



Student Name:

Class Period:

Date:

Meet the Originals

Texas Originals is a radio series about people who made an impact on Texas. You can hear it online and on radio stations around the state. Read or listen to the episode on Dominique and John de Menil. Then, answer questions about it.

Dominique and John de Menil 1908–1997 (D); 1904–1973 (J)

Houston is the home of world-class art. That's due in part to the generosity of Dominique and John de Menil, a French couple who left their Nazi-occupied homeland in 1941, ultimately settling in Houston.

As John rose to prominence in the oil industry, he and Dominique developed a passion for collecting art. Inspired by their friendship with Father Marie-Alain Couturier, a Dominican priest who championed a new religious art, the de Menils became fascinated with modern art that served a transcendent purpose.

Recognizing spiritual and artistic links between contemporary art and the traditions that preceded it, the couple's enthusiasm soon extended to the arts of Indigenous peoples, and later to antiquities and medieval and Byzantine art.

Houston institutions benefited immensely from their patronage, including the de Menils' Rothko Chapel, a non-denominational chapel with works by mid-century abstract painter Mark Rothko.

But the couple's greatest contribution to Houston is their own museum, the Menil Collection, which opened in 1987, fourteen years after John's passing. Dominique guided the museum—watching her lovingly curated collection become a world-renowned institution—until her death in 1997.

Housed in buildings designed by famed architect Renzo Piano, the museum is celebrated for its modern and contemporary masterpieces and holds one of the world's foremost collections of Surrealist art. Just as important, the museum remains true to the de Menils' vision of art as a spiritual pursuit.

Check for Understanding: Answer the questions below based on evidence from the episode on Dominique and John de Menil. Refer to the text included above if needed.

1. What types of art did Dominique and John de Menil collect?
2. How did the de Menils guarantee that others might also enjoy their love of art?

Going Further: Write or discuss your answer to the question below, supporting your answer with evidence from the episode or additional information you have learned in class.

3. **Creating Connections.** The de Menils left France in 1941. Why might they have felt unsafe in their homeland?