

*NeoHooDoo:  
Art for a Forgotten Faith*

**An exploration of ritual and spirituality in contemporary American art**

Exhibition on view at The Menil Collection June 27 to September 21, 2008

**Exhibition Preview: Thursday, June 26, 2008, 6.30 – 8.30 pm**

HOUSTON, June 23, 2008 – Co-organized by The Menil Collection and P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center, *NeoHooDoo: Art for a Forgotten Faith* brings together a multigenerational group of North, South, and Central American artists who address the value of ritual in the artistic process and the broader implications of spirituality in contemporary art.

On view from June 27 to September 21, this exhibition of some 50 works (sculpture, photography, assemblage, video, performance, and other media) asserts that the drive towards spiritual practice is as relevant today in our ever-expanding global society as it has ever been. Artists have long engaged with ritualism to enrich their work, drawing on the traditions of shamans, griots and oral historians. *NeoHooDoo: Art for a Forgotten Faith*, states

exhibition curator Franklin Sirmans, Menil curator of modern and contemporary art, “grew out of a desire to explore the multiple meanings of spirituality in contemporary art.”

Said Menil Director Josef Helfenstein: “The works in this extraordinary and important exhibition, rooted in a great diversity of rituals – and reflecting the role of ritual today – find special resonance here at the Menil, where the experience of art is itself a spiritual one.”

In the late 1960s poet Ishmael Reed adopted the 19<sup>th</sup>-century term “HooDoo” — referring to religious and cultural practices originating in pre-colonial West Africa — to discuss uses of ritualism in more contemporary works of literature and art. “Neo-HooDoo,” he states in his 1972 collection of poetry, *Conjure*, “believes that every man is an artist and every artist a priest.” Reed looked to artistic expression as a pathway to explore cultural and political ideas beyond the confines of dominant belief systems and social norms. In his novel *Mumbo Jumbo*, for example, Reed incorporates innumerable, often conflicting cultural references into an



Byars, James Lee- *The Halo*