



Barnett Newman's **BROKEN OBELISK** in the Rothko Park

The **BROKEN OBELISK**, situated in a reflecting pool opposite the Rothko Chapel entrance, has been called by some art critics "the greatest American sculpture of the twentieth century." Acquired in 1968, the same year that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated, it is dedicated to the memory of the civil rights leader.

Barnett Newman was a friend of Mark Rothko and was one of the most influential of the New York abstract expressionists. Like Rothko he was beset by profound religious and philosophical concerns which he struggled throughout his life to translate into visual form. Newman died in 1970.

This obelisk is one of three in existence, another being in the upper courtyard of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, the third in the quadrangle of the University of Washington, Seattle. It is 26 feet high and made of Cor-Ten steel. It consists of a square base plate beneath a four-sided pyramid whose tip meets and supports that of the up-ended broken obelisk. The two tips have exactly the same angle (53 degrees, borrowed from that of the Egyptian pyramids which had long fascinated the artist) so that their juncture forms a perfect X.

Twentieth Century Painting/Sculpture magazine raises the question of why this monument has such power to stir our feelings: "Is it the daring juxtaposition of two age-old shapes that have contrary meanings, the one symbolizing timeless stability, the other a thrust toward the heavens?.....it speaks of our unfulfilled spiritual yearnings, of a quest for the infinite and universal that persists today as it did thousands of years ago."