

THE MENIL COLLECTION

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News

On view beginning April 11, 2008

A New Installation of the Menil's African Art Galleries



HOUSTON -- As humanists and as collectors, John and Dominique de Menil believed that art is a means by which cultures and individuals can better understand themselves and the world beyond. The Menil's African holdings – nearly 1,000 objects, assembled largely between the 1950s and the 1970s and ranging from a miniature Kongo ivory finial to a large Mboi figure from northeastern Nigeria -- focus on the human form and offer insights into the full range of human experiences: a Dogon mother and child figure, for example, speaks to birth and regeneration, while a terra cotta from the Inland Niger Delta of Mali depicts a body ravaged by disease and a Kongo power figure seeks out the spiritual source of affliction in the human world.

Within the de Menils' larger vision, these objects provide evidence of how African cultures have celebrated existence, related to their surroundings and confronted questions of human meaning; they also offer spiritual insight to us today. Perhaps more than any other part of the Menil collection, these African pieces also shed light on the intertwining of art, social activism, and spirituality that were at the heart of the couple's passions, motivations, and inspirations.

Beginning April 11, visitors to the Menil will see and experience the first comprehensive reinstallation of the African art galleries since the museum opened in 1987. In these open, airy spaces and rooms (some sharing glass walls with atriums), nearly one hundred

objects from the permanent collection (many of which have never previously been exhibited) will be on view in totally reconfigured galleries. Kristina Van Dyke, the Menil's associate curator of collections, has designed the installation around an exploration of the human form, ranging from the miniature to life-size figures, abstract to naturalistic, male to female, and familiar to foreign. The new galleries also reveal how various African cultures represent their place in the physical and spiritual world and communicate with their fellow beings.

“The de Menils’ humanist and spiritual inclinations provided a foundation for their wide-ranging collection.” says Van Dyke. “Embracing what they called ‘chance encounters,’ they put African art in conversation with other parts of their collection, seeing these as a point of convergence between human beings past and present.”

The new installation, signaling the Menil's increased activity in the field of African art history through exhibitions, publications, and programs, will coincide with the publication of a full-color catalogue featuring nearly 100 African objects from the Menil's permanent collection, with more twenty contributions by scholars from American, European, and African institutions.

This project is has the generous support of The Brown Foundation, Inc., Mr. and Mrs. Peter Hoyt Brown, The Hobby Family Foundation, and the City of Houston

**For further information and images,
please contact the press office, 713.525.9469, or press@menil.org**

**The Menil Collection, located within Houston's Museum District,
is open Wednesday through Sunday, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.
Admission and parking are free.**

Photo captions:

Mask
Yaka
Democratic Republic of the Congo

Antelope Headdress (Ciwara)
Bamana
Mali

Kneeling Male Figure
Inland Niger Delta, Mali
11th-17th century