

The Menil Collection
1533 Sul Ross Street
Houston, Texas 77006
713-525-9400

Cy Twombly Gallery
1501 Brannard Street

Dan Flavin Installation at Richmond Hall
1500 Richmond Avenue

Byzantine Fresco Chapel
4011 Yupon Street

Menil Bookstore
1520 Sul Ross Street
713-535-3180

Museum and Bookstore Hours:
Wed.–Sun., 11 a.m.–7 p.m.
Free admission
Exhibition programs are funded in part by the City of Houston.

Bistro Menil
1513 West Alabama Street
713-904-3537
Hours: Wed.–Sat., 10 a.m.–10 p.m.
Sun., 10 a.m.–9 p.m.

Free parking lots at
1515 West Alabama Street and adjacent to Richmond Hall and the Byzantine Fresco Chapel

The Rothko Chapel
3900 Yupon at Sul Ross Street
713-524-9839
Hours: Daily, 10 a.m.–6 p.m.

menil.org

Outdoor Sculpture

Jim Love A. <i>Jack</i> , 1971	Mark di Suvero G. <i>Bygones</i> , 1976
Max Neuhaus B. <i>Sound Figure</i> , 2007	Barnett Newman H. <i>Broken Obelisk</i> , 1963–67
Michael Heizer C. <i>Charmstone</i> , 1991 D. <i>Isolated Mass/Circumflex (#2)</i> , 1968–78 E. <i>Dissipate</i> , 1970 F. <i>Rift</i> , 1968/1982	

Support The Menil Collection

The Menil Collection is a not-for-profit organization that gratefully relies on our many friends to foster its important activities. Your support is vital to the museum’s mission and helps us share our collection, special exhibitions, and public programs free to visitors. Please consider making a gift online at menil.org, or by check to 1515 Brannard, Houston, Texas 77006.

Become a Menil Member

Members enjoy special events and unique experiences and provide critical support for exhibitions and programs.

3 Easy Ways to Join

Onsite: Join at the museum reception desks and at the Menil Bookstore

Online: Join on our secure website at menil.org

By phone: Call the Membership Office at 713-525-9435

Menil Bookstore

Located across from the main entrance of the museum, the bookstore offers a diverse selection of art publications, children’s books and toys, and cards.

THE MENIL COLLECTION

Guide



Cover photograph: George Hixson, Houston

Max Ernst,
Le surréalisme et la peinture (Surrealism and Painting), 1942
Oil on canvas
77 x 92 inches



© 2015 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris
Photograph: Hickey-Robertson, Houston

Art: Take it off its marble pedestal and show it as a daily companion, refreshing, human and rich; witness of its time and prophet of times to come.

—John de Menil

Welcome

The Menil Collection opened to the public in June 1987 to house, exhibit, and preserve the art collection of John and Dominique de Menil. Assembled over the course of many decades by the Houston philanthropists, the collection is recognized not only for its quality and depth but also for its distinctive presentation and eclecticism. An actively collecting institution, the Menil Collection contains diverse holdings representing many world cultures and thousands of years of human creativity, from prehistoric times to the present. The museum, which is operated by the Menil Foundation, Inc., is also recognized for presenting special exhibitions and programs throughout the year.

Located in a quiet residential neighborhood within Houston’s Museum District, the Menil Collection anchors a cultural enclave of shaded streets where bungalows stand side-by-side with artist pavilions and outdoor sculpture and near an art-filled chapel—the whole shaped by the vision and generous spirit of the de Menil family.

John & Dominique de Menil

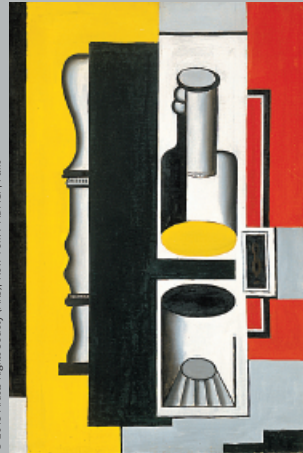
The story of the Menil Collection begins in France with the 1931 marriage of John de Menil (1904–73), a young banker from a military family, and Dominique Schlumberger (1908–97), daughter of Conrad Schlumberger, one of the founders of the oil services company Schlumberger, Ltd. The de Menils left France during World War II, making their way to Houston, where John would eventually direct Schlumberger’s worldwide operations.

The de Menils quickly became key figures in Houston’s developing cultural life as advocates of modern art and



John and Dominique de Menil, 1967

Photographs, top to bottom: Hickey-Robertson, Houston

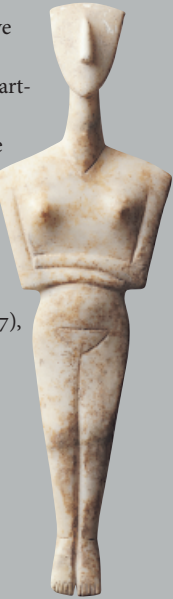


Fernand Léger, *Nature morte (Still Life)*, 1927
Oil on canvas
36 1/8 x 23 1/2 inches

architecture and supporters of civil and human rights. They commissioned the architect Philip Johnson to design their home (one of the first International Style residences in Texas), which they filled with art and where they hosted many of the leading artists, scientists, civil rights activists, and intellectuals of the day. During the 1950s and 1960s, the de Menils promoted modern art through the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (to which they gave important gifts of art), and founded the art history department at the University of St. Thomas and the Institute for the Arts at Rice

University. They commissioned a suite of paintings by the artist Mark Rothko for a chapel; dedicated in 1971, the Rothko Chapel campus also features Barnett Newman’s sculpture *Broken Obelisk* (1963–67), honoring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The de Menils also initiated several ambitious research and publishing projects, such as the catalogues raisonnés of the artists René Magritte and Max Ernst, and the multiple-volume *Image of the Black in Western Art*.

Figure, attributed to the Ashmolean master, Greece, Cycladic Islands, possibly Naxos, 2400–2300 BCE. Marble, 14 1/2 x 4 1/2 x 1 1/4 inches



The Collection

John and Dominique de Menil began collecting art intensively in the 1940s, ultimately amassing more than 17,000 paintings, sculptures, prints, drawings, photographs, functional items, and rare books. They were deeply influenced by four figures: Father Marie-Alain Couturier, a Dominican priest and an advocate for incorporating modern art into the Catholic Church; the international art dealer Alexander Iolas; and the renowned curators Jermayne MacAgy and Walter Hopps. A core strength of the growing collection was European art (including Surrealist works by Giorgio de Chirico, Max Ernst, René Magritte, Man Ray, and Yves Tanguy) and Cubist and School of Paris painters (including Fernand Léger, Henri Matisse, and Pablo Picasso). By the 1960s the de Menils had gravitated toward the major American postwar movements of Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art, and Minimalism. Over the years the family enjoyed close personal friendships with many of the artists whose work they collected, including Victor Brauner, Ernst, Jasper Johns, Yves Klein, Magritte, Robert Rauschenberg, and Andy Warhol.

As modernists, the de Menils recognized a profound formal and spiritual connection between contemporary works of art and the arts of ancient and indigenous cultures, broadening the collection to include works from classical Mediterranean civilizations and the Byzantine Empire, as well as objects from Africa, the Pacific Islands, and the Pacific Northwest.

At the time of John de Menil's death in 1973, the couple had begun to explore the idea of building a museum to house their collection. Surviving her husband by a quarter of a century, Dominique de Menil would pursue that dream.



Photograph: George Hixon, Houston

Central corridor outside the Surrealist art galleries



Photographs: left and bottom: Hester + Hardaway; right: George Hixon, Houston

African art gallery and north atrium



© 2015 Michael Heizer

North facade and entrance with Michael Heizer, *Isolated Mass/Circumflex* (#2), 1968–78 (detail, foreground)

As the idea of a museum slowly took shape, I dreamed of preserving some of the intimacy I had enjoyed with the works of art: we would rotate portions of the collection in generous and attractive space... The public would never know museum fatigue and would have the rare joy of sitting in front of a painting and contemplating it.

—Dominique de Menil

Antiquities galleries



The Museum

Working with the architectural firm Renzo Piano Building Workshop of Genoa, Italy, Dominique de Menil envisioned a building that seemed “large on the inside but small on the outside.” The interior galleries and storage areas are spacious enough to accommodate the vast collection but also intimate, including design elements inspired by the de Menils’ single-story house—discreet spaces, dark floors, large windows, and atrium gardens filled with lush, tropical plants. The understated edifice of steel, glass, and cypress siding echoes the human scale of its park-like setting. (The museum’s muted gray matches that of the surrounding bungalows, which are used as residences and offices.) Piano developed an imaginative system for modulating the bright Texas sun, using fixed ceiling louvers, skylights, and expansive windows that gently suffuse the galleries with what Dominique de Menil called “living light,” illumination that varies with the weather, time of day, and season.

A love of simplicity pervades every aspect of the Menil Collection. Within a series of serene galleries, works of art are generously spaced and installed at eye level, encouraging personal interaction with each. There are no audio tours, and wall and label text is spare—all to foster a more intimate exchange between object and visitor. The museum offers free printed gallery guides for special exhibitions, as well as a wide range of publications available in the Menil Collection Bookstore.

In keeping with the egalitarian beliefs of its founding patrons, the Menil charges no admission fee. Menil members and other generous donors help to make many programs—including lectures, films, and concerts—free to the public.



Photograph: Hickey-Robertson, Houston

North promenade



South entrance

Photographs: top and middle: George Hixon, Houston

An Enduring Legacy

In 1995, collaborating with the Dia Art Foundation, the Menil Collection opened the

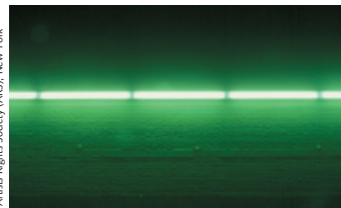
Cy Twombly Gallery, a satellite building on the Menil campus. Also designed by Renzo Piano, it houses more than thirty works by the abstract painter and sculptor Cy Twombly.

The following year Dominique de Menil commissioned artist Dan Flavin to create a site-specific installation with works

of fluorescent light for nearby Richmond Hall, built as a grocery store in 1930. These spaces are integral components of the Menil neighborhood and, along with the Rothko Chapel, all are within a short walk of the main museum building. In 1997, the Byzantine Fresco Chapel, designed by architect Francois de Menil, was opened to house two thirteenth-century frescoes rescued and restored on behalf of the Holy Archbishopric of Cyprus. After an extended loan, they were returned in 2012, and a series of site-specific projects in the building began in 2015.

John and Dominique de Menil left a remarkable legacy to Houston and to the world. Today the Menil Collection, whose holdings continue to grow, is a vital part of the city’s cultural life, an international destination—and an ideal setting for personal reflection and the quiet contemplation of art.

Dan Flavin, *Untitled*, 1996 (exterior detail, Richmond Hall)



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Photograph: Hickey-Robertson, Houston

Cy Twombly Gallery (exterior detail)