

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

FOURTH STREET AT CONSTITUTION AVENUE NW WASHINGTON DC 20565 • 737-4215/842-6353

CONTACT: Randall Kremer
Ellen Stanley
(202) 842-6353

NEW INSTALLATION FACT SHEET

TITLE: Seven American Masters

DATES: The installation opens to the public the weekend of July 4, 1986 and will remain on view until the spring of 1987.

LOCATION: Upper Level of the East Building

DESCRIPTION: This installation highlights the work of seven major post-war American artists in a series of "artist rooms," each of which is devoted to the work of one painter: Al Held, Jasper Johns, Ellsworth Kelly, Roy Lichtenstein, Barnett Newman, Robert Rauschenberg and Mark Rothko.

Featured in this installation are new loans of major works, including:

- * Barnett Newman's Stations of the Cross -- Lema Sabachthani (1958-66), a 14-painting series culminating in a 15th work, Be II (last seen at the Gallery in 1978 in a special exhibition to celebrate the opening of the East Building)
- * Jasper Johns' Target (1958), No (1961), According to What (1964) and Untitled (1984)
- * Al Held's two untitled "pigment paintings" (1956, 1958), Ivan the Terrible (1961), Black Nile (1974), Promised Land (1969-70) and Roberta's Trip (1985)
- * Ellsworth Kelly's Tiger (1953)
- * Robert Rauschenberg's Automobile Tire Print (1951) and Summerstorm (1959)

The installation has been organized by Nan Rosenthal, curator of 20th century art at the National Gallery of Art.

A complete checklist is attached.

#

#

#

CONTACT: Randall Kremer
Ellen Stanley
(202) 842-6353

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: SEVEN AMERICAN MASTERS

The recently completed installation of seven 20th century artist rooms now on view in the East Building highlights the work of seven major postwar American painters: Al Held, Jasper Johns, Ellsworth Kelly, Roy Lichtenstein, Barnett Newman, Robert Rauschenberg and Mark Rothko.

Included in the installation is Barnett Newman's rarely exhibited series The Stations of the Cross -- Lema Sabachthani and Be II. Paintings from the Gallery's collection of 20th century art, such as Rothko's Seagram Murals, have also been selected for this new installation.

BARNETT NEWMAN

Newman is represented by The Stations of the Cross, a starkly dramatic series of 14 paintings begun in 1958 and completed in 1966. The series is considered one of the masterpieces of postwar American art and is rarely exhibited (the last time it was on public view was in a different installation at the opening of the East Building in 1978). The paintings have black or white modulating stripes of varying widths (which Newman called "zips") extending from the top to the bottom of each painting.

20th century rooms...page two

Historically, the stations of the Cross were codified as a theme of Catholic devotion in the 18th century. Images of each station, from Christ condemned to death to the Entombment, were placed at intervals around a church. The devout could then retrace the stages of the Passion in a kind of pilgrimage. According to Nan Rosenthal, curator of 20th century art at the National Gallery:

Here Newman is not concerned with the specific events of Christ's Passion, but rather with their thematic unity as a symbol of universal human suffering. Newman is also concerned with the question raised by that suffering: Christ's final cry, Lema Sabachthani, -- Why did you forsake me?

In earlier painting artists often created illusions of the acts and gestures of gods, heroes and men. In this work, Newman's handling of paint -- the artist's act -- is the gesture we attend to.

The series culminates in a 15th painting, Be II (1961-64), which introduces a cadmium red edge on one side and a black, hard stripe on the other side, with white paint covering the canvas. The Stations of the Cross and Be II were last seen at the Gallery in 1978 in a special exhibition to celebrate the opening of the East Building.

The Stations of the Cross and another major painting by Newman, Achilles (1952), were lent by the artist's widow, Mrs. Annalee Newman.

JASPER JOHNS

The room devoted to Johns' paintings contains eight major examples dating from the late 1950s to the mid-1980s. The earliest, Target (1958), shows Johns' tendency during the late 1950s to use flat, preformed, conventional common objects -- such as a flag, stenciled

numbers or a target -- as subject matter covering the entire field of a painting. Ms. Rosenthal says:

The impersonal subject matter -- in Johns' words, "things the mind already knows" -- acts in tension with his subtle paint-handling to create a style that is at once cool, seemingly neutral and yet poignant in its denial of the gestural expressionism of the previous generation.

No (1961) is one of a group of monochromatic, gray, encaustic and collage paintings of that year which demonstrates Johns' handling of the theme of apparent neutrality. No contains the letters "N" and "O" in painted form on the surface of the canvas and in cut-out, "sculptmetal" form dangling from a wire, in front of the canvas. This creates a third representation of the word on the canvas in the form of a shadow cast by the metal letters.

According to What (1964) is a large work that also contains representations of objects, real objects and their cast shadows. It continues Johns' exploration of relationships between language -- the words "red," "yellow" and "blue" -- and visual art. This important work also contains several homages to Marcel Duchamp; in one example, Duchamp's profile and initials are concealed on the back side of a small canvas hinged to the large painting. Five of the paintings by Johns were lent by Mr. and Mrs. S.I. Newhouse, Jr.; three were lent by the artist.

AL HELD

The Al Held installation features eight paintings lent by the artist and presents a condensed, chronological overview of Held's career beginning with two untitled "pigment paintings" (1956, 1958) from his

early work in abstract expressionism. These paintings are characterized by a broad range of color, a thick application of paint and according to Ms. Rosenthal, a "strong, physical presence which extends beyond the canvas into the space where the viewer is standing." The early 1960s represented a transitional period for Held in which he applied layers of pigment, created hard edges and focused on large geometrical shapes. Ivan the Terrible (1961) illustrates this period. Later, Held turned to a more illusionistic form of geometric abstraction, working in black and white and then with chromatic illusions of space. Black Nile VII (1974) and Promised Land (1969-70) are works from the black and white series. Roberta's Trip II (1985), on exhibit for the first time anywhere, is an example of Held's recent intensely colored images of imaginary space.

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG

The room containing nine works by Robert Rauschenberg includes a group of important early paintings on loan to the National Gallery. Among these, Automobile Tire Print (1951) and Summer Storm (1959) are on view at the Gallery for the first time. Tire Print was created by driving a Model-A Ford with ink applied to the front tire over a 22-foot strip of paper. As Ms. Rosenthal observes:

Tire Print is very characteristic of Rauschenberg. Its extreme length means it must be experienced by the viewer over time, and that is what its subject, a rolling tire, suggests -- movement through time. It is also wonderfully typical of Rauschenberg to use an image that is simultaneously a picture, a representation of a thing and its literal trace. It is at once a print of a tire tread and a representation of a tire.

Summer Storm (1959) is an example of Rauschenberg's giant collages for which he coined the term "combine painting." In this work, the artist uses a grid like pattern as a compositional device to organize space which might otherwise appear to be a disparate assemblage of "found objects," such as refuse.

MARK ROTHKO, ELLSWORTH KELLY AND ROY LICHTENSTEIN

Like Barnett Newman, Rothko is represented by a cycle of closely related paintings that tend to "create a unified environment," according to Ms. Rosenthal. The six Seagram Murals (1958-59) derive from a commission to paint murals for the Seagram Building in New York in 1958. This group is characterized by soft-edged, brushy forms in orange, red or black. They were given to the National Gallery by the Mark Rothko Foundation in 1985.

In addition to the Seagram Murals, four large paintings by Rothko from the early and mid - 1950s, on loan from Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon, are included in the new installation: Number 20, 1950 (1950), Blue, Green and Brown (1951), Red, Black, White on Yellow (1955) and White and Greens in Blue (1957).

Highlights of the Ellsworth Kelly room include a new loan Tiger (1953), a compelling geometric abstraction of black, white, yellow, pink and orange rectangles grouped in a nearly square format. Ms. Rosenthal notes that this work "indicates the artist's attraction during the early part of his career to the balanced asymmetry of Mondrian, and it shows Kelly's transition to a large, bold scale that bombards the viewer with intense color."

The room devoted to Roy Lichtenstein's work shows his absorption of commercial graphic techniques and focuses on a group of his works that refer, in their subject matter, to earlier paintings by other artists: Claude Monet's Rouen Cathedral series; Henri Matisse's Goldfish (1911); cubist still life and the bizarre juxtapositions of surrealist landscape.

.

#

#

Checklist: SEVEN AMERICAN MASTERS
National Gallery of Art

*Indicates new loan

AL HELD (born 1928)

*Untitled
oil on canvas, 1956
private collection

*Untitled
oil on canvas, 1958
private collection

*Ivan the Terrible
acrylic on canvas, 1961
private collection

*Mao
acrylic on canvas, 1967
private collection

*Promised Land
acrylic on canvas, 1969-1970
private collection

*Mercury Zone VIII
acrylic on canvas, 1976
private collection

*Black Nile VII
acrylic on canvas, 1974
private collection

*Roberta's Trip II
acrylic on canvas, 1985
private collection

JASPER JOHNS (born 1930)

*Target
oil and collage on canvas, 1958
collection of the artist

*Jubilee
oil and collage on canvas, 1959
lent by Mr. and Mrs. S.I. Newhouse, Jr.

*No
encaustic, collage and sculpmetal on canvas with objects, 1961
collection of the artist

*According to What
oil on canvas with objects, 1964
lent by Mr. and Mrs. S.I. Newhouse, Jr.

*Screen Piece 3 (The Sonnets)
oil on canvas, 1968
lent by Mr. and Mrs. S.I. Newhouse, Jr.

*Weeping Women
encaustic and collage on canvas, 1975
lent by Mr. and Mrs. S.I. Newhouse, Jr.

*Untitled
encaustic and collage on canvas with objects, 1983
lent by Mr. and Mrs. S.I. Newhouse, Jr.

*Untitled
encaustic on canvas, 1984
collection of the artist

ELLSWORTH KELLY (born 1923)

Window, Museum of Modern Art, Paris
oil on wood and canvas, two joined panels, 1949
private collection

White Relief
oil on wood, 1950
private collection

*Tiger
oil on canvas, 1953
private collection

Yellow White
oil on canvas, 1961
private collection

Blue Green
oil on canvas, 1962
private collection

Blue Yellow Red III
oil on canvas, three joined panels, 1971
private collection

Chatham V: Red Blue
oil on canvas, two joined panels, 1971
private collection

White Curve VIII
oil on canvas, 1976
gift of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Helman, 1984

ROY LICHTENSTEIN (born 1923)

Girl with Hair Ribbon
oil and magna on canvas, 1965
private collection

Yellow Brushstroke II
oil and magna on canvas, 1965
private collection

Rouen Cathedral, Set III
oil and magna on canvas, 1969
private collection

Still Life with Goldfish Bowl
oil and magna on canvas, 1972
private collection

Cubist Still Life
oil and magna on canvas, 1974
gift of Lila Acheson Wallace, 1983

Cosmology
oil and magna on canvas, 1977
private collection

BARNETT NEWMAN (1905-1970)

*Achilles
oil, 1952
lent by Annalee Newman

*The Stations of the Cross -- Lema Sabachthani, 1958-1966
Tent by Annalee Newman

*First Station
magna on canvas, 1958

*Second Station
magna on canvas, 1958

*Third Station
oil on canvas, 1960

*Fourth Station
oil on canvas, 1960

*Fifth Station
oil on canvas, 1962

*Sixth Station
oil on canvas, 1962

*Seventh Station
oil on canvas, 1964

*Eighth Station
oil on canvas, 1964

*Ninth Station
acrylic polymer on canvas, 1964

*Tenth Station
magna on canvas, 1965

*Eleventh Station
acrylic polymer on canvas, 1965

*Twelfth Station
acrylic polymer on canvas, 1965

*Thirteenth Station
acrylic polymer on canvas, 1965-66

*Fourteenth Station
acrylic polymer and Duco on canvas, 1965-66

*Be II
acrylic and oil on canvas, 1961-64

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG (born 1925)

Female Figure (Blueprint)
monoprint on blueprint paper, c. 1949
private collection

*Automobile Tire Print
ink on paper mounted on canvas, 1951
private collection

White Painting
oil on canvas (seven panels), 1951
private collection

Black Painting
oil and newsprint on canvas (four panels), 1951-52
private collection

Minutiae
mixed media on wood and fabric, 1954
private collection

*Summerstorm
mixed media, 1959
lent by Mr. and Mrs. S.I. Newhouse, Jr.

Blue Eagle
mixed media, 1961
private collection

Untitled (Venetian)
mixed media, 1973
private collection

Copperhead Grande
acrylic with corrosives and polishes
on copper sheets sealed in lacquer, 1985
Rauschenberg Overseas Culture
Interchange Collection

MARK ROTHKO (1903-1970)

Number 20, 1950
oil on canvas, 1950
lent by Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon

Blue, Green and Brown
oil on canvas, 1951
lent by Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon

Red, Black, White on Yellow
oil on canvas, 1955
lent by Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon

White and Greens in Blue
oil on canvas, 1957
lent by Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon

Untitled (Seagram Mural)
mixed media on canvas, 1958
gift of the Mark Rothko Foundation, 1985

Mural Sketch
mixed media on canvas, 1959
gift of the Mark Rothko Foundation, 1985

Untitled (Seagram Mural)
mixed media on canvas, 1959
gift of the Mark Rothko Foundation, 1985

Untitled (Seagram Mural)
mixed media on canvas, 1959
gift of the Mark Rothko Foundation, 1985

Untitled (Seagram Mural)
mixed media on canvas, 1959
gift of the Mark Rothko Foundation, 1985

Untitled (Seagram Mural)
mixed media on canvas, 1959
gift of the Mark Rothko Foundation, 1985

rev.6/30/86

#

#

#