

Seeing Barnett Newman's *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* was influence at first sight, I had never seen that much space in painting before. That was in 1963. I never made paintings that were directly influenced by Newman, by likewise also never made one that wasn't affected by his work to some extent. No one else does simplicity that isn't simple that profoundly, or at least in my view.

My paintings are about complexity, I think that they have come to be about logic as much as anything else. Not logic as in philosophy, logic as in music, where one talks of it making sense but does not mean it provides a riddle and its answer. I want the work to interact with the viewer, to take place in the space around itself and between itself and the person looking at it, and to hold the attention for some time. T.J. Clark began his history of Modernism and its aftermath with David's painting of Marat murdered in his bath. I'd begin mine, if I wrote one, with Friedrich's monk on the beach, because it is the first painting to be mostly made out of space. The sublime, I think, is what we used to call uncertainty or the indeterminate. I should like my paintings to be made out of uncertainty, or to make uncertainty be an active force. There's too much certainty around in art as far as that goes (I'm sure of that,) but that is why its opposite is attractive to me. I think uncertainty puts movements in play rather than resolving them, space as depth is by definition uncertain—you can measure length and width but how deep it is can't be got at with a ruler, to paraphrase Marin and Merleau-Ponty—and that's what I work with. That, and painting being a matter of inside and outside, are together the basis of what joins it to the viewer and the world, and separates it from them too. I'd go so far as to say that space brings with it the experience of movement, one's eyes go in and come back,

and that this moving groundlessness is activated further—intensified and seen to be structured or kept unstructured—by color and drawing, both of which are always moving.

My work has changed over the years, of course, and has had periods of being very varied. In earlier work I, like most or many in my generation and those immediately before, thought about what defined the medium and worked with it. I did so indirectly, however, and not usually because I had a question that was related exclusively to painting. For examples, I made a group of five-panel paintings which had as their starting point Eisenstein's thought that in film there are only two shots, the direct and the oblique. So those paintings are bas-reliefs at which one is always looking directly at the oblique. That's a start though, not the point of the work, that had more to do with duration. Likewise, I made some works on paper that were framed asymmetrically, in order to relate the image to its frame in a certain way, and which were mounted on matte boards that were photographic magnifications of the center of the work. Again, they were a start that got one looking at the work in a certain way, they weren't about a lesson in the formal relationships between support and the supported. Although, of course...

Now I don't think about painting as a medium very much at all. I think of it more as an instrument that one plays, regardless of whether it's in fashion in this particular epoch. I have dealt with the death of painting issue in various places,<sup>1</sup> and shan't address it here. I think, though, there's a reason why thinking about it as a medium has in a way run its course and it has to do with mediums being historical. Playing the violin is not historical, to the extent that it is at all, in the way music as an institution may be. The medium, I think, is no longer able to be the place where one may find what one needs to

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<sup>1</sup> Perhaps most thoroughly in [Penny book, Ashcroft press...] and most recently and also cursorily in [Brooklyn Rail

make art be more than a record of something, let alone, and worse, the confirmation of an historical inevitability. I think in part, at least, that what I'm thinking has to do with the distinction between being in the moment and being of it. Anything that happens is of the moment, and tells one something about it by default and to this or that degree of coherence and self-explanation. Herbie Hancock said there was one night where he was playing with Miles Davis and it felt like his fingers were playing by themselves, his whole mind and body was in the moment. All the music they made together was of the moment, but that was the good stuff. That is an example of what makes me find the idea of the instrument more useful than that of the medium, at this late phase of my career. Art should cut across history, otherwise it never gets to take place now.