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YOSHIDA, Yuri. Barnett Newman's Self-Historicization: Analysis of Late 1960s Letters on Deposit at the Barnett Newman Foundation

This essay considers how, during the late 1960s, the Abstract Expressionist artist Barnett Newman (1905–1970) attempted to place himself within the history of post-WWII American art. A year of comprehensive research at the Barnett Newman Foundation in New York, which houses more than 16,000 archival documents collected during the artist's lifetime, revealed to me that one can follow Newman's consciousness of his historical evaluation and placement through letters from his later years. Considering the contents of those letters, I argue that Newman's late works can be interpreted as his attempt at what can be called a kind of "self-historicization" to establish an image that he wished to convey through his artistic practice. This can be seen in his careful presentation of his works and in his correspondence with curators and art historians, those who play an important role in assessing the historical placements of artists.

Firstly, I analyze the letters concerning the exhibition in which Newman participated in 1965. In that year, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art organized the exhibition *New York School: The First Generation*. Newman informed the curator of his concerns that unknown works being shown in such a survey exhibition could distort the historical facts. This is an example of Newman seeing himself as a representative figure of the Abstract Expressionist movement, who took great pride in the foresight and originality of his works compared to those of other artists. Newman also participated in the São Paulo Biennial as the only senior artist among a group of young artists. He thought of the group of participating artists as a "train," and of himself as a "locomotive" needed to pull them. From the letters to the curator, we see that Newman believed that his influence on the young had been established; with that confidence, he attempted to have the curator emphasize his influence on his peers.

Secondly, we see Newman attempting to give his work special meaning in relation to the exhibition space. In 1967, Newman exhibited his large-scale sculpture *Broken Obelisk* on the plaza of the Seagram Building. In his letters to Philip Johnson, Newman described that place as the best place, indeed the only place, in the city where he hoped to show the sculpture. We see that for Newman, installing *Broken Obelisk*, in which ancient monuments were re-created with the latest technology, on the plaza of the neo-futuristic architecture involved the historicization of his art, showing himself as a great artist in history from the past, the present, and the future.

Lastly, there is Newman who felt his influence on his peers had been slighted. In a 1969 draft of a letter to a scholar acquaintance, Newman was convinced that his influence on his own generation was obvious, but he expressed anxiety and hopelessness in that his impact was being ignored. In Newman's works from the late 1960s, the size of his pictures became larger, while his brushstrokes became reduced and his vivid colors became more apparent. At the time Newman also made versions of earlier paintings, heightening their optical and physical presence. This stylistic shift can be interpreted as an attempt to historicize his artistic accomplishment compared to artists of his generation, artists by whom he felt slighted.

Regarding Newman's activity in the 1960s, Richard Schiff has described various aspects of the artist in which he had a galvanizing and inspiring effect on the art world, especially on the independent individuality of young artists. On the other hand, Sarah K. Rich claims that, because of his anxiety that Abstract Expressionism was becoming obsolete, Newman turned toward styles seen in subsequent movements. Taking into consideration the work of those scholars, this essay offers a new interpretation, suggesting that changes in the artistic style of Newman's late years were strategic attempts to position himself in the past, present, and future of post-WWII American art history.

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