

**THE MENIL COLLECTION TO REOPEN MAIN MUSEUM BUILDING
ON SEPTEMBER 22, 2018 WITH REIMAGINED GALLERY SPACES DEVOTED
ENTIRELY TO THE GROWING PERMANENT COLLECTION**

**Building to Open Following Seven Months of Updates and Repairs
Funded by *The Campaign for the Menil***



HOUSTON, TEXAS, June 12, 2018 – Rebecca Rabinow, Director of the Menil Collection, today announced that the museum’s main building will reopen to the public on Saturday, September 22, 2018. The past several months have been devoted to a subtle yet substantial refreshment of the building that includes new state-of-the-art fire detection sensors, refinished Loblolly pine floors throughout the first level, enhanced exterior and gallery lighting, and updated restroom facilities. This work has been undertaken in conjunction with a redesign of

gallery layouts and displays. The museum will reopen with entirely new installations of artwork consisting exclusively of the permanent collection and promised gifts.

Comprised of nearly 17,000 objects, the museum’s growing collection, while not encyclopedic, spans the prehistoric era to the present day. Particular areas of strength include Byzantine art, West and Central African art, Surrealism, and 20th and 21st century American and European art. The year-long permanent collection initiative will include thematic presentations of artwork, as well as two temporary rotating series, complemented by a roster of public programs that underscore the museum’s engagement with and commitment to living artists. The installation will feature many of the museum’s most well-known paintings and sculptures, as well as recent acquisitions and other works and promised gifts that have never before been on view in the museum.

Said Menil Director Rebecca Rabinow, “Because of the need for updates and repairs to our main building, we recognized that we had a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to refresh the galleries and reimagine the installation. For over a year, our staff has done just that, and the result is spectacular. Not only do the galleries honor the extraordinary legacy of John and Dominique de Menil, but they also illuminate the impressive growth of our permanent collection. We actively collect and reaffirm our commitment to living artists. I speak on behalf of the entire staff when I say that we are proud of what we have achieved and look forward to welcoming visitors from around the world as they rediscover the magic and the beauty of the Menil Collection.”

Highlights of the installation include:

- Beginning in 1960, John and Dominique de Menil, outspoken champions of civil rights, initiated *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, a trailblazing response to the racism and segregation they observed in the southern United States. Artworks related to this initiative are installed throughout the museum. Examples include an Ancient Greek amphora from the late 6th century BCE; George Morland’s *European Ship Wrecked on the Coast of Africa, known as African Hospitality*, 1788–1790; and *Triptych with Virgin and Child, Saint George and the Dragon, and Angels and Attendants* by the Amhara peoples, a gift of Dr. Syliva Ardyn Boone (1942–1993).
- Additionally, *The Image of the Black in Western Art* project has inspired a new presentation of African and early modern European art that explores cultural exchange from the 15th to the 19th centuries. Among the works on view are an 18th century copper-alloy sculpture of a Portuguese musketeer made by a hereditary guild of the Benin Kingdom and a powerful portrait of William Ansah Sessarakoo (ca. 1736–1770) by British portraitist Gabriel Mathias (1719–1804).
- A new gallery for the arts of the Pacific Islands showcases masks, body ornaments, textiles, prestige objects, ceremonial and utilitarian sculptures, and musical instruments crafted from flora and fauna that are thought possess *mana*, the animating energy of the visible and invisible worlds. Many of the Menil’s extraordinary Pacific Island works were created in Melanesia and Polynesia, part of the more than 20,000 islands in the Pacific Ocean, which comprise the world’s most expansive and culturally diverse region of artistic production.
- The presentation of the arts of Medieval to Early Modern Europe (5th to 18th centuries) has been redesigned around a central room devoted to the Menil’s celebrated collection of Byzantine icons. The Menil’s icons range in date from the

6th to the 18th centuries and represent three distinct cultures: Greek, Balkan, and Russian.

- For the first time since it opened thirty years ago, the Menil is using what used to be a temporary exhibition space to display the permanent collection. As a result, the museum's presentation of modern and contemporary art will be significantly expanded. The opening display will include a group of 11 paintings by Fernand Léger (1881–1955), a little-known strength of the Menil, as well as rooms devoted to the spectacular abstract paintings by the American artists Mark Rothko (1903–70) and Barnett Newman (1905–70).
- The strength of the Menil's holdings of Post-War European Contemporary art will be presented with major works by Yves Klein (1928–62), Lucio Fontana (1899–1968), Takis (b. 1925), Christo (b. 1935), Niki de Saint Phalle (1930–2002), and Jean Tinguely (1925–91).
- The galleries devoted to the Menil's iconic Surrealist collection have been expanded, yet retain the intimate domestic scale expected by the museum's visitors. The new installation includes entire rooms devoted to individual artists: Max Ernst (1891–1976), Victor Brauner (1903–66), and René Magritte (1898–1967). The final gallery of this suite will open with a display of mechanical drawings, collages, and a selection of exceptional boxes by Joseph Cornell (1903–72).
- Two series have been incorporated into the year-long display. *Collection Close-Up* provides the opportunity for an in-depth exploration of lesser-known aspects of the collection. This series debuts with *Claes Oldenburg, Rhymes With Mouse*, a presentation of drawings, sculptures, and prints related to American artist Claes Oldenburg's (b. 1929) development of the geometric mouse during the 1960s and 1970s.
- The second series, *Contemporary Focus*, continues John and Dominique de Menil's unwavering support of living artists. It debuts with new acquisitions by American artist Leslie Hewitt (b. 1977): *Where Paths Meet, Turn Away, Then Align Again, 2012*, large geometric sculptures made of bent plate steel, and *Where Paths Meet, Turn Away, Then Align Again (Distilled moment from over 72 hours of viewing the civil rights era archive at the Menil Collection in Houston, Texas), 2012*.
- Other parts of the museum will also showcase works by living artists. Pride of place in the museum's foyer is given to the colorful, monumental canvas, *Middle Passage, 1970*, by Guyana-born British artist Frank Bowling (b. 1936). Acquired by John and Dominique de Menil in 1970, this will be the first time it has been shown at the Menil Collection.

Major funding for the reinstallation of the permanent collection is provided by Nancy and Robert Carney and Cecily E. Horton. Additional support comes from The Brown Foundation, Inc. / Mike Stude, Diane and Michael Cannon; Poppi Massey, Robin and Andrew Schirrmeister; Jacqueline and Richard Schmeal, and Scott R. Sparvero.

About the Menil Collection Main Building

Opened in June 1987, the Menil Collection's main building is the first in the United States designed by Renzo Piano. The 100,000 square foot building includes 30,000 square feet of exhibition galleries, along with spaces for storage, conservation, library, archives, and staff offices. The project was made possible by *The Campaign for the Menil* – the museum's first comprehensive fundraising effort for campus improvements and endowment that raised more than \$121 million. The building has received numerous awards and accolades over its 30-year history including the 2013 American Institute of Architects Twenty-five Year Award. It is celebrated for its functionality as a living and working museum, its domestic scale within a historic residential neighborhood, and its innovative use of natural light.

About the Menil Drawing Institute

In addition to the reopening of the main building this fall, the Menil Drawing Institute—the first freestanding facility built expressly for the acquisition, exhibition, study, conservation, and storage of modern and contemporary drawings—will open to the public on November 3, 2018. The 30,000-square-foot, \$40 million building designed by Johnston Marklee will be inaugurated with *The Condition of Being Here: Drawings by Jasper Johns*, an exhibition spanning the artist's career.

About the Menil Collection

Houston 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 building opened to the public. Today, some thirty years later, the Menil Collection consists of a group of five art buildings and green spaces located within a historic residential neighborhood. The Menil embodies the ideals and values of its founders, in particular, that art is vital to human life and should be readily accessible to all persons.

This summer, while work finishes on the main building, the Menil's other galleries, amenities, and greenspaces remain open to the public with regular hours. These spaces include the Cy Twombly Gallery, Dan Flavin Installation at Richmond Hall, Byzantine

Fresco Chapel, Menil Bookstore, Menil Park, and Bistro Menil. Visit menil.org for more information.

The Menil is open Wednesday through Sunday, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m., and charges no admission fee.

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Image: Frank Bowling, *Middle Passage*, 1970. Synthetic polymer paint, silkscreen ink, spray paint, wax crayon, and graphite on canvas, 122 1/4 × 122 1/4 × 2 in. (310.5 × 310.5 × 5.1 cm). The Menil Collection, Houston. © Frank Bowling / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / DACS, London

Press Contact:

Menil Press Office
Tommy Napier
713 535 3170
tnapier@menil.org

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