

Byzantine Things in the World

CONTEMPORARY MASTERPIECES REACTIVATE THE POWER OF LATE ANTIQUE ART

On view at the Menil May 3 – August 18, 2013

**Free Public Program: Thursday, May 2nd 6:00 p.m.
Illustrated Discussion with Curator Glenn Peers
Followed by Exhibition Preview 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.**



HOUSTON, TX, March 27, 2013 — To the Christian faithful in the Eastern Roman Empire, works of art were not inert objects, suitable only for contemplation, but earthly embodiments of a supernatural force, spiritually “alive” and capable of acting in the world. This belief in the literal efficacy of icons and relics has withered in the modern world—and yet many modern and contemporary artists have continued the tradition in their own way, evoking a sense that the materials they use are charged with inherent power.

Exploring this connection across the centuries, and bringing together a fascinating range of the museum’s renowned holdings, the Menil presents the exhibition ***Byzantine Things in the World***. Curated by Glenn Peers, Professor of Early Medieval and Byzantine Art at the University of Texas at Austin, the exhibition will be on view from May 3 through August 18, 2013.

Featuring works that date from circa 9,000 BCE to the present, but focusing especially on the Menil’s rich collection of Byzantine art (4th to 15th centuries CE), the exhibition juxtaposes more than seventy remarkable objects, reawakening a sense of how people in late antiquity experienced art and bringing Byzantium’s aura into the present day.

Josef Helfenstein, director of the Menil Collection, stated, “Even though we can appreciate the meaning of Byzantine objects by studying their history, something is lost if we do not respond to them sensually, seeing the luster of an icon’s gold as an emanation of heaven’s light, or imagining how the earth in a pilgrim token bears the stamp of the saint who had touched that ground. In this exhibition, the material force of great artworks of our own era helps to reactivate the power of



Byzantine art, and extraordinary objects from the Byzantine era illuminate a vital strain of contemporary art.”



The exhibition is designed to contrast Byzantine objects – including icons, reliquaries and pilgrim tokens – with works ranging from Neolithic stone work and African ironwork to European and American abstract painting and Minimalist sculpture. Among the modern and contemporary works represented in the exhibition are James Lee Byars’s *The Halo*, Yves Klein’s *Hiroshima*, Brice Marden’s *The Seasons*, Michelangelo Pistoletto’s *Vietnam*, and Robert Rauschenberg’s

Untitled (Gold Painting).

Guest curator Glenn Peers, a fellow at Princeton’s Institute for Advanced Studies, earned his Ph.D from John Hopkins University and has published several books on the theoretical and visual aspects of Byzantine art including Sacred Shock: Framing Visual Experience in Byzantium (2004), and Subtle Bodies: Representing Angels in Byzantium (2001).

The exhibition is accompanied by a related book with copious illustrations featuring new scholarly texts developed in part through a workshop held at the Menil Collection in 2011, involving established and emerging scholars from a variety of disciplines.

This exhibition is generously supported by David and Anne Kirkland; Louisa Stude Sarofim; Anne and Bill Stewart; Still Water Foundation; Baker Hughes Foundation; W.S. Bellows Construction Corporation and the City of Houston.

Public Program

Thursday, May 2, 2013, 6:00 p.m.

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Images: *Saint Onouphrios*, The Menil Collection, Houston. Photo: Paul Hester. Robert Rauschenberg, *Untitled (Gold Painting)*, 1956. Gold leaf, wood, fabric, and cardboard in wood and glass frame. The Menil Collection, Houston, given in memory of Dominique de Menil by Susan and Francois de Menil and their family. Photo: Hickey-Robertson, Houston. *Bird*, The Menil Collection, Houston. Photo: Rick Gardner

Contact:

Vance Muse or Gretchen Sammons

Menil Press Office

713 535 3170

press@menil.org

www.menil.org