlain works go on view in celebrated retrospective at New York's Guggenheim Museum

Menil among four U.S. museums to receive award



Houston, March 12, 2012 – The Menil Collection has announced that it has been awarded a grant to restore 12 sculptures by the American artist John Chamberlain through Bank of America's Art Conservation Project. A unique global conservation effort, the Art Conservation Project is providing grants to nonprofit institutions to fund the restoration of 20 art works and artifacts with important cultural and historical value from 19 cities.

The Menil is one of four domestic projects awarded a grant, along with the National Gallery of Art, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and Seattle Art Museum. The award selections range from 6th Century BC Chinese artifacts to Renaissance and modern masters, covering all forms of conservation on works spanning over 2,500 years.

"We are grateful for this vital support from the Bank of America Art Conservation Project," said Menil Director Josef Helfenstein. "We're honored to be among its stellar recipients here and abroad. This international program helps ensure that future generations will be able to enjoy and experience the full impact of these modern masterpieces."

The Menil holds one of the world's largest and most significant collections of John Chamberlain's work, with 14 drawings included among the dozen sculptures. With this generous funding, Menil conservators will be able to undertake a vital, in-depth study of the artist's working methods and materials.

"This program makes real investments in cultural treasures throughout the world while also allowing us to help a local museum with the growing cost of art conservation," said Kim Ruth, Houston market and Texas state president, Bank of America. "Bank of

America is honored to help preserve this significant group of sculptures by such an important American artist and to support the Menil Collection, a landmark that plays a vital role in Houston's vibrant culture."

The conservator's science in this case is designed to address the complex issues in these signature sculptures, made of automotive metal (including car bumpers, fenders and hoods), metal file cabinets and various bits of found steel. To the casual observer, such materials may seem like urban litter, but to Chamberlain, who died last December at the age of 84, they were "exotic". And he turned them into beautiful works of art.

The art conservator's approach is systematic, beginning with provenance research and photo documentation. "This helps us understand what the sculpture originally looked like and whether or how it has changed over time," said Menil Chief Conservator Brad Epley, who is in charge of the project, working with the museum's Objects Conservator, Shelley Smith. "This knowledge determines how we proceed with treatment.

"We are also gathering as much information as possible regarding John Chamberlain's creative process and how this changed over time. Understanding how the pieces fit together is critical during this process. Our goal—and the challenge—is to successfully treat each piece, always being true to John Chamberlain's aesthetic."

The Art Conservation Project reflects Menil founders John and Dominique de Menil's commitment to the in-depth collecting of significant individual artists and the preservation of their work. Along with such artists as Max Ernst, Jasper Johns, René Magritte, Robert Rauschenberg, Mark Rothko, Cy Twombly, and Andy Warhol, John Chamberlain has been a vital part of the Menil since its opening in 1987. The museum's inaugural exhibition—*Sculpture: John Chamberlain, 1970s & 1980s*—showcased the artist in galleries throughout the museum. In the 25 years since, Chamberlain's work has also been included in several exhibitions at the museum.

For a full description of each project and images, please visit <http://museums.bankofamerica.com/arts/ArtConservation.aspx>.

Born in 1927, John Chamberlain is best known for creating vibrantly colored sculptures from crushed, twisted and bent automobile parts. He used such found metal pieces as raw materials, shaping them at will, adding paint and welding the finished compositions to preserve their stability. Despite the heavy and unyielding character of the materials, Chamberlain's work achieves a lyrical quality, improbably light and poetic.

While Chamberlain's works are made from strong industrial materials, they possess inherent vulnerabilities. Manifold deterioration issues arise from the combination of age and method of assembly. Restoration will address flaking automotive paint, metal fatigue and corrosion, broken welds, missing or damaged parts and residual thick grime and dirt.

The Menil will treat the 12 pieces in consultation with the artist's studio, developing conservation techniques suited to Chamberlain's aesthetic and philosophy. The first two Menil works to be treated—*Nanoweap* (1969), *Rooster Starfoot* (1976)—are currently on view in a major retrospective of the artist's work, *John Chamberlain: Choices*, organized by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (February 24- May 13, 2012). The exhibition will then travel to the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao in the summer of 2013.

The Menil Collection -- which celebrates its 25th anniversary this year -- is widely considered one of the most important privately assembled collections of the twentieth century. The Menil's holdings, ranging from the prehistoric to art of the present day, are housed in a modern landmark designed by the renowned architect Renzo Piano. In the quarter-century since it opened to the public, the Menil has established an international reputation for presenting acclaimed exhibitions and producing many scholarly publications; pioneering partnerships with other cultural and educational institutions across Houston, Texas and the United States; and conducting groundbreaking research in the conservation of modern and contemporary art. The Menil charges no admission fees.

Bank of America and the Arts

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Caption: John Chamberlain, *Rooster Starfoot*, 1976. © 2012 John Chamberlain / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. The Menil Collection, Houston, gift of Heiner and Fariha Friedrich. Conservation was funded by a grant from the Bank of America Art Conservation Project. Photo: Hickey-Robertson, Houston

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