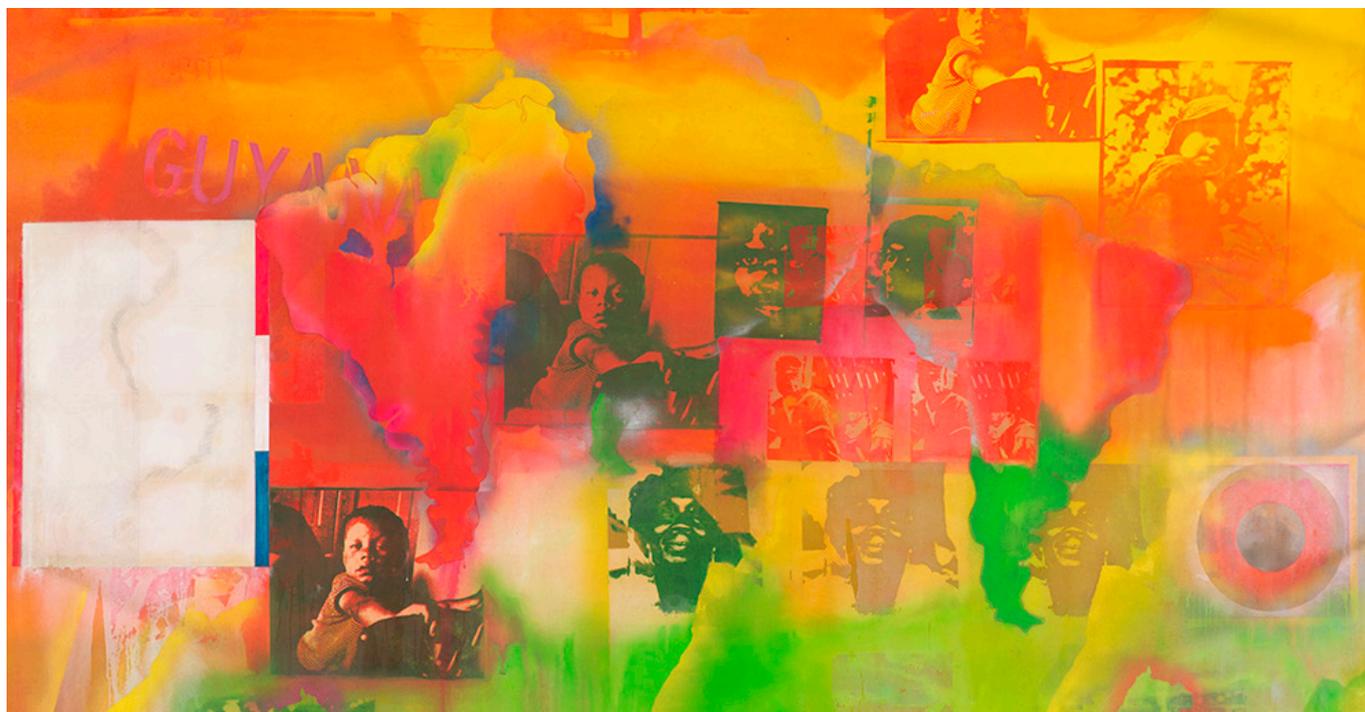


FRANK BOWLING

Tarra Gaines, 'Highly anticipated reopening of Menil Collection casts light on legendary icons', Culture Map Houston, 21 September 2018



Frank Bowling, *Middle Passage*, 1970, (detail)

Anyone who ever set out to do a spot of home improvement knows the scenario: one quick fix-it somehow transforms into months of labor and a whole new illuminated abode. Luckily for Houston, the Menil Collection leaned into that renovation sensation in February when they closed their main building for needed maintenance.

Now, seven months later, they stand ready for the triumphant reopening. On Saturday, September 22, the museum invites the city back to explore a redesigned main building interior that quite literally sheds new light onto this world renowned collection of art.

An artful transformation

When the Menil closed its main building to install a state-of-the-art fire detection system, they took it as an opportunity to refinish the Loblolly pine floors throughout and enhance the exterior and gallery lighting. But as redoing the floor required the moving of all the interior, non-load-bearing walls, Menil Director Rebecca Rabinow decided this also gave the curators and staff a chance to do a “deep dive” into the collection with an eye on how best to remarry the art and the Renzo Piano-designed space.

“This became a two year, concentrated effort of reimagining of what the Menil galleries could be,” explained Rabinow at a recent preview of the reorganized space.

A reimagined presentation they certainly have achieved. Even those art-lover who thought they had mapped every airy corner and cranny of the building decades ago, will likely find themselves wonderfully lost within the galleries that have shifted and expanded. For the next year, the building will be dedicated to showing works from the permanent collection and promised gifts, giving visitors a new perspective on the masterpieces within.

With so much to see, here are just some of the changes and highlights to explore within this iconic landmark of Houston’s art landscape.

Expanded space for the legends

Building new walls and moving others has allowed the Menil to expand galleries and create new ones for an intimate focus on a single artist. Look for whole rooms and spaces devoted to some of the greats of the collection, including Pablo Picasso, Max Ernst, Victor Brauner, Mark Rothko, and René Magritte. A favorite of many visitors, the surrealism galleries have been enlarged 800 square feet.

The curators will also be rotating works in and out of display, giving art-lovers the chance to see different pieces with each visit. For example, the Menil has 55 major Magritte paintings in its collection, so we’ll never know which mystery of the ordinary awaits us with the next visit.

H A L E S

New discoveries

The Menil continues to add works to the collection every year and it now contains nearly 17,000 objects. Some of that artwork has never been exhibited in Houston. This redesign of the galleries brings several pieces into the building for the first time. In these first months, look for never-displayed works throughout the galleries, including Frank Bowling's fraught and beautiful *Middle Passage*, the first painting we'll encounter walking through the main entrance. Other highlights will be Yves Klein's seemingly gravity and temporal defying *Blue Rain* and two large-scale canvas pieces by Joe Overstreet, all situated in the contemporary galleries.

Hidden treasures

The moving of whole walls brings surprises throughout the building. The curators have created galleries within galleries, so a walk through feels perhaps feels a bit like a journey into a labyrinth. Case in point: Wandering the Medieval to Early Modern Europe (5th to 18th centuries) galleries eventually leads to an inner art sanctum intentionally reminiscent of a Medieval chapel, an atmospheric setting perfect for housing some of the Menil's spectacular Byzantine icons, Greek, Balkan, and Russian. And in the contemporary galleries we'll discover a window, covered for 30 years, now gifting new light onto Cy Twombly's massive painting, *Treatise on the Veil*.

Living legacies

The reorganization of the works and galleries also continue to help tell the story of John and Dominique de Menil's relationships with some of the great artists of the 20th century and their collecting philosophy, but the arrangement will also highlight the de Menil's concern for human rights and social justice issues. Pieces collected for *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, a project the couple began in the '60s as a response to segregation have been installed throughout the galleries, but the project has also inspired a presentation of African and early modern European art that explores cultural exchange from the 15th to the 19th centuries.

All together, this reimagining of the galleries serve to illustrate the de Menil's inspirational presence throughout the whole of the museum.