

Objects of Devotion

On view at the Menil Collection August 13 – October 31, 2010

Exhibition features works never before displayed in the museum



Shinto Deified Lord, Kamakura period, 1185–1333

Houston, August 5, 2010 – An Olmec vase, a Dogon Mother and Child, a rosary, crucifixes, a golden monstrance, a Shinto lord, a pilgrim's flask from Palestine, a pre-Columbian trumpet: Drawing on various parts of the Menil's diverse permanent collection, *Objects of Devotion* explores the role of art in religious practices in different times and places, East and West, across the millennia.

Approximately 32 objects – ranging from the small-scale and personalized (a Byzantine ampulae; a ninth-century Mayan drinking vessel) to the architectural and sculptural (shrine figures and saints) – attest to the myriad roles objects play in establishing, reinforcing, and refining spiritual beliefs.

In their past lives the works of art included in the exhibition performed varied functions, acting as representations of the divine or as conduits that provided access to it, regulating the proper comportment of religious practice and rituals, or acting as stand-ins for the petitioner. For example, a sixteenth-century Northern Renaissance portrait of a female almsgiver (a fragment of a larger altar piece) not only bears witness to her piety during her lifetime, but continues her prayer into the present day. An eighteenth-century Spanish colonial painting of Mary and Christ offers the believer an

image by which to conceptualize the divine and his intercessor in material form. A monstrance designed by Dominique de Menil when she lived in Venezuela with her husband, John, in 1941, acts as a testament to spiritual devotion.

Many of the works featured in *Objects of Devotion* have never previously been on view in the museum. As an ensemble they speak to the spiritual foundations of the collection and to the de Menils' inspiring early encounters with the Dominican priest Father Marie-Alain Couturier, who prompted the couple to begin acquiring art in the 1940s.

This exhibition is generously supported by Michael Zilkha and the City of Houston.

Public Program: October 12, 2010, 7:30 p.m. Gallery Talk. Exhibition curator Kristina Van Dyke will be joined by Linda Neagley, Associate Professor of Art History at Rice University, where she is Director of Graduate Studies, for a discussion about the intertwined relationship of art and religious practice

For further information and images,
please contact the press office, 713.535.3170, or press@menil.org
www.menil.org

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Wood

24 x 29 x 13 inches

The Menil Collection, Houston

Photo: Hickey-Robertson, Houston