

**ON ITS 25TH ANNIVERSARY, THE MENIL COLLECTION SELECTS
JOHNSTON MARKLEE ARCHITECTS TO DESIGN THE
MENIL DRAWING INSTITUTE**

**First Building in America Dedicated to Modern and Contemporary Drawing Will
Inaugurate Major Development in the Plan to Expand and Enhance the
Menil's Renowned Campus**

HOUSTON, TX, June 8, 2012 — Almost twenty-five years to the day after Dominique de Menil and architect Renzo Piano celebrated the opening of the central museum building of the Menil Collection, Director Josef Helfenstein announced that the Board of Trustees has unanimously chosen the Los Angeles -based architecture firm Johnston Marklee to design the Menil Drawing Institute (MDI), the first major building project to be initiated under an ambitious plan for the institution's future.

MDI will accommodate the special needs of the Menil's largest and fastest-growing collection by providing the first facility in the U.S. built especially for the exhibition, study, storage, and conservation of modern and contemporary drawings. Added to the other buildings on the serene, wooded campus, where concentrations of exceptional art are connected by paths through abundant green space, MDI will make accessible as never before a wealth of works that exemplify the Menil experience of a direct encounter between the visitor and the artist's hand.

"Johnston Marklee has proposed an approach that sensitively and ingeniously addresses the challenges of accommodating the vital yet inherently delicate medium of drawing," Josef Helfenstein stated. "The firm understands on the deepest level the distinctive role that MDI will play as a focal point for the entire campus, giving us an approach that will serve this important collection and elevate the future experience of the Menil as a whole."

Leslie Elkins Sasser, Chair of the Menil's architect selection committee, stated, "We are excited to welcome Sharon Johnston and Mark Lee to the distinguished company of architects who have built the Menil's campus, and who now will be bringing it to a more complete realization under our long-range plan. In their work, we see the skills and insights of brilliant architects who have respected the Menil's history while adding something new and distinctive for the next phase of its life."

On behalf of the full Board, President Harry Pinson expressed the Trustees' appreciation and deep respect for the extraordinarily high quality of the proposals submitted by all the firms invited to participate in the final phase of this international selection process.

Now that Johnston Marklee has been selected, the firm will develop its approach into a conceptual design for the Menil Drawing Institute.

According to Josef Helfenstein, the approach is distinguished by its respect for the landscape and the residential scale of the Menil's campus, and by its ingenuity in adapting these characteristics to serve the multiple purposes of MDI. Johnston Marklee has proposed a single-story, metal-roofed structure that would be built around a trio of courtyards. Two of the courtyards would serve as entrances, placed at either end of the building; the researchers' and scholars' area of MDI would wrap around the third. In the middle would be a "living room," an intimately scaled common space for staff, scholars, and the public. MDI's exhibition gallery, a highly flexible space filled with controlled, reflected natural light, would be entered from the living room. In this way, a visitor to MDI would pass from the outdoor space of the campus with its sunlight and shade to the semi-enclosed space of the courtyard, then to the enclosed but transparent space of the living room (with its views to other parts of the building and to the outdoors) and finally to the fully enclosed exhibition gallery. This progression of spaces would also effect a series of gradations in light, gradually and gently bringing the visitor from the bright Texas sunlight to the low level of light needed for drawings.

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 collaborations with artists. Notable projects, often designed to take advantage of their site, include writers-in-residence facilities for the Lannan Foundation in Marfa, Texas; View House, Rosario, Argentina; Hill House, Pacific Palisades, California; and Helios House, Los Angeles. Current projects include a new studio campus for the UCLA Graduate Art Program, Culver City; DEPART Foundation's Grand Traiano Art Complex, Grottaferrata, Italy; Poggio Golo winery, Montepulciano, Italy; Vault House, Oxnard, California; and Chile House/META, a community arts center in Penco, Chile.

The Menil Long-Range Plan and MDI

The Menil's plan to enhance and add to its campus began with a strategic planning process undertaken in 2006, calling for a series of expansions to realize the full founding vision of Dominique and John de Menil. Among its features, the strategic plan proposes completing the campus with construction of the MDI, a café, additional space for the Menil Archives, and buildings devoted to the work of individual artists (such as the Menil's Cy Twombly Gallery and Dan Flavin Installation at Richmond Hall).

In 2009, on the basis of this strategic plan, the Menil commissioned David Chipperfield Architects to create a master site plan for the campus, a 30-acre "neighborhood of art" (as it was described by the architecture critic Reyner Banham) in Houston's Museum District. The Board of Trustees has enthusiastically embraced the Chipperfield master site plan for its sensitivity and intelligence in showing how to increase the Menil's visibility and accessibility without sacrificing the campus's tranquil, oasis-like quality. The plan suggests no alterations to existing

Menil art buildings and will preserve the scale, green ambience, and tranquility of the Menil's neighborhood.

The Board of Trustees resolved that a freestanding facility for MDI will be the first major project undertaken through the long-range plan, as a key expression of the institution's values and vision for the future. A modest project under the plan—a 1,500-square-foot café – is currently being designed by Rice University's Rice Building Workshop.

Established in 2008 as a program of the Menil Collection, the Menil Drawing Institute currently conducts research into modern and contemporary drawing; organizes exhibitions (such as surveys of the drawings of Claes Oldenburg and Tony Smith, and the current *Richard Serra Drawing: A Retrospective*); and is undertaking the research and publication of the multi-volume catalogue raisonné of the drawings of Jasper Johns.

About The Menil Collection

Considered one of the most important privately assembled collections of the twentieth century, the Menil Collection opened officially on June 4, 1987, and is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year. 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 highly respected scholarly publications; pioneering partnerships with other cultural and education institutions across Houston, Texas and the United States; and conducting groundbreaking research into the conservation of modern and contemporary art. The Menil charges no admission fees.

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