

The Collection

Although John and Dominique de Menil began collecting art soon after marrying, they did not do so intensively until the 1940s, ultimately amassing more than 15,000 paintings, sculptures, decorative objects, prints, drawings, photographs, and rare books. They were deeply influenced by three figures: Father Marie-Alain Couturier, an advocate for incorporating modern art into the Catholic Church; the international art dealer Alexander Iolas; and the legendary curator Jermayne MacAgy. A core strength of the growing collection was European art (including Surrealist works by such artists as 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 they had gravitated toward the major 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, Max Ernst, Jasper Johns, Yves Klein, René Magritte, Robert Rauschenberg, and Andy Warhol.

As modernists, the de Menils recognized the profound formal and spiritual connections between contemporary works of art and the arts of ancient and tribal cultures, broadening the collection to include works from classical Mediterranean civilizations and the Byzantine Empire, as well as an array of ethnographic artifacts from Africa, Oceania, and the Pacific Northwest.

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



Photograph: George Hixon, Houston

Central corridor with René Magritte, *Le thérapeute (The Healer)*, 1967 (foreground), and John Chamberlain, *Elixir*, 1983 (background)



African art gallery and north atrium



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

Photographs, left, right, and bottom: George Hixon, Houston

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



Twentieth-century art galleries with Andy Warhol, *Little Race Riot*, 1964; Jasper Johns, *Voice*, 1964–67; and Warhol, *Double Mona Lisa*, 1963 (left to right)

The Museum

Working in close collaboration 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 were to be spacious enough to accommodate the vast collection but also discreet, including design elements inspired by the de Menils’ single-story house—intimate 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 ceiling louvers, skylights, and expansive windows that gently suffuse the galleries with what Dominique

called “living light,” illumination that varies with weather, time of day, and season.

This love of simplicity pervades every aspect of the Menil. 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 instead 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. Through their support, Menil members and other generous donors help ensure that the museum remains open free of charge.



North promenade with Michael Heizer, *Charmstone*, 1991 (right)

Photograph: Hickey-Robertson, Houston

An Enduring Legacy

In 1995, collaborating with the Dia Art Foundation, The Menil Collection opened the Cy Twombly Gallery, a satellite

building also designed by Renzo Piano that 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 three site-specific

works of fluorescent light for installation at Richmond Hall. In 1997 she opened the Byzantine Fresco Chapel Museum, designed by architect François de Menil, to house two thirteenth-century frescoes in a consecrated setting for the Church of Cyprus. With the Rothko Chapel, these spaces are integral components of the Menil neighborhood, and all are within a short walk of the main museum building.

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.



South entrance with Andy Warhol, *Flowers*, 1966

Photograph: George Hixon, Houston

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



Photograph: George Hixon, Houston

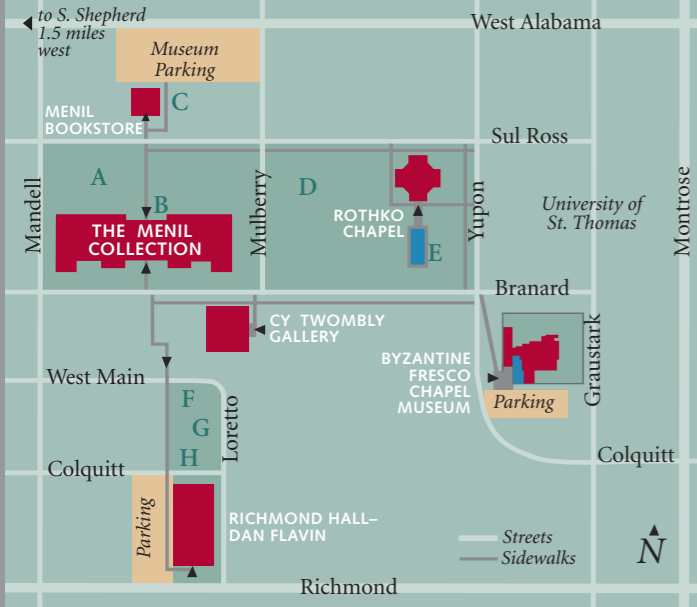


Photograph: Hickey-Robertson, Houston

Cy Twombly Gallery (exterior detail)

THE MENIL COLLECTION

Guide



The Menil Collection
1515 Sul Ross
Houston, Texas 77006
713-525-9400

Cy Twombly Gallery
1501 Branard

**Richmond Hall
Dan Flavin Installation**
1500 Richmond Ave.

Menil Collection Bookstore
1520 Sul Ross
713-535-3180

Rothko Chapel
Hours: Daily, 10 a.m.–6:00 p.m.
3900 Yupon at Sul Ross
713-524-9839

**Byzantine Fresco Chapel
Museum**
*Hours: Friday–Sunday,
11 a.m.–6:00 p.m.*
4011 Yupon at Branard
713-521-3990

Museum Hours:
*Wednesday–Sunday,
11:00 a.m.–7:00 p.m.*
Free admission
Free parking at
1515 West Alabama

www.menil.org

Outdoor Sculpture

- | | |
|---|--|
| A. Michael Heizer
<i>Isolated Mass/Circumflex
(#2)</i> , 1968–78 | D. Mark di Suvero
<i>Bygones</i> , 1976 |
| B. Michael Heizer
<i>Charmstone</i> , 1991 | E. Barnett Newman
<i>Broken Obelisk</i> , 1963–67 |
| C. Tony Smith
<i>The Snake Is Out</i> , 1962 | Tony Smith
<i>The Elevens Are Up</i> , 1963 |
| | F. <i>The Elevens Are Up</i> , 1963 |
| | G. <i>Wall</i> , 1964 |
| | H. <i>New Piece</i> , 1966 |

Become a Menil Member

Membership encourages a closer connection with The Menil Collection and provides critical support for its exhibitions and programs. Membership brochures are available at the museum reception desk. You may also join on our secure website, www.menil.org, or call the Membership Office at 713-525-9490.

The Menil Collection Bookstore

Located across from the main entrance of the museum, the bookstore offers a diverse selection of art publications, posters, cards, and artworks.
Bookstore Hours:
Wednesday–Friday, 11:00 a.m.–6:00 p.m.
Saturday and Sunday, 11:00 a.m.–6:45 p.m.

Exhibition programs are funded in part by a grant from the City of Houston through the Houston Museum District Association.

Cover photograph: George Hixon, Houston



René Magritte,
La clef de verre
(*The Glass Key*), 1959
Oil on canvas, 51 1/8 x
63 3/4 inches

© 1999 C. Herscovici, Brussels. Photograph: Hickey-Robertson, Houston

*The gifted artists are the great benefactors of the world.
Life flows from their souls, from their hearts...
They invite us to celebrate life and to meditate on the
mystery of the world. They bring us back to the essential.*
—Dominique de Menil, 1987

Welcome

The Menil Collection opened to the public in June 1987 to house, exhibit, and preserve the private 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. The Menil Collection's diverse holdings represent many world cultures and thousands of years of human creativity, from prehistoric times to the present. The museum 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, which is operated by the Menil Foundation, Inc., anchors a cultural enclave of shaded streets where bungalows stand side-by-side with art-filled chapels, artist pavilions, and outdoor sculpture—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 (1904–1973), a young banker from a military family, and Dominique Schlumberger (1908–1997), the 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

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), filling it with art and hosting many of the leading artists, scientists, and intellectuals of the day. During the 1950s and 1960s, the de Menils promoted modern art through the Contemporary Arts Museum 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 an ecumenical chapel; dedicated in 1971, the Rothko Chapel also features Barnett Newman's sculpture *Broken Obelisk*, honoring 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*.

Attributed to the Ashmolean Master, *Reclining Female Figure*, Greece, Cycladic Islands, Naxos (?); 2400–2300 B.C. White marble, 14 1/2 x 47/16 x 1 1/4 in.



Dominique and John de Menil, 1967



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

Photographs, top to bottom: Hickey-Robertson, Houston

