

# BROKEN OBELISK

## WHAT IS THE SCULPTURE OUTSIDE?

The sculpture is entitled Broken Obelisk and is dedicated by the de Menils to the legacy of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

## A CONTROVERSIAL STORY

How the Broken Obelisk came to the Rothko Chapel is a controversial story, caught up in the midst of the turmoil of the late 1960's. In 1969, the de Menils offered to match a grant the city of Houston had received to help purchase a work of contemporary sculpture. They chose the Broken Obelisk, and specified that it be placed near City Hall and dedicated to the recently slain civil rights leader. The city accepted their offer to purchase the sculpture, but rejected the dedication. The de Menils then withdrew their offer and purchased the sculpture themselves, installing it in front of the Rothko Chapel and dedicating it to Dr. King in the opening ceremonies of 1971.

## WHAT DOES IT REPRESENT?

Barnett Newman did not give an explanation but was inspired by the forms and symbolism of Egyptian pyramids and obelisks. He was fascinated by the energy created in the collision of these two classical forms.

For the Chapel and the de Menils, the sculpture represents the other half of the Chapel's mission - a call to action for human rights and the legacy of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s work. When a visitor leaves the contemplative environment of the Chapel, they are confronted with this monumental sculpture. It rises towards the sky as a symbol of the aspirations of humanity.



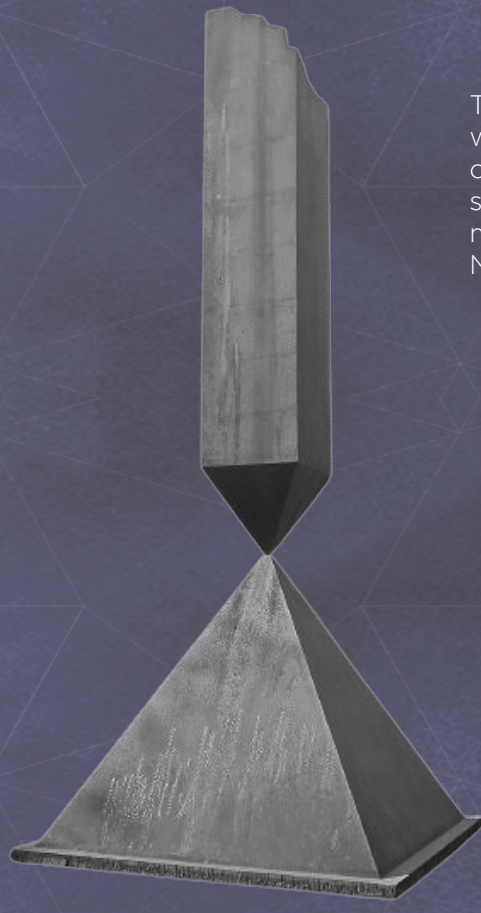
## WHO IS THE ARTIST?

The Broken Obelisk was created by the artist Barnett Newman (1905-1970) who was a contemporary of Mark Rothko and a fellow abstract expressionist. The son of Jewish immigrants from Poland, Newman grew up in New York City and studied there at City College before beginning to create art in the 1940s. The majority of his work was very abstract, color-field paintings. Like Rothko, Newman also died in 1970 and was never able to see the Chapel completed and his sculpture installed.

## WHERE/WHEN WAS IT MADE?

The idea of the Broken Obelisk was conceived in 1963 but did not get manufactured until 1967. It was made by Don Lippincott's factory in North Haven, Connecticut.

There are three originals in existence, one at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York, one at the University of Washington in Seattle, and this one. The sculptures at Chapel and the University of Washington in Seattle were created first and considered identical twins. In 2003, the Newman Foundation allowed a copy to be manufactured and is currently on display at the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra, Australia.



## HOW TALL IS THE SCULPTURE?

26 feet.

## WHO DECIDED TO DISPLAY IT OVER WATER?

It was Newman's decision to install the sculpture over water. This is the only Broken Obelisk to be installed over water.



## WHAT IS THE SCULPTURE MADE OF?

It is made of cor-ten steel.

## WHEN WAS THE SCULPTURE ADDED?

The sculpture was installed prior to the Chapel opening in 1971. It has been in the reflecting pool and has accompanied the Chapel since it opened.

# MORE ABOUT THE PLAZA

## SAVANNAH HOLLIES

- There are 31 planted along the west and south side of the reflection pool
- The trees provide a great winter food source for birds and wildlife.

## REFECTION POOL

- The pool is 70' by 40' and is typically holding between 22,000 and 28,000 gallons of water
- While there are limited chemicals, we are unable to use typical pool chemicals to keep the water clean and clear
- The floor is a custom exposed aggregate
- The pool undergoes a full drain and cleaning at least once per year to remove dirt, pollen, debris, algae and other contaminants

## PLAZA

- Custom exposed aggregate installed by Texas Bomanite
- There are 60 squares which were poured in a checkerboard

# BE MINDFUL

The Chapel Grounds are welcoming, calming green spaces. The Grounds act as an extension of the Chapel itself, making them an ideal place to reflect and have a moment of solitude. The Chapel Grounds are free and open to the public daily from dawn until dusk.

## TIPS FOR VISITING

All are welcome to enjoy the peacefulness of the Chapel. We ask that all visitors take care to respect the Chapel and its visitors by following these guidelines:

- Respect the silent, contemplative atmosphere
- Help preserve the works of art by maintaining a safe distance of a least two feet
- Refrain from taking photos and using technology
- Do not lie on the floor or benches
- Leave all food, liquids, and large bags outside or in the Welcome House lockers
- Only service animals may enter

While enjoying the Rothko Chapel grounds, please be mindful of the following guidelines:

- Please refrain from: wading or swimming in the reflecting pool, climbing in trees, littering, smoking, drinking alcoholic beverages, using glass containers, fires or grills, amplified music, motorized vehicles, or installing furnishings and hammocks.
- Advance permission is required for events, gatherings, and commercial photography.
- Non-exotic pets are welcome but must remain on a leash and owners must pick up after their pets

## PROHIBITED ITEMS & ACTIVITIES

- Possession of a firearm inside the Chapel or on the Grounds
- Hosting events and/or gatherings on the grounds and/or plaza without advance written permission from the Rothko Chapel
- Taking professional and/or commercial photography or video on the grounds and/or plaza without advance written permission from the Rothko Chapel
- Smoking within 25 feet of the Chapel entrance
- Installing external decorations and/or equipment such as tables, chairs, lights, amplification systems, hammocks, candles, etc.
- Wading and/or swimming in the reflecting pool
- Drinking alcoholic beverages
- Throwing rocks, coins, and/or other materials at the sculpture or into the reflecting pool
- Motorized vehicles
- Glass containers
- Open fires or grills
- Climbing in trees, bamboo, on sculpture, or Chapel building
- Littering

