

**THE MENIL COLLECTION UNVEILS ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN
BY JOHNSTON MARKLEE FOR THE MENIL DRAWING INSTITUTE**

**First Major Project in a Campus-Wide Master Plan Will Bring a
New Level of Public Prominence to Modern and Contemporary Drawing**

HOUSTON, TX, February 19, 2014 — Josef Helfenstein, director of the Menil Collection, today unveiled the design by the Los Angeles-based architecture firm Johnston Marklee for the Menil Drawing Institute (MDI). A project with transformative potential for the museum world, the 30,150-square-foot, \$40 million MDI will be the first freestanding facility in the United States created especially for the exhibition, study, storage, and conservation of modern and contemporary drawings.

The MDI also will be the first building for art added to the Menil's architecturally distinguished ensemble under a long-range plan to enrich and enhance the 30-acre enclave in the heart of Houston. Other elements of the plan include the development of a more expansive, coherent, and sustainable landscape, designed by Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates; and construction of an Energy House, also designed by Johnston Marklee, which will serve as an efficient, environmentally sustainable central utilities plant for the museum and all of its annex buildings.

"Artists, curators, and scholars have long recognized the heightened importance of drawing in the modern era as an independent medium on the level of painting and sculpture," said Josef Helfenstein. "Until now, however, institutions have struggled to accord a proper place to this relatively fragile and inherently experimental practice. With a design that is at once serene and revolutionary, Johnston Marklee has enabled the Menil to make its drawings a more active and public part of the collection than ever before. Beautifully rational and open, the MDI building is also innovative in making the modulated presence of natural light possible within a building dedicated to fragile works on paper—an achievement that previously had seemed as impossible as squaring a circle."

Sharon Johnston and Mark Lee, founders and principals of Johnston Marklee, said, "The program for the MDI building is complex, involving multiple groups of users, multiple functions and spaces, and thousands of artworks that demand sensitive treatment. Because of

the MDI's public-oriented mission, though, and the famously understated architecture of the Menil's other buildings, we knew this complexity had to be accommodated in a design that would seem direct and self-evident. The site itself showed us the way forward. The gardenlike character of the campus with its tree-shaded streets of bungalows gave us the clues we needed to find the right scale, resolve the relationship between interior and exterior spaces, and, above all, modulate the light."

Elevating a Program's Potential Through Architecture

The MDI has existed as a program of the Menil Collection since 2008, developing a national reputation for exhibitions such as *Lee Bontecou: Drawn Worlds* (on view January 31-May 11, 2014) and the 2012 traveling exhibition *Richard Serra Drawing: A Retrospective*. The MDI also has embarked on ambitious scholarly projects, such as the multiple-volume catalogue raisonné of the drawings of Jasper Johns, and has established a programmatic collaboration with The Morgan Library & Museum. According to Allegra Pesenti, the John R. Eckel Jr. Foundation Chief Curator of the Menil Drawing Institute, the construction of a freestanding facility will open important new possibilities for the MDI and the entire Menil Collection, while also making a remarkable and original contribution to the museum field.

"The act of drawing," Allegra Pesenti said, "is often the starting point for sculpture, painting, performance, and film. It is a place where all other mediums can meet, a practice that binds all countries and cultures. And since there is little room on paper for cheating or masking the artist's hand, a drawing speaks the truth. We are proud to be putting drawing at the heart of the Menil's campus with the new MDI building."

Drawing a Roof Over the Landscape

The site for the Menil Drawing Institute lies just south of the main museum building (Renzo Piano, 1987, AIA 25 Year Award) and the Cy Twombly Gallery (Renzo Piano, 1995) and north of Richmond Hall, a 1930 masonry structure housing a permanent Dan Flavin light installation. The Energy House will be built directly to the west, across from a new park that will be created. The location positions the MDI as a hub among the Menil's other art buildings, surrounded by new green spaces and placed at the center of new pedestrian paths and an extension of West Main Street that will unify the campus.

Johnston Marklee's design begins from these circulation routes and from a prominent natural feature of the site: magnificent live oak trees. The design calls for trees to be surrounded by three square, open-roofed courtyards: two of them serving as entrances on the west and east sides of the building, and the third providing a "scholars' cloister" on the north.

Enclosed volumes set between these courtyards provide the main areas for the MDI's programs. A "living room" —both a circulation spine and a gathering place—runs between the west and east entrance courtyards. On the living room's south side, the space opens into the exhibition galleries. On the north, the living room gives access to administrative offices on one side of the scholars' cloister and to study rooms and the conservation lab on the other.

The principal structural element that unifies these indoor and outdoor spaces and their circulation routes is a thin, flat roof made of painted steel plate. When the one-story MDI is viewed from the side, the roof appears to float in the landscape, pierced here and there by treetops. Functionally, the roof works with the landscape to create MDI's unprecedented modulation of natural light, devised by Johnston Marklee in collaboration with the distinguished lighting design firm George Sexton Associates.

As visitors approach and enter the MDI, the sharp Texas sunlight is reduced in stages, first by the canopy of trees and then by the roof canopy. By the time visitors are inside the building, the intensity of light has been greatly diminished, naturally and incrementally, even as the courtyards enable a sense of connection to the outdoors and allow a modest level of baffled light to spill into the building. When visitors pass from the living room into the interior spaces, this mild wash of sunlight fades away. In this way, varying qualities of natural and artificial light define the interior volumes, with natural light orienting visitors and scholars in the areas for public gathering and study, and more controlled gradients of artificial light defining the areas for exhibition and storage. In the study room, a skylight fitted with fritted glass and a sailcloth scrim (not unlike the sailcloth ceiling of the Cy Twombly Gallery) admits natural light, so that researchers may notice subtle changes in the sky throughout the day.

For all users of the MDI—staff, researchers, and the public—the direct visual connections between the living room and the scholars' cloister, and the gentle flow of space into and through the building, will create what is possibly a more active, open, and engaging atmosphere than has existed before for the act of viewing and studying drawings. Contributing to the experience will be the carefully judged scale of the building and its program areas. Constructed on a footprint of 17,000 square feet and rising to a height of 16 feet, MDI is midway in size between the domestic architecture of the surrounding bungalows and the institutional architecture of the main museum building. It is a public facility for artworks that are frequently intimate in scale.

"This building will make the MDI an unprecedented merger of private and public spaces and functions for the enjoyment and study of drawings," Allegra Pesenti stated. "It will be a

platform for the work of artists, and a welcoming place where scholars and museumgoers will easily mingle.”

The MDI is one component of a \$110 million capital and endowment campaign for the Menil Collection. Groundbreaking for the MDI is tentatively scheduled for early 2015.

About Johnston Marklee

Founded in 1998 by Sharon Johnston and Mark Lee, Johnston Marklee has undertaken residential, commercial, and institutional projects and exhibition environments with a particular focus on the arts and artist collaborations. Notable projects, designed in response to specific site conditions, include writers-in-residence facilities for the Lannan Foundation, Marfa, Texas; View House, Rosario, Argentina; Hill House, Pacific Palisades, California; and Vault House, Oxnard, California. Current projects include a new studio campus for the UCLA Graduate Art Program, Culver City; Pavilion of Six Views for the West Bund 2013 Biennale of Architecture and Contemporary Art, Shanghai; a new commercial building in the Miami Design District, Miami, Florida; Poggio Golo winery and artist-in-residence studio for DEPART Foundation, Montepulciano, Italy; and Chile House/META, a community arts center in Penco, Chile. (www.johnstonmarklee.com)

About the Menil Collection

A legacy of the late Houston philanthropists John and Dominique de Menil, the Menil Collection opened in 1987. The main museum building anchors the 30-acre campus, which also 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, 11am to 7pm, and charges no admission fee.

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