

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