

## ***Body in Fragments***

*On view at The Menil Collection August 21, 2009 – February 28, 2010*

### Public Program:

Illustrated Lecture with Exhibition Curator Kristina Van Dyke  
Tuesday, October 20, 7 p.m.

HOUSTON, July 21, 2009 -- Drawn from the Menil's diverse collection of over 16,000 objects, ***Body in Fragments*** explores the manner in which the human form is dissected and reconfigured in the art of various times and places, conveying spiritual, physical, and intellectual notions of personhood. John and Dominique de Menil collected an extensive array of paintings, sculptures, and works on paper portraying the human figure in fragmented form, including Pre-Columbian pottery, medieval reliquaries, disjointed Cubist collages, and Surrealist photographs. Curated by Kristina Van



Dyke, associate curator for collections and research, ***Body in Fragments*** brings together painting and sculpture that reflect the de Menils' interest in the fragmentary form, such as a disembodied arm of an Egyptian statue, and objects that exaggerate or appropriate aspects of the human anatomy, like a 15th-century European reliquary in the form of a finger.

These captivating and far-ranging works reveal the imaginative possibilities of the fragmentary as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the human body. Between and in the wake of two world wars, modern art sought to challenge many of the existing beliefs and perceptions of the human mind. Mirroring new developments in psychology,

artists searched for ways to represent the consciousness and spirit of human subjects, placing far less emphasis on the mortal form. In one of the exhibition's centerpieces, a 1930 Surrealist work by Rene Magritte, *L'evidence éternelle (The Eternally Obvious)*, the traditional female nude is broken up across five individual framed canvases, each detailing a different section of the subject's body. Magritte takes on the male figure in *Le manteau de Pascal (Pascal's coat)*, showing a tattered overcoat floating above a barren mountain landscape. While the coat takes the shape of a human form, only the sky and rocky terrain are visible through the holes in the fabric.

Exploring another trajectory in 20th-century art, ***Body in Fragments*** looks to Modernism's embrace of what was then known as "primitive" art – a reflection of



American and European global expansionism and its influence on the art world. *Light Borne in Darkness*, a 1951 photographic print by Robert Rauschenberg and Susan Weil, presents silhouetted hands across a solid cyan-blue background, suggesting ancient rock paintings from the American West.

The exhibition displays numerous works from non-Western cultures around the world, exemplifying the transformative effect representations of the human body may have on their beholders. A comb from the Dan culture of Western Africa, with its well-sculpted legs, brings together the idealization of the human form with the act of beautification when the comb is used. A shoe hook from 18th-century France featuring a brass handle in the shape of a strong human leg shows a similar connection between the object and its use.

On view at the Menil Collection until February 28, ***Body in Fragments*** exhibits nearly 50 works of art that span over four millennia. Highlighting the exhibition's historical breadth and cross-cultural nature, ancient artworks and artifacts are juxtaposed with works such as Edward Kienholz's *Conversation Piece*, with protruding mannequin parts, and Michaelangelo Pistoletto's gilt-framed *Division and Multiplication of the Mirror*, in which viewers see endless reflections of their own bodies in fragments.

**Public program: Illustrated Lecture**

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Exhibition curator Kristina Van Dyke and a panel of scholars consider the fragmentation of the human figure in art from ancient Egypt to the 20th century.

Admission is free, but seating is limited.

This exhibition is generously supported by the City of Houston.

**Photo captions:** James Rosenquist, *Promenade of Merce Cunningham*, 1963, Oil on canvas, 70 x 60 inches  
The Menil Collection, Houston, Formerly in the collection of Christophe de Menil  
Photo: © 1986 D. James Dee

*Spoon (Kalukili)*, 20th century, Ivory, 7 x 1-7/8 x 3/4 inches, The Menil Collection, Houston,  
Photo: Hester + Hardaway Photographers

**For further information and images,  
please contact the press office, 713.525.9469, or [press@menil.org](mailto: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 always free.  
[www.menil.org](http://www.menil.org)**