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Since the late '50s, Barnett Newman has been the name most invoked as precedent for the newest abstraction; Still and Rothko, grouped with him at first, somehow dropped out of critical vocabularies after a while, and Reinhardt, whose prototypical position is still clearer, was never as influential, perhaps because his work is more specific. Newman, on the other hand, saw his color field and vertical scale become major components of contemporary painting. Due partially to Clement Greenberg's well-placed enthusiasm, but primarily to the stature of his work, Newman has been a seminal influence for a group of younger artists who have since taken his formal innovations into very different spheres than those for which he intended them; this influence has been over-emphasized in recent years, but is substantially valid, at least in regard to *some* important younger figures. Yet there are still observers who do not consider Newman a painter, a premiss originating in the early '50s and pretty well scotched in the meantime. There is no question that he has been an uneven painter, in key with the romantic temperament, and he has bucked a much-changing decade with a non-developmental style; his oeuvre is not immense and he has done a lot of writing and talking. Newman's is not an art of equilibrium despite its simplicity. His single-minded devotion to its spiritual content rather than to its formal evolution runs counter to prevailing motives, for while Newman is clearly a prototype of the serial painters and structurists, he has used a sequential motif for more private reasons than his successors. His single image, for him, embraces all significant content.

"The Stations of the Cross, Lema Sabachthani" at the Guggenheim Museum by title alone is a surprising project that could also be called naive and pretentious. It is a nervy choice of subject, guaranteed to raise the hackles of many of Newman's colleagues and observers. Such a title makes the series less rather than more accessible to both general and specialized public. The former will balk at the improbability of the venture and the absence of signposts; the latter is queasy about "meaning" and would prefer to see the works non-objectively—that is, without any abstract associations. Lawrence Alloway notes in the catalogue that this "unit of 14 continuous parts . . . pays homage to the original content" rather than illustrating a particular program. In view of Newman's writings and well-documented search for the Sublime, or "man's natural desire for the exalted", it is possible for the spectator to experience a broad satisfaction that results from both the artist's intent and from his formal success. For the extraordinary thing about this series is its success. Fourteen variations on a constant module (basically a tripartite vertical division with a broad central area and bands at each side) could well have been a formal exercise, and in the hands of many artists it would have been. Newman has rendered his vision with passion as well as exactitude, and this passion—that of the artist, perhaps synonymously with that of Christ—is strongly communicated. While individual units may be found formally lacking, it is almost to the advantage of the whole. The stations are tremendously moving, serene and assured; as a group they evoke a powerful ambiance. Their "human scale" and unabashed beauty, at times elegance, will disappoint some viewers, but testing my reaction from the non-formal standpoint of immediate emotion felt, I would call them successful.

The 14 Stations are all black (and grayed blacks), white, and cream, the last being the raw cotton surface. They were executed, in order, from 1958–66, and can be subdivided into groups of 2, 3 or 4, important to the

rhythm of the continuous whole. Numbers 1–4, black and grays on cream, consist of a black hard-edge band at the left, bare canvas middle area, with the band at the right complicated by brushwork or added lines. Numbers 5–8, black on cream, are one band, one line; 9–11, white on cream, are a band and a double line; 12–13 each a very different black on cream; 14 is all white, dazzling, with a single cooler band on the left edge. Their size, but not scale, are identical. Different paints have been used: oil, acrylic, Magna and Duco, to vary the surface and densities. They are hung low so that the enveloping quality, characteristic of Newman's larger canvases, is still present. Limitation to black and white means that the great density of the larger paintings in color is sacrificed, though he has compromised with the creamy cotton. None of these canvases singly has the overwhelming impact of the rich blue *Onement No. 6, 1953*, which provided one of the most memorable and intense color experiences I have ever had, but *in toto* the serenity and austere grandeur for which Newman is known came through. Unfortunately, all 14 panels could not be hung in one room; the first four were outside at the left of the entrance and the fifteenth, not one of the series, was outside at the right. This last, *Be II* (shown earlier as *Resurrection*), is a different size and format and has a sliver of orange at the left. Though a good painting, and perhaps necessary in terms of religious iconography (the pure white Station 14 was the Entombment), it is an anticlimax.

I haven't the space to explore the formal subtleties, successes and failures, but two things did strike me in the context of Newman's previous work. First, I have never seen him look so well in such small size (78 × 60"). Since a little painting at the Whitney this fall was pure parody of Newmanesque scale, and only a few of the drawings I have seen approach the strength of the paintings, I did not expect the Stations to be so grand. Some are obviously less grand than others and most of them are less grand than his best large work in color, but the soaring verticals and coherent, disciplined painterly touches—glorifications rather than remnants—are most effective. Secondly, the ragged, or ruffled edge has often seemed fussy and decorative, serving to diminish rather than open up the scale. In this series, probably because the size is better suited to sophisticated detail, the edge has been both controlled and varied in a virtuoso performance. It runs like a line of melody through the pulsing expansion and contraction of the whole series. The individual paintings range from extreme lyricism verging on prettiness to the monumental clarity for which Newman is deservedly known. These are some of the most *luscious* minimal paintings ever executed, and this aspect, expectedly, backfires at times.

The first four Stations are the most detailed. They become increasingly simple as they move toward ultimate purification. This may have been determined by Newman's own style changes at the time, but in retrospect the progression seems virtually Dantean. The final, all-white panel is the only one in which there is no raw canvas (with its flecks and imperfections), and it is the only one with knife-edge rather than hand-wrought line. Yet there is nothing of self-denial in this series, nor purism. It does not celebrate loss of the self in some great encompassing spirit so much as realization of the self; it represents a modern Passion. Newman's importance is rooted in his will, or ambition, to transcend the ordinary in all spheres. His mysticism is militant rather than meditative. The subject matter of art, for him, is "the Self, terrible and constant". Incidentally, the ego is clear enough in Newman's painting without having the full signature and date blazoned across a corner of each painting. This is the sort of belligerent overstatement that has destroyed several of his paintings for me. The artist's identity, the artist's hand, above all the artist's *anima* is so compelling in the best of his work that such a gesture is redundant.

