

The Museum of Modern Art

11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019 Tel. 956-6100 Cable: Modernart

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MEMORIAL FOR BARNETT NEWMAN AT MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

As a memorial to Barnett Newman, who died July 3, 1970, at the age of 65, The Museum of Modern Art has installed four paintings and one sculpture from its collection in the Main Hall. They range from a 1949 painting to a nine foot sculpture completed in 1965, and will remain on view through September 8.

In the wall label, the Museum points out that the art of Barnett Newman represented a daring extreme among the many challenging styles of the Abstract Expressionists; that his painting was first and foremost an art of the senses and focussed upon that element of the painter's vocabulary that is traditionally associated with the sensuous and the passionate: color.

"More than any other painter of his generation, Newman was responsible for establishing what is now called 'color-field' painting. The large size of certain of his pioneering canvases, the purity and drama of his color, and above all the immediacy and simple splendor of his art especially recommended it to the younger abstract painters who were finding their own styles in the later nineteen-fifties. They were naturally most interested in those aspects of Newman's art which fit their own needs: the formal daring--the flatness and pictorial economy--of the whole. The more poetic, visionary aspect of Newman's enterprise belongs rather to the spirit of Abstract Expressionism and links him more closely to contemporaries such as Pollock and Rothko."

The works on view are: Abraham 1949, Philip Johnson Fund, The Voice, The Sidney and Harriet Janis Collection (1950), The Wild (1950) gift of the Kulicke family, Vir Heroicus Sublimis 1950-51, fractional gift of Mr. and Mrs. Ben Heller, and Here II 1965, promised gift of Philip Johnson. Other works in the Museum Collection not available for this special showing include Onement 3 (1949), promised gift of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Slifka.

Checklist, photographs and text of wall label available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53rd Street, New York, New York, 10019. (212) 956-7501.

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WALL LABEL - BARNETT NEWMAN - (June 5-September 8, 1970)

The art of the late Barnett Newman represented a daring extreme among the many challenging styles of the Abstract Expressionists. His reduction of the pictorial field to areas of relatively flat color, divided and resonated by sparsely placed vertical (or, more rarely, horizontal) bands, went beyond the painting of his contemporaries in its sacrifice of the traditional components of style.

The point of this "reductionism" was not to create a large scale version of the type of severe, architectural painting exemplified by Mondrian; nothing could have been further from Newman's goals than such a rigorously intellectual, Cubist-derived style. On the contrary, the painting of Newman was first and foremost an art of the senses, and it therefore focussed upon that element of the painter's vocabulary that is traditionally associated with the sensuous and the passionate: color.

But if, to that extent, the deepest roots of Newman's style are to be found in Impressionism, his art was more than just the Impressionists' petite sensation of pure color writ large. It involved more, too, than Newman's endowing his large fields of effulgent color with an architectural stability and a spirit of order and permanence. Above all, his art attempted to extract from color alone a range of expression that transcended the pervasive hedonism of Impressionism and Fauvism-- a handling of color that could translate the sublime, the heroic, and the tragic in human existence.

The color tradition in modern painting, from Monet through Matisse, had been rooted in the observation of the external world. Already in his early work of the middle forties, which contained elements of figuration, Newman showed himself more interested in an imagery rooted in the symbolic and highly poetic forms of an inner world; his "cosmic landscapes" of those years bore distant affinities to the works of certain Surrealists. Even when, towards the

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end of the decade, his painting became entirely abstract, it never shed that visionary, apocalyptic character.

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In recent years Newman turned increasingly to sculpture, making a group of works as unexpected in character and imposing in quality as they are few in number. The Museum is most fortunate in having two of these among the seven of Newman's work in--or promised to--its collection.

For painters as for amateurs (in its original sense of "lovers") of modern art, the loss of Barnett Newman is a great one on a personal level as well. One of the most remarkable and gregarious personalities in the world of art, one of its most acute "eyes" and penetrating intellects, is gone. We here at The Museum of Modern Art feel this loss especially keenly.