

The Menil Collection

NEWS RELEASE

The Menil Collection Announces *How to Make an Exhibition: The Story of Jermayne MacAgy*



HOUSTON—May 13, 2026—The Menil Collection announces *How to Make an Exhibition: The Story of Jermayne MacAgy*, on view **December 11, 2026–July 18, 2027**. The exhibition, presented in celebration of the Menil's 40th anniversary in 2027, honors the impact and legacy of the late San Francisco- and Houston-based curator, art historian, and museum director Jermayne MacAgy (1914–1964), who was renowned for her dynamic and groundbreaking installations and innovative approach to curating.

MacAgy was among a vanguard of professionals in the 20th century who transformed the art museum into a site of conversation and learning. Working closely with Menil Collection founders John and Dominique de Menil from the mid-1950s until her death a decade later, she deeply impacted the future museum and the formation of the Rothko Chapel. She encouraged the couple to build a teaching collection and publicly exhibit their art using display techniques that encouraged curiosity and engagement. Dominique de Menil once recalled that MacAgy's

installations created an “atmospheric miracle, which set the work of art in such a light that it would shine and talk to anyone who would care to listen.”

Rebecca Rabinow, Director, The Menil Collection, said, “The curator Walter Hopps, the first director of the Menil Collection, often cited the impact of Jermayne MacAgy. He saw some of her exhibitions in San Francisco while he was a student in the late 1940s and recalled that her imaginative displays ‘knocked my socks off.’ MacAgy’s close partnership with John and Dominique inspired many aspects of what would become the Menil Collection and continues to influence the museum’s exhibition-making practices and methods of display. As the museum kicks off its 40th anniversary year, the Menil spotlights MacAgy’s vision and energy and tells her story—a compelling chapter of the museum’s history.”

Organized chronologically, *How to Make an Exhibition* will lead audiences through groups of work inspired by, or included in, some of MacAgy’s most influential exhibitions from the 1940s-1960s, from her time in San Francisco at the California Palace of the Legion of Honor, to her work in Houston at the University of St. Thomas and the Contemporary Arts Association (now Contemporary Arts Museum Houston). Displays will include nods to *Illusionism and Trompe l’Oeil: A History of Painting That Fools the Eye* (1947); *Mobiles and Articulated Sculpture* (1948); *Islands Beyond: An Exhibition of Ecclesiastical Sculpture and Modern Paintings* (1958); *Totems Not Taboo: An Exhibition of Primitive Art*; (1959); and *Art Has Many Facets* (1963). The show will also include portraits of MacAgy that the de Menils commissioned from Andy Warhol, a selection of archival materials and photographs, and works of art that MacAgy bequeathed to the museum.



Michelle White, Senior Curator, The Menil Collection, said, “This exhibition illuminates MacAgy’s curatorial practice as essential to modern American art history during a time of enormous transition. Along with an analysis of her vital contributions to the field, from the West Coast to the Gulf Coast, it examines her intellectual origins within modernism, her position at the forefront of avant-garde circles of the time, and the impactful methods she applied in making exhibitions for the public, lessons that lead us to now.”



In December, the Menil will release a complementary publication, *Jermayne MacAgy: Lessons from a Curator*, offering a comprehensive, archive-based survey of MacAgy’s exhibitions, alongside an in-depth look at her life and career. Edited by Michelle White, the book includes contributions from Paul R. Davis, Donna De Salvo, Claudia Schmuckli, and Jacqueline Siegel, and is co-published by the Menil Collection and Yale University Press.

How to Make an Exhibition: The Story of Jermayne MacAgy is curated by Michelle White, Senior Curator, The Menil Collection.

About Jermayne MacAgy

Jermayne MacAgy, born in Cleveland, Ohio. She studied art history, received her PhD from Western Reserve University, and attended the influential Museum Course at Harvard University. MacAgy was the acting director of the California Palace of the Legion of Honor, San Francisco, during World War II, and later served as director of the Contemporary Arts Association, Houston, from 1955-59. Over the course of her career, she curated and/or designed more than 200 exhibitions. Working with John and Dominique de Menil, she founded the Art History Department at the University of St. Thomas, Houston.

About The Menil Collection

Philanthropists and art patrons John and Dominique de Menil established the Menil Foundation in 1954 to foster greater public understanding and appreciation of art, architecture, culture, religion, and philosophy. In 1987, the Menil Collection's main building opened to the public. Today, the Menil Collection consists of a group of art buildings and green spaces located within a residential neighborhood in central Houston. The Menil remains committed to its founders' belief that art is essential to human experience and welcomes all visitors free of charge. menil.org

Funding

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Images

1. Installation view of Andy Warhol's *Jermayne MacAgy*, 1968, at the Menil Collection, Houston. Acrylic and silkscreen ink on linen. 40 × 40 in. (101.6 × 101.6 cm). © Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.
2. Installation view of *Totems Not Taboo: An Exhibition of Primitive Art*, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 1959. Courtesy of Menil Archives, The Menil Collection, Houston.
3. Dominique de Menil with Jermayne MacAgy, ca. 1957. Courtesy of Menil Archives, The Menil Collection, Houston. Photo: Maurice Miller

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