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## Barnett Newman's Masterpiece *Stations of the Cross* is Focus of Fifth "In the Tower" Exhibition at National Gallery of Art, June 10, 2012–February 24, 2013



Barnett Newman, *First Station*, 1958  
Magna on canvas  
Collection of Robert and Jane Meyerhoff

Washington, DC—A new exhibition featuring 26 works by Barnett Newman (1905–1970), one of the great figures of the abstract expressionist movement, will be on view June 10, 2012, through February 24, 2013, in the East Building of the National Gallery of Art. ***In the Tower: Barnett Newman*** is the fifth show in a series installed in the Tower Gallery that focuses on developments in art since midcentury. The centerpiece of the exhibition, Newman's famed *Stations of the Cross* (1958–1966), is brought to new light in the vaulting, self-contained space of the I.M. Pei-designed tower.

*The Stations of the Cross* is considered by many to be Newman's greatest

achievement. It was his most ambitious attempt to address what he called a "moral crisis" facing artists after World War II and the Holocaust: "What are we going to paint?"

"Drawn largely from the Gallery's holdings—one of the world's most important collections of Newman's work—this exhibition focuses attention on Newman's breakthrough in the mid-1940s and on the most ambitious work of his maturity, *The Stations of the Cross*, which was the generous gift of Robert and Jane Meyerhoff," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "We are also grateful to several private collectors who have lent important drawings that will help us tell the story of Newman's development."

### **Organization and Support**

The exhibition was organized by the National Gallery of Art.

This exhibition was made possible by The Exhibition Circle and The Tower Project of the National Gallery of Art.

### **Barnett Newman**

Born in New York in 1905, Newman took classes at the Art Students League while in high school and college. At New York's City College he majored in philosophy, graduating in 1927. Believing that all earlier 20th-century painting styles were obsolete, Newman destroyed most of his paintings from the 1930s and early 1940s.

In the mid-1940s, Newman sought a new, more abstract mode, and it was at this time that he made his first works using his signature vertical elements, or "zips," to punctuate the single-hued fields of his canvases. In 1948 he, along with Mark Rothko, Robert Motherwell, and others, founded the Subjects of the Artist school as a means for exploring ideas about the inspiration, attitudes, and possibilities of abstract expressionism. Although Newman's first solo exhibitions in the early 1950s met with ridicule, by the end of that decade his work was hailed by artists and critics though it was not widely known.

### **The Exhibition**

In 1958 the 53-year-old artist—recovering from a heart attack—prepared two canvases of the same size, 6 ½ x 5 feet. "From the very beginning I felt that I would do a series," he recalled. Two years later, while painting the fourth work of the series, he "began to think of them as the Stations of the Cross." Six years later, in 1966, he completed the full cycle of 14 canvases, along with a coda, *Be II*, which are all installed in the large Tower Gallery.

These paintings were first shown at the Guggenheim Museum in the spring of 1966. Organized by Lawrence Alloway, it was Newman's first solo museum exhibition. His subject was not any particular religious narrative but rather a question, Jesus' cry from the cross, which Newman took for the exhibition's subtitle (using the Aramaic), *Lema Sabachthani*: "Why have you forsaken me?" He wrote, "This is the Passion. This outcry of Jesus. Not the terrible walk up the Via Dolorosa, but the question that has no answer." Not any particular narrative, Newman explained, but an expression "of each man's agony."

Newman died in 1970; *The Stations of the Cross* and *Be II* were purchased from Newman's widow Annalee Newman by Robert and Jane Meyerhoff and donated to the Gallery in 1986. The smaller gallery puts these works in context with rare earlier drawings made in the mid-1940s as he explored surrealism. By the late 1940s, he had eliminated much of the brushy atmosphere and expressive gesture from his art, leaving the ever-changing zip to take center stage in such declarative, symmetrical compositions as *Yellow Painting* (1949), which is also displayed. As Newman noted, "I feel that my zip does not divide my paintings. I feel it does the exact opposite."

### **Curator and Related Offerings**

The curator of the exhibition is Harry Cooper, head of modern and contemporary art, National Gallery of Art.

A fully illustrated brochure is available in the exhibition.

On Monday, June 4, at 12:10 and 1:10 p.m., curator Harry Cooper presents a Works in Progress lecture entitled ***Barnett Newman: The Stations of the Viewer*** in the East Building Small Auditorium. Admission is free and available on a first-come, first-seated

basis.

## **Modern American Genius**

Celebrate modern American genius on and off the National Mall this summer with exhibitions at The Phillips Collection, the Corcoran Gallery of Art, and the National Gallery of Art. Encounter the work of three trailblazers—Richard Diebenkorn, Jasper Johns, and Barnett Newman—whose cutting-edge paintings and works on paper helped make American art a significant global force. In addition to the Gallery's presentation of *In the Tower: Barnett Newman*, The Phillips Collection presents *Jasper Johns: Variations on a Theme*, June 2–September 9, 2012, and the Corcoran Gallery of Art presents *Richard Diebenkorn: The Ocean Park Series*, June 30–September 23, 2012. Join the conversation with all three museums on Twitter at **#ModAmericanGenius**.

## **In The Tower**

Previous installations in the series have been *In the Tower: Philip Guston* (February 1–January 3, 2010), *In the Tower: Mark Rothko* (February 21, 2010–January 9, 2011), *In the Tower: Nam June Paik* (March 13–October 2, 2011), and *In the Tower: Mel Bochner* (November 6, 2011–April 29, 2012).

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## General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets along Constitution Avenue NW and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will be closing gradually beginning in July 2013 and will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit [www.nga.gov/renovation](http://www.nga.gov/renovation) (<http://www.nga.gov/renovation>) .

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's website at [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov). Follow the Gallery on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt](http://www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt) and on Twitter at [twitter.com/ngadc](http://twitter.com/ngadc).

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

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