

**THE MENIL COLLECTION APPOINTS ALLEGRA PESENTI  
AS CHIEF CURATOR OF THE MENIL DRAWING INSTITUTE**



**HOUSTON, TX, September 11, 2013** – Josef Helfenstein, Director of The Menil Collection, today announced the appointment of Allegra Pesenti as Chief Curator of the Menil Drawing Institute (MDI). As Chief Curator, she is charged with realizing the development of the first stand-alone facility in the United States created especially for the exhibition, study, storage, and conservation of modern and contemporary drawings. Ms. Pesenti, who has served since 2007 as Curator of the Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, will assume her duties at the Menil as of January 2014.

Established as a program of the Menil in 2008, MDI oversees the largest and fastest-growing body of work in the museum’s collection, organizes exhibitions (such as the widely acclaimed *Richard Serra Drawing: A Retrospective*), and undertakes scholarly projects such as research and publication of the catalogue raisonné of the drawings of Jasper Johns. In 2012, the Menil announced the selection of the Los Angeles-based firm of Johnston Marklee to design a free-standing home for MDI, as the first major new art building to be added to the museum’s 30-acre campus under the institution’s long-range plan.

Josef Helfenstein stated, “We believe MDI offers us the opportunity to advance the enjoyment and study of the entire field of modern and contemporary art. It does so in a way that is possible only on the Menil campus, with its discrete yet related concentrations of art collections and buildings, and only through the lens of the inherently experimental medium of drawing. In Allegra Pesenti, we have a Chief Curator with the ideal combination of scholarship, imagination, taste, and energy to bring this important project to fruition. I am delighted to welcome her to the Menil.”

Allegra Pesenti stated, “Drawings cabinets and collections are the ancestors of modern-day museums and continue to be sites of observation and discussion. But even though some have been modernized to meet current needs and conservation standards, none has been invented

anew with the kind of focus, dedication, independence, and ambition that are proposed for the Menil Drawing Institute. MDI's carefully conceived architectural setting and comprehensive mission will strike a balance between the private nature of drawing and the public and educational role of the museum, bringing this vital artistic medium into a new era. I am deeply grateful to have been chosen to help develop this potentially transformative new facility."

A native of Milan, Italy, Allegra Pesenti did her undergraduate studies at the École du Louvre and University College London and received her M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from the Courtauld Institute of Art, where she specialized in the study of Italian drawings of the 15th and 16th centuries. She began her museums career as an intern in the prints and drawings departments of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the British Museum, and the Louvre before joining the drawings department of the J. Paul Getty Museum in 1999 as an assistant curator. At the Hammer Museum, where she oversaw the Grunwald Center's collection of 45,000 prints, drawings, photographs, and artists' books dating from the Renaissance to the present, she recently curated the exhibition *Zarina: Paper Like Skin*, which traveled to the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York and the Art Institute of Chicago. Among her other exhibitions at the Hammer, all accompanied by publications, were *Alina Szapocznikow: Sculpture Undone, 1955-1972* (2012), *Rachel Whiteread Drawings* (2010), *Gouge: The Modern Woodcut, 1870 to Now* (2008), and *Extraordinary Exhibitions: Broad-sides from the Collection of Ricky Jay* (2007). She also initiated a series of artist-curated and collection-based exhibitions at the Hammer, *Houseguest*, involving the artists Jennifer Bornstein, Francesca Gabbiani, Frances Stark and William E. Jones (2008-13).

Construction of MDI is part of the Menil Collection's long-range plan to carry forward the institution's vision of a great international art museum within a parklike urban neighborhood. Realization of the plan begins with enhancing the Menil's urban landscape with a design by Michael Van Valkenburgh, adding a café where local and international visitors can meet, and elevating the artistic and scholarly program by creating the Menil Drawing Institute.

### **About The Menil Collection**

Founded by Dominique and John de Menil, The Menil Collection in Houston opened on June 4, 1987 in a modern landmark building designed by Renzo Piano. Surrounding the main museum building is the Menil's 30-acre "neighborhood of art" in the heart of the city, which includes other art buildings (the Cy Twombly Gallery and the Dan Flavin Installation at Richmond Hall), outdoor sculptures on the wooded campus, and the separate and independent Rothko Chapel.

The Menil originates special exhibitions, many of which travel nationally and abroad, and presents rotating displays from its ever-expanding holdings of approximately 20,000 objects,

widely recognized as one of the most important privately assembled art collections of the twentieth century. These holdings include masterpieces of modern and contemporary art; objects from the classical Mediterranean civilizations, Byzantine and medieval devotional works; and artworks by the indigenous peoples of Africa, the Pacific Islands, and the Pacific Northwest. The Menil also has established an international reputation for conducting groundbreaking research and producing scholarly publications, including the catalogues raisonnés of René Magritte and Max Ernst and the forthcoming catalogue raisonné of the drawings of Jasper Johns.

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