

downtown

FALL 2009

CONNECTING YOU TO THE CENTER OF HOUSTON

* **196** Ideas to fire up your social calendar ▶ DATEBOOK pg. 31

A FALL FEAST OF THEATER MUSEUMS VISUAL ART READINGS FILM DANCE

art & culture collision

PROFILE

The Rockets' **Daryl Morey** makes the numbers work

inside:
DOWNTOWN
GETS
SCHOOLED

PLUS: WEEKEND ODYSSEY | DOWNTOWN AFTER DARK | GREAT EVENT SPACES

MUSEUM



ABOVE | Peter Paul Rubens' *Self-Portrait in a Circle of Friends at Mantua* at MFAH.

HOUSTON MUSEUM DISTRICT SHINES THROUGH PERMANENT AND CHANGING EXHIBITS.

BY SANDRA COOK

With 17 museums plus the zoo, this scenic, culture-rich district offers unlimited exploration of art, science, nature and history.

MUSEUM DISTRICT DAY

Museum District Day is a fun-filled day of discovery for anyone who wants to know more about the myriad museums clustered amongst the oaks along South Main and Bissonnet and the surrounding blocks. And it's free! That's right; Museum District Day on September 12 offers free admission to 17 museums from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Explore the vast **Museum of Fine Arts, Houston** for a broad spectrum of art through the ages or the tranquil **Menil Collection** for an interesting mix of ancient, recent and contemporary art. Embrace various forms of contemporary art at **Contemporary Arts Museum Houston**, **Houston Center for**

Contemporary Craft, **Houston Center for Photography**, **Lawndale Art Center** and **Rice University Art Gallery**. Two small-scale, but quietly cosmic stops include the subdued **Rothko Chapel**, a spiritual sanctuary for all that features a stunning series of paintings by Mark Rothko, and the ethereal **Byzantine Fresco Chapel Museum**, which houses remarkable 13th-century frescoes.

For kids and adults alike, fascinating experiences await at the newly super-sized **Children's Museum of Houston**. Families also enjoy **The Health Museum**, **The Weather Museum** and **The Houston Museum of Natural Science**.

Those in an intellectual mood can ponder



Havel Ruck Projects' *Give & Take* is part of CAMH's *No Zoning* exhibition.

the highs and lows, successes, failures and possibilities of humankind at places like the **Holocaust Museum Houston** and **Jung Center of Houston**, or reflect upon the military and cultural histories featured at the **Buffalo Soldiers National Museum** and the **Czech Center Museum Houston**.

Walk your own path of cultural discovery or ride the free shuttle buses available throughout the district as you delve into the diverse displays of art, science, nature and history. www.houstonmuseumdistrict.org

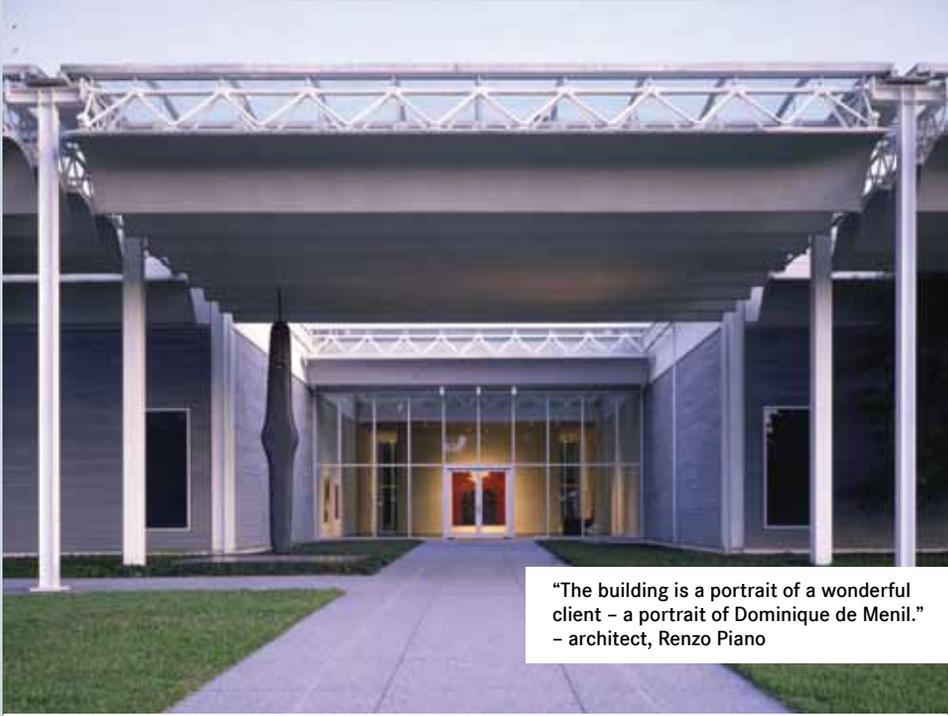
UP CLOSE: HOLOCAUST MUSEUM

Why visit **Holocaust Museum Houston**? Sure it's heavy stuff, but the resonating message is surprisingly uplifting and enlightening.

This unique museum is not home to splashy playscapes and whimsical art displays, but it does feature much more than the tragedies of the Nazi concentration camps. Its many exhibits depict the worldwide consequences of hate, prejudice and apathy. The museum also spotlights brave groups and individuals who chose to stand up for human rights.

Special exhibits this fall include *Besa: Muslims Who Saved Jews During the Holocaust*, which depicts the heroic stories of Albanian Muslims who showed a heart-melting kindness and righteous determination to save Jews – those of Albanian origin and refugees alike – from death despite great danger to themselves and Xavier University's exhibit *A Blessing to One Another: Pope John Paul II and the Jewish People*, which details the Pope's work to mend relations and attitudes between Catholics and Jews.

Holocaust Museum Houston's permanent exhibit, *Bearing Witness: A Community Remembers*, features historic film footage, artifacts, photographs and documents that depict life in pre-war Europe, the Nazi move toward the Final Solution, and life after the Holocaust. The films *Voices* and *Voices II* give visitors personal accounts from Houston-area survivors. The museum's permanent exhibit also includes an



“The building is a portrait of a wonderful client – a portrait of Dominique de Menil.”
– architect, Renzo Piano

authentic World War II rail car of the type used to carry millions of people to their deaths and a 1942 Danish fishing boat of the type used to save more than 7,000 Danish Jews from execution.

“Visitors to Holocaust Museum Houston end their visit with a better understanding of not just the history of 65 years ago, but with a renewed sense of how that history still impacts our world today,” says Susan Myers, executive director of the museum. “By understanding the evils that led to the Holocaust, students and adults alike can learn about and better understand their responsibilities – and their options – for combating similar injustices that continue around the globe even today.”

True, the realities of the Holocaust are harsh and horrifying, but from behind this tremendous dark cloud shines the light of hope. Holocaust Museum Houston also tells the stories of the courageous acts of whole countries and individuals who chose human kindness in the face of fear and widespread hatred.

“The Holocaust proved that there are

only four roles each individual can play in society,” says Myers. “If we are not to be victims ourselves, then we must be either perpetrators of hatred, bystanders who allow it to go unchecked or upstanding citizens who confront it head-on. Our museum challenges people to make the right choice.”

ART & ABOUT

Located a few blocks off the iconic oak-lined thoroughfares of Main and Montrose, **The Menil Collection** reigns serene. The main museum building is surrounded by bungalow-style houses, park spaces, smaller museum buildings, related art spaces and the University of St. Thomas. The campus-like setting has been called a neighborhood of art and its sweeping green spaces – dotted with some 11 sculptures – provide an almost endless welcome mat to art-seeking Houstonians and visitors. The museum and gallery structures are all designed by award-winning architects, such as Renzo Piano and Philip Johnson.

Ever-present, yet hidden-to-some, the

Carlos Cruz-Diez, a pioneer of Kinetic art, has created an amazing street installation for the MFAH’s crosswalks along Bissonnet/ Binz Street.

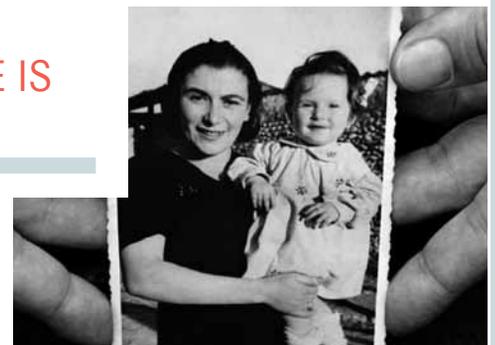


Museum of Fine Arts, Houston’s Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden stretches itself across slightly more than one acre, at Bissonnet and Montrose, directly across from the museum’s front entrance. Car-centric Houstonians often whiz past this soothing space en route to their destination, even when that destination is a Museum District parking space.

The sculpture garden offers enchanting (and changing) views as light and shadow shift morning, noon and evening. Working with Houston landscape architect Johnny Steele, Isamu Noguchi laid out “a geometry of playfulness” when he designed the garden. Opened in 1986, the space is a collage of

WHY VISIT HOLOCAUST MUSEUM HOUSTON? SURE IT’S HEAVY STUFF, BUT THE RESONATING MESSAGE IS SURPRISINGLY UPLIFTING AND ENLIGHTENING.

RIGHT | The Holocaust Museum’s special exhibit, *Besa: Muslims Who Saved Jews During the Holocaust*, runs through February 2010.



RIGHT | Émile-Antoine Bourdelle's bronze *Adam* located in MFAH's The Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden.



trees, walls, lawns, and pavers that come together to form a brilliant frame for outdoor sculpture.

Noguchi's artful creation serves as an outdoor gallery for more than 25 works from the MFAH's collection, plus a few selected pieces on loan from other sources. Masterpieces always on view include sculptures by Henri Matisse, Alexander Calder, David Smith, Frank Stella, and Louise Bourgeois.

These days you can pick up a \$5 sack lunch from the museum's Café Express for your own art-full picnic. This inspiring mental breathing space allows you to unburden your mind and your wallet, as it is always free and open daily from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. Want to know more? Pick up the MFAH's book, *Isamu Noguchi: A Sculpture for Sculpture*.

New in 2009 are creative crosswalks by

internationally renowned Venezuelan artist Carlos Cruz-Diez. The artist's design enlivens the street-surface crosswalks that connect the central campus buildings of the MFAH with an optical grid of colorful zebra-like stripes.

More scientific and interactive, the outdoor spaces surrounding **The Houston Museum of Natural Science** offer lessons in geography and solar studies. In front of the main entrance, the impressive Virginia and Ernest Cockrell Sundial is a fascinating tool for studying the solar equinoxes and solstices. The vast sundial, one of the largest in the world, sits atop a flowing fountain, which is bordered by pink granite cut to mimic the Texas coastline.

And if you're still looking for enchanting outdoor spaces to explore, please cross the street and lose yourself in **Hermann Park**.

BIGGER & BETTER: CHILDREN'S MUSEUM OF HOUSTON

Opened in March of 2009, **The Children's Museum of Houston's** new building doubled the museum's size. Now at 90,000 square feet, CMH offers seven new permanent exhibits – all bilingual – and a total of 14 exhibits.

"The Children's Museum of Houston is not just a place for little children, and we're not even a typical museum," says Tammie Kahn, the museum's executive director. "We're finding that our new expansion and our all-new exhibits are wowing kids of all ages, including their parents, and that's no surprise to us. The number one reaction when families walk in is 'Wow!' when they see the three-story climbing tower in *PowerPlay*, and 'Awesome!' when they walk into the giant *Invention Convention* lab with all of its moving parts."

Here's the lowdown on what's new: *Cyberchase – The Chase Is On!* takes children on a virtual math adventure
FlowWorks explores fluid dynamics
Invention Convention encourages inventing and creative problem solving
Kidropolis, USA promotes financial literacy and civic engagement
Matter Factory investigates the properties of matter and nanotechnology
PowerPlay introduces kids to fitness as they climb, dance, jump, stretch and balance
*Tot*Spot* is an interactive exhibit designed for children three years and younger.

Each new exhibit is created to help kids



Physical activity and exercise become fun at the *PowerPlay* exhibit at the Children's Museum of Houston.

RIGHT | See Miles, a baby Masai giraffe, and his family daily at the Houston Zoo.

FAR RIGHT | The Rothko Chapel is a modern meditative environment inspired by the mural canvasses of American abstract expressionist Mark Rothko.

BELOW | The Houston Museum of Natural Science's Hall of Paleontology contains more than 450 fossils and fossil replicas.



develop lifelong learning skills. The expansion grew out of a necessity to accommodate the more than 750,000 families who visit the museum each year. Before the expansion, the museum operated at 160 percent capacity.

“By bringing families together with innovative thinkers in science, math, arts, commerce and engineering we really have achieved our goal of giving Houston a ‘Playground for Your Mind’, says Kahn. “We’re not about stationary exhibits, but rather changing opportunities to test and try on a daily basis in a one-of-a-kind environment that is unlike anything seen before. Including the grand opening week in March, when people from 44 states and eight countries visited, attendance is up 74 percent over this time last year.”

Today Children’s Museum Houston is rated a 5-star nationwide children’s museum by *Citysearch.com*, was voted “Ultimate Kid-Friendly Attraction” in a *Houston Chronicle* reader’s poll and tied for the nation’s best children’s museums No. 1 spot in *Child* magazine. The Children’s Museum is located at 1500 Binz in Houston’s Museum District. Find details at www.cmhouston.org.

ALL AGES APPEAL

Including the **Houston Zoo**, the Museum District offers 18 different places for Houstonians of all ages to admire an endless variety of art, history, science and nature. Here are just a few of the experiences to be had.

EMPOWER YOUTH WITH A WEALTH OF HEALTH KNOWLEDGE

Young kids and teens dive into discovering how their own bodies work at **The Health Museum**. The larger-than-life *Amazing Body Pavilion* offers a 7,000-square-foot, walk-through tour of the human body. Kids can explore the workings of the mouth, study the 22-foot-long backbone (suspended overhead), and explore everything under the skin” *You: The Exhibit* uses multi-media and special effects technology to reveal how you’d look 30 years from now and curiosities such as how you would look as the opposite sex or with a different ethnic background.

AWE EVEN THE HIPPEST HIPSTERS

Funky, cool and often ingenious, exhibits at **Lawndale Art Center** are never stodgy. This non-profit alternative space fosters contemporary works in all media and frequently focuses on Houston-area artists. With four galleries in its locally significant Art Deco building, Lawndale includes

close to 500 artists annually in changing exhibitions. Lawndale’s annual events such as Día de los Muertos/Day of the Dead, the 20th Century Modern Market and The Big Show are full-tilt celebrations of art and culture.

ENLIGHTEN CEREBRAL TYPES

The Rothko Chapel is an intimate sanctuary available to people of every belief, where visitors are inspired by the mural canvasses of American abstract expressionist Mark Rothko. The chapel is alive with religious ceremonies of all faiths and diverse programs to engage audiences intellectually, artistically and spiritually. It is a place where the experience and understanding of all traditions and cultures are encouraged and made available. Support for human rights issues is central to the Rothko Chapel’s concern with peace, freedom and social justice throughout the world. In front of the chapel, Barnett Newman’s *Broken Obelisk* is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. [📍](#)

// Point of View

“As a newcomer I’ve been very impressed in the way the Museum District makes it very easy to locate your activities in one area and how many venues are free or low cost. There’s nothing else like this in the country. It’s a great resource for the city, especially being linked to downtown by the rail line. Houston’s Museum District is a great place to live and be entertained. After living in Cambridge, so close to Boston and MIT, I find Houston to be equally stimulating and intellectually engaging.” - Bill Arning, now director, Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, formerly curator of the MIT List Visual Arts Center