The Menil Collection began with French philanthropists John and Dominique de Menil. Making their way to Houston during World War II, the couple quickly became key figures in the city’s developing cultural life. They began collecting art intensively in the 1940s, amassing significant holdings in the city’s developing cultural life. They began collecting art intensively in the 1940s, amassing significant holdings in modern and contemporary art, and the couple was especially attracted to the Surrealists and School of Paris painters. From the beginning the de Menils collected objects from classical Mediterranean civilizations, the Byzantine Empire, Africa, the Pacific Islands, and the Americas, and they saw profound formal and spiritual connections between modern works and the arts of ancient and indigenous cultures. By the 1960s they had gravitated toward the major American postwar movements of Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art, and Minimalism.

By 1987 the de Menils had discussed the construction of a museum. Dominique de Menil, surviving her husband by a quarter of a century, pursued this goal. Since the Menil Collection opened in 1987, the institution has continued to collect and to evolve the campus. The Menil has assembled deep holdings of modern and contemporary art. Recognizing the opportunity such a collection presents, the museum established the Menil Drawing Institute, which began to organize exhibitions and scholarly projects in 1995. A decade later, the institute’s building opens its doors, making it the newest addition to the Menil campus. In addition to facilitating research by museum curators and visiting scholars and hosting a state-of-the-art conservation lab, it provides an intimate setting for the public to interact with the Menil’s collection and changing exhibitions.

The Menil Collection building, and the Cy Twombly Gallery in the Menil Drawing Institute, were both designed by the Italian architect Renzo Piano, architect of the main Menil Collection building, and the Cy Twombly Gallery opened in 1995. Piano designed a system for filtering sunlight by ingeniously layering fixed and moving louvers, a steel canopy, a skylight, and sailcloth, all of which hover above the building. Twombly (1928–2011) about a single-artist installation. The proportions and color of the concrete blocks and the single stepped base on which they rest create a strong yet quiet exterior. Piano designed a system for filtering sunlight by ingeniously layering fixed and moving louvers, a steel canopy a skylight, and sailcloth, all of which hover above the building. Twombly’s design was realized by Renzo Piano, architect of the main Menil Collection building, and the Cy Twombly Gallery opened in 1995.

In the early 1990s, the Menil Collection approached Cy Twombly (1928–2011) about a single-artist installation. Twombly designed the installation, which opened in both the building’s pilot hall in a room in a sketch he made—and the selection and placement of artworks. The design was realized by Renzo Piano, architect of the main Menil Collection building, and the Cy Twombly Gallery opened in 1995.

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Dan Flavin Installation
at Richmond Hall

The minimalist Dan Flavin (1933–1996) revolutionized art in the 1960s by using light from standard fluorescent tubes as a sculptural medium, creating experiences of great beauty with south available to any art lover. In the 1970s, Flavin began to explore the idea of a permanent, site-specific "monuments for V. T, at Lin, 1964–69, to the Holy Archeparch of Cyprus and the Byzantine Fresco Chapel were broken into fragments were put on sale.

The neighborhood of the Menil Collection is punctuated by major works of outdoor sculpture. Jim Love’s 1971, welcomes visitors as they enter from the Alabama Street parking lot and walk between the Menil Drawing Institute and Bistro Menil. Love’s unique sculptures, a carefully chosen array of gifts, and select offerings replace the museum’s permanent collection.

The Menil Collection Bookstore features books for all tastes, the collections, and special projects, as well as an array of titles on contemporary art, architecture, and design. The bookstore also has children’s books and a section, a carefully chosen array of gifts, and select offerings replace the museum’s permanent collection.

Continue the Experience
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