

# The Menil Collection

NEWS RELEASE

## The Menil Collection Announces *The Space Between Looking and Loving: Francesca Fuchs and the de Menil House*

*Opening in May 2025, the exhibition is the artist's response to an unexpected familial connection to the museum and studied reflection on the de Menils's home in Houston*



HOUSTON—*February 25, 2025*—The Menil Collection is pleased to announce *The Space Between Looking and Loving: Francesca Fuchs and the de Menil House*, on view **May 23–November 2, 2025**. An unexpected connection with a second-century Roman sculpture of a male torso in the museum's permanent collection inspired Houston artist Francesca Fuchs's new paintings. The works explore the histories of objects collected by John and Dominique de Menil that were regularly displayed in their Houston home.

Presented with tokens remade from her childhood, rarely seen photographs of the de Menil house, and artworks and archival material from the museum, Fuchs's paintings move between her looking and loving, from the representation of an object's foundational truth to a personal

devotion in the power of the painted image. Reflecting on object biographies, the plasticity of memory, and the authenticity of reproductions, the exhibition evokes the significant relationships between people and the objects with which they live. A unique, creative perspective on works from the museum's permanent collection, Fuchs's first exhibition at the Menil generates new insights on the history of the de Menil house and its significant role in the design and curation of the main museum building, designed by Renzo Piano in 1987.

In 1970, the Menil's cofounder John de Menil wrote to German classical archeologist Dr. Werner Fuchs (1927–2016) seeking to identify the subject of a Roman male torso in his collection. Was it a statue of Apollo or Dionysus? Forty-nine years later, Fuchs's discovery of black-and-white photographs depicting the marble torso in her father's personal effects in Oxford, England, prompted the artist to find the original letter in the Menil archives. This exhibition is the artist's response to John de Menil's unanswered letter.

Francesca Fuchs said, "I make my work thinking about the significance of objects, making paintings of paintings, and paintings of objects I live with and love, trying to up-end hierarchies from within the intimacies of domestic space. *The Space Between Looking and Loving* is consistent with my years-long engagement with the deeply personal and my profound belief in the power of the intimate and every day. With this exhibition, I've shifted this wonder to the things that John and Dominique de Menil lived with, and to the existence of the letter John de Menil wrote to my father more than five decades ago."

After John and Dominique de Menil moved from France to the United States during World War II, they chose to make Houston their permanent residence. The modern house the couple commissioned from architect Philip Johnson in the late 1940s soon became a home for their disparate collecting interests, exhibition and educational projects, and philanthropic initiatives.



As Fuchs researched hundreds of photographs of the home taken between the 1950s and late 1990s—a period bookended by the de Menils moving into their new home and the death of Dominique de Menil—the artist studied how artworks moved through the interior spaces. Fuchs noticed that certain works, such as Max Ernst's *Shell Flowers (Fleurs coquillages)*, 1933, and a fourteenth-century French statue of the Virgin and Child, routinely appeared in the photographs. The constant presence of these and other objects in the

home suggests the deep connections the de Menils had to them, one that mirrors Fuchs's studied remaking of objects through painting.

Paul Davis, Curator of Collections, The Menil Collection, said, "It's been a joy to collaborate with Francesca on this research project and exhibition. Developed from the most serendipitous historical kernel, Francesca's sincere and inspired approach to researching the de Menil house and permanent collection has generated a refreshingly original and rich perspective on the lives of objects collected by John and Dominique de Menil. Her enduring pursuit of painting compels us to think about the layered and fungible meanings of everyday objects."

Fuchs's painted excavations of objects is a signature theme of her artistic practice. In remaking, Fuchs invokes the originality of the object and questions where authenticity is located. By juxtaposing her paintings with artworks and archival materials from the museum, the artist addresses the tensions between the objective truth of representation and a subjective faith in memory.

*The Space Between Looking and Loving: Francesca Fuchs and the de Menil House* is curated by Paul R. Davis, Curator of Collections, The Menil Collection.

### **About the Artist**

Born in London and raised in Münster, Germany, Francesca Fuchs moved to Houston in 1996 as a fellow for the Core Program at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. During her thirty-year career in Houston and internationally, Fuchs's work has been a process of honing extended reflections on the nature of everyday objects and illuminating their fundamental truths. Her portraits of objects are re-paintings of paintings, prints, photographs that resist and reconsider their accepted signals of cultural importance, particularly as they relate to the intimacies of life. Fuchs's work has been included in exhibitions organized by the Institute of Contemporary Art, London; The Whitechapel Art Gallery, London; The Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth; Contemporary Arts Museum Houston; Art Museum of Southeast Texas, Beaumont; The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; The Suburban, Oak Park, Illinois. In 2018, Art League Houston recognized Fuchs as Texas Artist of the Year.

### **About the Menil Collection**

Philanthropists and art patrons John and Dominique de Menil established the Menil Foundation in 1954 to foster greater public understanding and appreciation of art, architecture, culture, religion, and philosophy. In 1987, the Menil Collection's main building opened to the public. Today, the Menil Collection consists of a group of art buildings and green spaces located within a residential neighborhood in central Houston. The Menil remains committed to its founders' belief that art is essential to human experience and welcomes all visitors free of charge to its buildings and surrounding green spaces. [menil.org](http://menil.org)

### **Funding**

This exhibition is generously supported by Jacquelyn Barish; Hilda Curran; Franci Neely; Karlsson and Brian Salek; Bill Stewart and Johanna Brassert; Wawro-Gray Family Foundation; and the City of Houston through Houston Arts Alliance.

## **Images**

1. Francesca Fuchs, *Male Torso (Front) Sketch*, 2022. Acrylic on cotton rag, 8 × 5 in. (20.3 × 12.7 cm). Courtesy of the artist. © Francesca Fuchs. Photo: Thomas R. DuBrock
2. Francesca Fuchs, *Fleurs Coquillages*, 2024. Acrylic on canvas over wood panel, 17 5/16 × 22 in. (44 × 55.9 cm). Courtesy of the artist, Inman Gallery, Houston, and Talley Dunn Gallery, Dallas

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