

The exhibition is generously supported by Nina and Michael Zilkha, William J. Hill, Ann and Mathew Wolf, the Estate of Frederick W. Hughes, and the City of Houston

NOTES

1. Robert Rosenblum, "Andy Warhol: Court Painter to the 70s" in *Andy Warhol: Portraits of the 70s*. ed. David Whitney, p. 9.
2. Quoted in Bob Colacello, *Holy Terror: Andy Warhol Close Up*, p. 95.

cover:
Andy Warhol (1928–1987)

Portrait of Jermayne MacAgy, 1968. Acrylic and silkscreen ink on linen, 40 x 40 inches. The Menil Collection

Portrait of Dominique, 1969. Acrylic and silkscreen ink on linen, 40 x 40 inches. The Menil Collection

Caroline, 1976. Acrylic on canvas, 40 x 40 inches. The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Gift of Caroline Wiess Law 2000.948

All works © Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts/ARS, New York

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THE MENIL COLLECTION

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**ANDY
WARHOL:
Three
Houston
Women**



Jermayne MacAgy



Dominique de Menil



Caroline Wiess Law

The Menil Collection March 16–July 8, 2007

Andy Warhol created a signature portrait style—boldly colored silkscreen repetitions of enlarged photographs—which is recognizable to nearly everyone. He is credited with restoring the very genre within twentieth-century art. As historian Robert Rosenblum commented, “Andy Warhol, in fact, succeeded virtually single-handed in the early 1960s in resurrecting from near extinction that endangered species of grand-style portraiture of people important, glamorous, or notorious.”¹ What is not well known, however, is how the story of Warhol’s portraiture is intimately linked to Houston and The Menil Collection.

“Andy Warhol: Three Houston Women” commemorates Jermayne MacAgy (1914–1964), Dominique de Menil (1908–1997), and Caroline Wiess Law (1918–2004), three individuals who pioneered modern art in Houston. The portraits are also intimately linked to a fourth figure, Warhol’s business manager and former Houstonian Fred Hughes (1943–2001).

Hughes had been an outstanding student of Dominique de Menil’s at the University of St. Thomas in Houston. He met Warhol at a party hosted by the de Menils and Philip Johnson in 1967 and soon after went to work at the Factory, the artist’s studio and salon. He encouraged the de Menils to acquire early works and called upon their friends and acquaintances to begin securing portraits. Although Warhol had made a few such commissioned works in the early 1960s, it was not until his relationship with Hughes that portraiture became a critical element of his production and his chief source of income. Warhol biographer Bob Colacello noted, “In a few years, Fred engineered the rise of Andy Warhol from the demimonde to the beau monde, and set him on the road to real riches. He launched the commissioned-portraits goldmine.”²

In 1969 he suggested to Dominique that she honor her late friend and mentor, **Jermayne MacAgy**, by commissioning Warhol to paint her portrait. MacAgy had come to Houston from California in 1955 to direct the museum of the Contemporary Arts Association (now the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston) at the de Menils’ suggestion. A few years later she became head of the newly established art department of the University of St. Thomas, lecturing and organizing exhibitions. Her dramatic installations and broad scope of interests strongly

influenced the building and display of the de Menils’ collection. She continued there until her sudden death from diabetes at the age of fifty. For her portrait, Dominique de Menil provided Warhol with her favorite picture of MacAgy, taken by photographer Eve Arnold in 1958. The earliest of the portraits displayed here, it is also the most unusual stylistically. Warhol isolated MacAgy’s face and hand, emphasizing the tonal contrasts between light and shadow in some versions, reversing it in one, and nearly eliding it in others.

Only a few months after the MacAgy portrait, Hughes arranged the commission of **Dominique de Menil**’s own portrait. Out of several photographs sent by the de Menils, Warhol selected one taken by their daughter Adelaide de Menil Carpenter. The Menil Collection owns three large versions of the portrait, while four more remained with the artist and are now the property of the Warhol Foundation, and another was destroyed in a fire. The same photograph was the basis of a series of small portraits (not on view) measuring eight inches square. The de Menils kept one of these smaller versions (now in The Menil Collection), giving the others to friends and relatives. Before the establishment of The Menil Collection, John and Dominique de Menil were active at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, and were generous patrons of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

Another important woman in the history of Houston’s art world, **Caroline Wiess Law**, was the daughter of Olga Keith and Harry Wiess, who were among the original founders of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH). Like MacAgy and the de Menils, Law was passionate about modern art, assembling a collection that included major works by artists such as Willem de Kooning, Arshile Gorky, Franz Kline, Roy Lichtenstein, Joan Miró, Pablo Picasso, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, and Andy Warhol. She was equally ardent in her support of art in Houston, becoming a lifetime trustee of the MFAH (where her collection is now housed), and founding benefactor of The Menil Collection. *Caroline*, 1976, is the most typical of Warhol’s commissioned portraits. Transferred from a Polaroid photograph taken by the artist, the silk-screened image was printed on canvas and then embellished by hand with passages of brightly colored acrylic paint.