

## THE MENIL COLLECTION

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News

### For Immediate Release

#### MAYOR ANNISE PARKER JOINS MUSEUM LEADERS AND ARCHITECTS SHARON JOHNSTON AND MARK LEE TO BREAK GROUND FOR THE MENIL DRAWING INSTITUTE

Unprecedented Facility for Modern and Contemporary Drawings, Built Through  
Major Gifts of Artworks and a \$110 Million Fundraising Campaign.  
Will Rise in the Heart of an Expanded, Parklike Menil Campus



HOUSTON, TX, March 27, 2015 — The Menil Collection today celebrated the groundbreaking for the Menil Drawing Institute (MDI), with Mayor Annise Parker, Menil leadership, Houston cultural and philanthropic leaders, and architects Sharon Johnston and Mark Lee attending the ceremony that marked the start of construction. Funded through the \$110 million *Campaign for the Menil*, which to date has achieved 70 percent of its goal, the MDI will be the first freestanding facility in the United States designed expressly for the exhibition and study of modern and contemporary drawings.

The 30,000-square-foot, \$40 million MDI building, designed by the Los Angeles-based firm of Johnston Marklee, will provide unprecedented access for both the public and scholars to the Menil's outstanding collection of drawings, which has grown rapidly in recent years through major gifts from donors including Louisa Stude Sarofim, William F. Stern, Cy Twombly, and David Whitney. The landscape design for the MDI, which is integral to the project and creates a new parklike space for Houston within the Menil campus, is by Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates.

Josef Helfenstein, director of the Menil Collection, stated, "The impetus for creating the MDI came from recognizing that drawing could be central to our visitors' experience, just as it is central to the lives of artists. The brilliant architectural design by Johnston Marklee will enable us to acknowledge and celebrate the key position of drawing in modern and contemporary culture, with spaces for exhibition, study, conservation, and reflection that will permit the public to interact both intimately and dynamically with our holdings. The extraordinary generosity of our donors, and the already established vigor of our program, make us confident of the MDI's ambitious future."

Mayor Parker stated, "Today we are launching the building of the Menil's new gift to the city of Houston. The museum was truly a gift when it opened, and it has been a gift every day since – a gift that is growing and becoming more precious over the years."

Following the Mayor, Janet Hobby, president of the Menil Foundation, said, "The Menil's uniqueness lies not just in preserving the past but in supporting its growth and impulse. The *Campaign for the Menil* signifies the foundation's commitment to the future its founders imagined."

### **Building the Collection**

Before the MDI was established as a program of the Menil Collection, in 2008, two important gifts added to the already strong holdings of drawings in the museum. Louisa Stude Sarofim's gift of Ellsworth Kelly's *Tablet*, announced in 2003, made Houston one of the most important cities in the world to study this major American artist's practice. Comprising 188 drawings and collages that Kelly made from 1948 to 1973, *Tablet* reflects his material and conceptual thinking during this seminal period in his career. Just two years later, David Whitney's transformative bequest, announced in 2005, added drawings by artists including Robert Rauschenberg, Vija Celmins, Roy Lichtenstein, Brice Marden, Cy Twombly, and Claes Oldenburg. Particularly notable in the bequest are the 17 drawings from Jasper Johns—the earliest realized in 1957—that have made the

Menil the main site for studying this key aspect of the artist's practice, and made the MDI the logical place to initiate the catalogue raisonné of his drawings.

Most recently, in 2013, a major bequest from Houston architect and Menil Trustee William F. Stern added notable drawings by Mel Bochner, Donald Judd, Sherrie Levine, Sol LeWitt, Robert Mangold, Richard Tuttle, and others to the MDI, as well as an endowment for acquisitions of modern and contemporary drawing.

Artists and their estates also have made remarkable gifts to the MDI. Robert Gober, Suzan Frecon, Max Neuhaus, David Novros, Claes Oldenburg, and the Estate of Fred Sandback are among those who have added drawings to the collection, enabling the Menil to present their practices in light of their long-standing relationships with the institution. Notable among these gifts is a donation made by Cy Twombly, whose freestanding pavilion will be near the new MDI building on the Menil campus, and whose work demonstrates the possibilities inherent in drawing. In 2009, the artist donated a suite of twelve landmark works on paper, which were recently featured at the Morgan Library & Museum in the exhibition *Cy Twombly: Treatise on the Veil*.

David Breslin, the John R. Eckel, Jr. Foundation Chief Curator of the MDI, stated, "Drawing privileges research and discovery and gives a material trace to the slipperiness of thought. It shouldn't come as a surprise that drawings are so frequently the objects of art that artists themselves choose to live with and work around. Drawings invite dialogue; they ask you to talk back to them; they compel you to take your own work further. As a medium that transcends discipline—it is as valuable to the choreographer, composer, and archaeologist as it is to the architect and artist—drawing gathers up what is frequently kept separate and offers a way to look at creative culture more as a whole. The gifts that the MDI has received reveal the multiple places that drawing inhabits—as a form of inquiry, a medium of experimentation and communication, and an end in its own right."

### **Building the Facility**

In the years since the Menil Collection established the MDI as a program, it has developed a national reputation for exhibitions, scholarship, and collaboration.

The current exhibition *Becoming Modern: Nineteenth-Century French Drawings from The Morgan Library & Museum and the Menil Collection* is organized under the MDI's auspices and reflects a programmatic collaboration between the MDI and the Morgan. Other

important traveling exhibitions have included *Serra Drawing: A Retrospective* (2012), *Lee Bontecou: Drawn Worlds* (2014), and the upcoming *Apparitions: Frottages and Rubbings from 1860 to Now*, organized by the MDI's curator-at-large, Allegra Pesenti.

Leading the MDI's scholarly projects is the multiple-volume catalogue raisonné of the drawings of Jasper Johns, initiated by the distinguished founding curator of the MDI, Bernice Rose.

Plans to construct a freestanding building for the MDI were included in a master site plan developed for the Menil in 2009 by architect David Chipperfield. In June 2012, the Menil announced that it had selected Johnston Marklee through an international competition to design the MDI building. In February 2014, the Menil unveiled the design by Johnston Marklee.

The site for the building—just south of the main museum and the Cy Twombly Gallery, and north of the Dan Flavin Installation—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.

Beginning from these circulation routes, and from the presence on the site of magnificent live oaks, the Johnston Marklee 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.

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.

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.

The MDI is one component of a \$110 million capital and endowment campaign that is expanding and enhancing the Menil’s campus and strengthening the institution for the future. Completion of the MDI is anticipated for mid-2017.

### **About the Menil Collection**

A legacy of the late philanthropists John and Dominique de Menil, the Menil Collection opened to the public in 1987. Housed in the first United States building designed by the Italian architect Renzo Piano, the main museum anchors a thirty-acre “neighborhood of art,” as the late architectural historian Reyner Banham described the Menil campus. Sharing this park-like enclave with bungalows, great live oaks, and outdoor sculpture are the Cy Twombly Gallery (also by Renzo Piano); a site-specific work by Minimalist pioneer Dan Flavin that has transformed Richmond Hall, built in 1930 as a grocery store, into what the Boston Globe has likened to a “cathedral and carnival”; and Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller’s *The Infinity Machine* at the Byzantine Fresco Chapel, now a venue for long-term installations by contemporary artists. Presenting regular rotations of artworks from the growing permanent collection, the Menil also organizes special exhibitions throughout the year; presents a full calendar of lectures, gallery talks, film screenings, and other public programs; publishes scholarly books; and conducts pioneering research in the conservation of modern and contemporary art. The museum is open Wednesday through Sunday, from 11a.m. until 7p.m., and closed Mondays and Tuesdays. Admission is free of charge.

*Image credit: Rendering of the West Courtyard of the Menil Drawing Institute. Johnston Marklee/Nephew.*

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