

THE MENIL COLLECTION

Visitor Guide



The Menil Collection



The Menil Collection is a museum and neighborhood of art spanning 30 acres in the heart of Houston, Texas. The main building showcases the museum's permanent collection as well as temporary exhibitions. These are complemented by rotating exhibitions and installations at the Menil Drawing Institute and single-artist installations at the Cy Twombly Gallery and Richmond Hall. A philosophy as well as an aesthetic unites them all: fostering direct, intimate encounters with art in serene galleries where works are generously spaced. In addition to presenting visual art, the museum publishes books and hosts performances by musicians, poets, and dancers as well as lectures by artists, curators, and scholars. Making art accessible is vital to the Menil's mission; admission is free and there is no charge for parking or public programs, which are made available online.



Dominique and John de Menil, 1965

The Menil Collection was founded by the French philanthropists John and Dominique de Menil. After 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 of paintings, sculptures, prints, drawings, photographs, and rare books. Prior to John de Menil's death in 1973, the couple had discussed the construction of a museum. Dominique de Menil, surviving her husband by a quarter of a century, pursued this goal and opened the Menil Collection in 1987.

Main Building

The main building, which houses the majority of the 18,000-work collection, is the first U.S. museum designed by the Italian architect Renzo Piano. It realizes the founder's vision of a space that seems "large on the inside but small on the outside." The galleries are filled with natural light that varies with the weather, time of day, and season.

Initially the main building featured the art collection of John and Dominique de Menil. Since that time, the museum has continued to grow its holdings. Modern European art was always a core strength; 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 began gravitating toward major postwar movements from Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art, and Minimalism in the U.S. to Art Brut and Nouveau Réalisme in Europe.



Headdress (*Ciwara kun*), 20th century.
Bamana peoples. Mali, Bougouni Region.
Wood, 25 7/8 x 10 1/4 x 2 in. (65.7 x 26 x 5.1 cm).
The Menil Collection, Houston.



Cy Twombly Gallery



In the early 1990s, the Menil Collection approached Cy Twombly (1928–2011) about a single-artist installation. Taken with the idea, Twombly became intimately involved in both the architecture of the building—the floorplan has its roots in a sketch he made—and the selection and placement of artworks. The design was realized by Renzo Piano, and the Cy Twombly Gallery opened in 1995.

Twombly is best known for his large-scale calligraphic paintings. Fascinated with writing, the artist found inspiration in ancient Mediterranean history and geography, Greek and Roman mythology, classical literature, and poetry. The works on view in the Cy Twombly Gallery, dating from 1953 to 2004, comprise a veritable retrospective of the artist's career, including a number of large canvases, sculptural works, and suites of paintings and drawings. Piano designed a system for filtering sunlight to produce a Mediterranean glow by ingeniously layering fixed and moving louvers, a steel canopy, a skylight, and sailcloth, all of which hover above unpainted plaster walls.

Menil

Drawing Institute

The museum houses nearly 2,000 drawings at the Menil Drawing Institute, which was designed by the architects Johnston Marklee and opened in 2018. The freestanding building makes innovative use of natural light and is designed around three tree-filled courtyards. The galleries provide an intimate setting for the public to interact with the drawing collection and changing exhibitions. The drawing institute is devoted to teaching, research, exhibition, storage, and conservation of works on paper, substantiating the Menil's dedication to artists and their creative thought and process.



Georgia O'Keeffe, *From a River Trip*, 1962.
Promised gift of Janie C. Lee. © Georgia O'Keeffe
Museum / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York





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 items available in any hardware store. Invited to make a permanent installation in Richmond Hall (built in 1930 as a grocery store), Flavin designed three distinct pieces, all untitled, completed in 1998. The work on the exterior lines the building's top edges (its green glow is most apparent after dark), and there is one artwork the lobby. The main rectangular room (128 × 50 feet) features two vertical rows of multi-colored tubes that fill the space with light. Since 2003, an exhibition space at the rear of the building has housed four earlier Flavin works, the “*monuments*” for V. Tatlin, 1964–69, acquired by the Menil Foundation in 1970.



Byzantine Fresco Chapel



The Byzantine Fresco Chapel opened in 1997 to house two 13th-century frescoes that had been stolen from a church in Lysi, Cyprus, broken into fragments, and put up for sale. After establishing that the Holy Archbishopric of Cyprus was the rightful owner, the Menil Foundation purchased the frescoes on the church's behalf and financed their restoration. The Archbishopric agreed to an extended loan, and the frescoes were on view in the chapel until 2012, when they were returned to Cyprus. The building, designed by the architect Francois de Menil, has subsequently housed long-term art installations.



Outdoor Sculpture & Greenspaces

The neighborhood of the Menil Collection is punctuated by major works of outdoor sculpture. Jim Love's *Jack*, 1971, welcomes visitors as they enter from the West Alabama Street parking lot and walk between the Menil Collection Bookstore and Bistro Menil. Works by Mark di Suvero, Michael Heizer, Ellsworth Kelly, and others are scattered throughout. The museum's green spaces include Menil Park, along Mulberry Street; McGovern Green, in front of the Cy Twombly Gallery; and the West Main Green across from the entrance to the Menil Drawing Institute. All are open to the public from dawn to dusk. Please see menil.org/visit/menil-policies for regulations governing their use.

Menil Collection Bookstore

The Menil Collection Bookstore features books that the museum publishes on exhibitions, the collection, and special projects, as well as an array of titles on contemporary art, architecture, and design. The Bookstore also has a children's book and toy section, a carefully chosen array of gifts, and select offerings of jewelry and artwork by Texas-based artists.

Library

The Menil Library is open to researchers by appointment. Email library@menil.org for more information.

Continue the Experience

Discover upcoming exhibitions and events and learn more about the museum's history, mission, and collection at menil.org, where you will also find online publications.

View conversations with artists and a wide selection of public programs on the Menil YouTube channel: youtube.com/user/themenilcollection.

Connect with the Menil on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram @menilcollection

Membership

Menil members are a group of dedicated art-lovers who provide critical support for the museum's exhibitions and programs. In appreciation, they enjoy behind-the-scenes access, special programs, a discount at the Menil Bookstore, and reciprocal membership benefits at over 900 museums, among other advantages.

3 Easy Ways to Join

Onsite at the museum reception desks and the Menil Collection Bookstore

Online at menil.org

By phone at 713-525-9435

Support

The Menil Collection is a not-for-profit, public organization that relies on donations to keep the permanent collection, special exhibitions, and public programs free of charge. Please consider making a gift online at menil.org, or by check sent to 1515 Branard Street, Houston, Texas 77006.

Hours & Locations

Museum Buildings

Wed.–Sun., 11 a.m.–7 p.m.

Main Building

1533 Sul Ross Street
Houston, Texas 77006

Cy Twombly Gallery

1501 Branard Street

Menil Drawing Institute

1412 West Main Street

Dan Flavin Installation at Richmond Hall

1500 Richmond Avenue

Byzantine Fresco Chapel

4011 Yupon Street at Branard Street

Free Parking

Parking lots are located at 1515 West Alabama Street and adjacent to Richmond Hall and the Byzantine Fresco Chapel. Additional free parking is available on Sul Ross, Branard, and West Main Streets.

In the Parks & Green Spaces

The museum does not allow climbing on trees or touching sculptures.

All pets must remain leashed and owners are required to pick up after their animals.

The Menil does not permit organized classes, performances, or events outside of museum programs. Groups must not block walkways from other visitors. Solicitation and advertising on campus is not permitted. We regret that we cannot accommodate weddings or large gatherings.

Prohibited items and activities include: hammocks, tightropes, glass containers, amplified music, alcohol, open fires or grills, furnishings, and smoking.

Menil Collection Bookstore

1520 Sul Ross Street
Wed.–Sun., 11 a.m.–7 p.m.
713-535-3180
Facebook and Instagram
@MenilBookstore

Bistro Menil

1513 West Alabama Street
Wed.–Sun., 11a.m.–9p.m.
713-904-3537, bistromenil.com

Parks

Dawn to dusk, daily

Inside the Buildings

Please refrain from touching the artworks and observe the barriers on the floor.

No food or drinks are permitted.

Backpacks must be worn on one shoulder.

In order to preserve the contemplative atmosphere and facilitate intimate encounters with works of art, photography is not permitted inside Menil galleries. Non-commercial photography of the exteriors, foyers, and hallways is allowed.

Free Admission, Always

Call 713-525-9400 or
email info@menil.org
for additional information.