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Australian National Gallery

In reply please quote:

27 March 1984

Mrs Annalee Newman
435 East 52nd Street
NEW YORK CITY N.Y. 10022
U.S.A.

Dear Mrs Newman,

Greetings from the other side of the world!

My name may well have slipped out of your memory by now, but we did meet many years ago. In fact, two of the warmest memories of my days as a young curator at the Museum of Modern Art were dinner conversations with you and your husband - once in the Village after an opening (where you were the only person kind enough to talk with this young, unpublished Assistant Curator), and once at the lavish farewell feast for René in Governor Rockefeller's garden. May I share with you my journal entry from that splendid evening in the summer of 1968?

"One of the main reasons I decided to go into museum work was Barnett Newman's curatorial work in the 40s - those deeply moving evocations of the transcendent ... and then the glowing Cantos of '64!"

"It was the transcendent that he and I talked about tonight in Governor Rockefeller's garden. The conversation started off with the recent articles which our mutual friend, Barbara Reise, had written for Studio International on his early work, Tiger's Eye, and the mytho-poetic roots of The New York School. I then told him of the conclusion to which his work had led me: that unless we have begun to touch the transcendent, we have not even started to reach the edge of human possibility, of knowing what it is to be human."

"His eyes, which always seem to be warm, began to shine even more brightly. "Would you say", I asked, "that the highest purpose an artist can have is to carve some kind of mirror for the ever-glowing always? "Yes!" he responded, with a huge smile that seemed to fill the whole balcony, the whole garden, the whole world."

"May I ask about your magical zip?" I enquired. "This quivering line, this light-beam, this crack of luminosity - has it been a kind of tool that has helped you to climb Jacob's Ladder?" "Yes, it has, in a way - and I like the way you express it. At first I worked with it horizontally. But no matter what I did with it, it wouldn't go anywhere. It would just keep going around and coming back on itself. But once I made it vertical, then it was no longer limited."

"Then René appeared on the balcony, and the two great bears hugged one another with enormous warmth, enormous love. I turned and walked away from these two old friends into the quiet atmosphere of the library filled with a profound feeling - a feeling that in some mysterious way love and light are one and the same. Someday I hope I can write something that will do justice to this beautiful man, this beautiful spirit, who is a Bringer of Light."

I had hoped to prepare a catalogue raisonné of Newman's prints. However, now that this has been done, I will be writing a special chapter on him and his influence in my next book on modern American prints.

I recently moved to Australia where my charge is to develop a collection of American masterpieces of the twentieth century. The first proposal I want to make is the complete printed work of Newman, all the lithographs and all the etchings. However, I'm not sure if any are left in private hands. Can you provide clues as to who might have any, and if they might be willing to part with them?

Best regards

LANIER

Lanier Graham
Curator
Department of International Prints

May 7, 1984

Mr. Lanier Graham, Curator
Australian National Gallery
G.P.O. Box 1150
Canberra A.C.T. 2601
Australia

Dear Mr. Graham:

What a pleasant surprise to receive your letter!

It was very moving to have you recall so eloquently that evening we spent at Governor Rockefeller's place on the occasion of Rene d'Harnoncourt's retirement from the Museum. I remember that evening very nostalgically -- I remember standing on the balcony and looking out at the great vistas below -- feeling very happy -- and having long conversations with good friends, and I am certain I would recognize you if I saw you but a snapshot now would help.

Your journal entries for that evening are most poetic but they are also penetrating and illuminating statements of my husband's work and in my opinion, reveal a great understanding if it. I hope to see your book on Prints soon.

You ask about my husband's prints and etchings. They were all sold long ago. I still have one book of "Cantos" but someone has first refusal for it. The person involved asked me to wait until May 15 for his reply. I will let you know then if he can buy them. If he cannot, then they will be available to you.

You may be interested to know that I have established a Barnett Newman Foundation. At present we are circulating an exhibition of my husband's prints. The catalogue is quite good and I am enclosing a copy of it for you.

Tonight I am going to the Museum of Modern Art for the opening of the new museum -- a grand new building. It will all be very festive, but a great many wonderful people won't be there. The place will be full of memories for me. I won't feel alone.

With best regards,

Sincerely,

Annalee Newman

Annalee Newman

435 East 52 Street
New York, NY 10022

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