

Tip: Favorite Features of the Menil Drawing Institute Conservation Lab

The Menil Drawing Institute opened in November of 2018 as the latest addition to the 35 acre Menil Collection campus in Houston, Texas. The Drawing Institute is dedicated to the research, exhibition, conservation, and storage of unique works on paper – with a strong focus on modern and contemporary art.

Conservator of works of art on paper, Jan Burandt was involved in architectural planning from the inception of the building project. Some of the favorite features of the space are built into the architecture by Los Angeles-based architects Sharon Johnston and Mark Lee of Johnston Marklee. The Suzanne Deal Booth Conservation Lab is situated in the *North East* corner of the building between the loading dock and study room (fig. 1). At the entrance of the lab, is the library and reading room (fig. 2). This skylit library is also a nice space to have meetings.

Once inside the lab the first thing people usually notice are the large North and East facing windows. The window blinds are automated and composed of separate diffusing and blackout blinds that are able to be raised and lowered to any height, giving complete control of the lighting. Track lights are set at the same 50 lux as the gallery space, so artworks on the display ledges have the same lighting conditions as the exhibition space. The ceiling features an acoustical treatment to keep noise down and the fume extraction system retracts into the ceiling resulting in a clean look.

Although it's an open plan, desk spaces for support staff are within alcoves, for a certain amount of privacy (fig. 3). In the previous paper lab, the intern's desk was in a windowless room with harsh fluorescent lighting. Jan wanted to create a more inviting space for pre-program volunteers, so she created a nook close to her own office space facing the East windows with the added benefit of a view of two Michael Heizer sculptures.

Storage space within the lab was designed to be clean and discreet and make good use of every space such as a cabinet to house rolled supplies that has a drop

down front for use as a cutting board (fig. 4) and cabinets built into otherwise 'dead spaces'.

There are many other tools and items of interest around the lab besides the built environment. The lab has a custom-built light box on a height-adjustable table with special spec white glass that doesn't impart the usual green color cast. Its rheostat is a very nice feature. The light table and work table tops were custom built and the bases are Ergonomic Series 400 Workstations from Phoenix. All of the work tables can be raised or lowered with a hand-crank, which makes working while either standing or sitting comfortable. There are custom transport carts designed with shelves for moving boxes of art or framed works and extendable flaps for moving long narrow works along with lockable wheels and convenient hand holds (fig. 5). The Wave LED 5D Magnifier/Loupe from Luxo has been helpful in looking at works of art closely with curators (fig. 6). Its special design feature is that it has lights on either side that are independently controlled - by using only one it displays a nice raking light. The rolling stand is extremely stable with its 5 legs.

In condition reporting, staff at the Drawing Institute use iPads and PDF Expert to create detailed illustrated reports. One set up that has been helpful is the medical cart – a Rescue General Purpose Medical Cart by Vitality Medical – and iPad stand that staff can roll out of the lab to use during installations in the Gallery or condition reporting in storage (fig. 7). The medical cart is very sturdy, with lockable wheels and drawers, and features soft closing drawers. The height including the stand is ergonomically correct, and relieves the stress of hand holding an iPad with a tilted neck for hours on end when conditioning drawings (fig. 8).

Another tool that is both functional and fun are the weights by Texas sculptor Jim Love that double as bookends (fig. 9). The weights were a commissioned project, and the de Menil's had a long relationship with Jim Love who even worked with the couple as

an art handler and mount maker in the early days of the Menil Collection.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to Jan Burandt for her generous insights and guidance throughout the preparation of this presentation. Thanks to both Jan and the Menil Collection for their continued support of pre-program

interns, fellows, other emerging conservation professionals.

ASHLEY STANFORD

Pre-program Intern

The Menil Collection, Menil Drawing Institute

Houston, Texas

ashleylouisestanford@hotmail.com

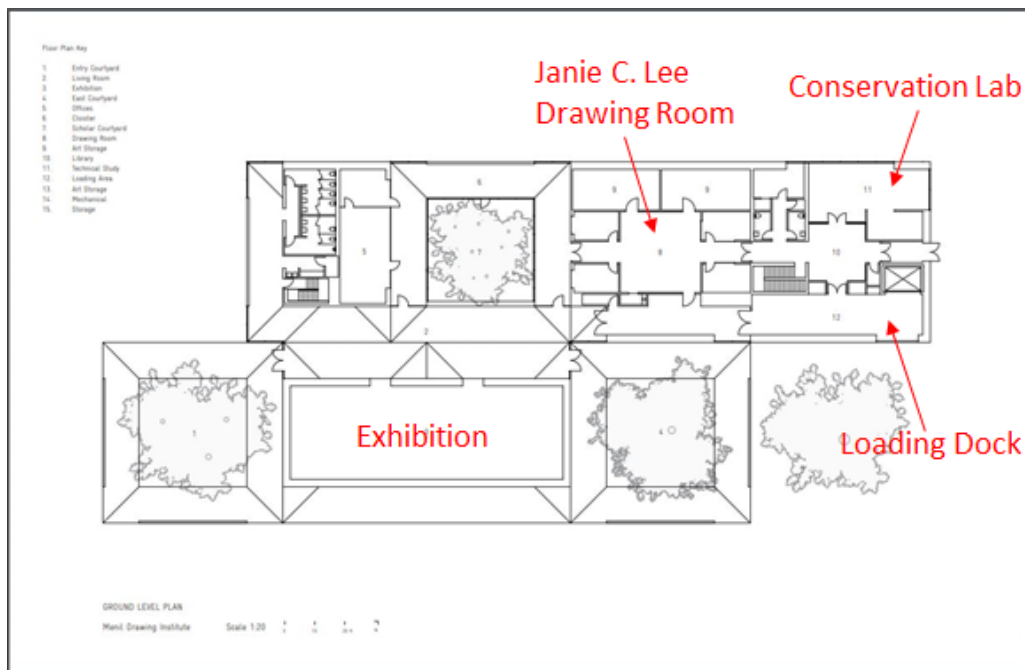


Fig. 1. Menil Drawing Institute



Fig. 2. Library and Reading Room with North-facing windows



Fig. 3. Desk spaces for support staff



Fig. 4. Cabinet to house rolled supplies under art ledge



Fig. 5. Art transport carts custom built for the Menil Drawing Institute

Fig. 6. Magnifier



Fig. 7. Medical cart and iPad stand



Fig. 8. Medical cart in use



Fig. 9. Weights by Jim Love