

KEVIN CASSIDY PHOTO COMPOSITIONS

**SELECTIONS FROM THE ROTHKO CHAPEL
AND THE BARNETT NEWMAN BROKEN OBELISK IN
HOUSTON, TEXAS.**

**SELECTIONS FROM THREE PERFORMANCES
AT THE ROTHKO CHAPEL (1979-1980)
AND FLASH FORWARDS TO 2019 AND 2020**

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15 October 2020 Ver 6.3.1**





WILSON JONES
1914-1991
THE JAMES T. JONES
ARCHIVE
WILSON JONES
WILSON JONES ARCHIVE

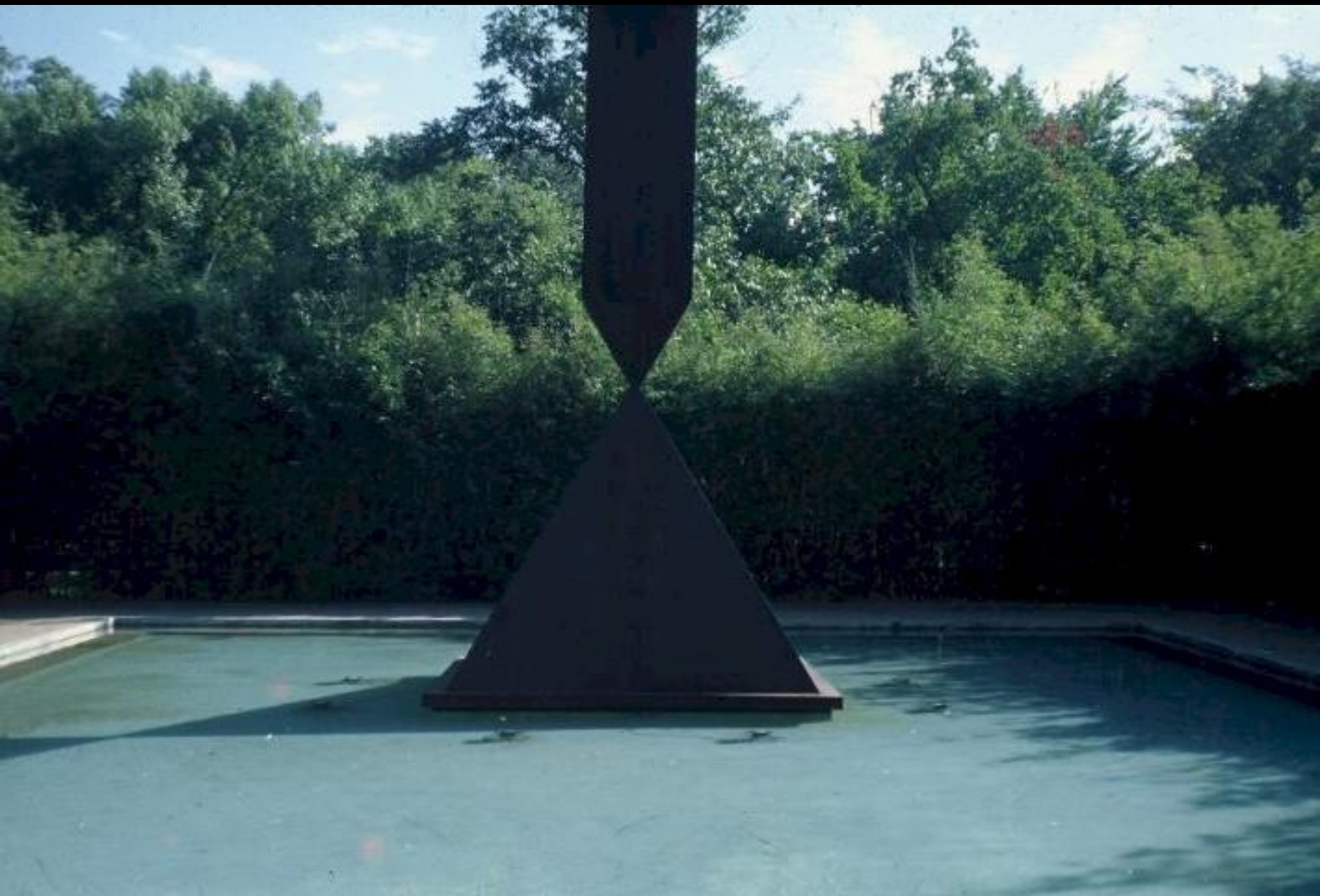
THE ROTHKO CHAPEL AND THE BARNETT NEWMAN BROKEN OBELISK

The Rothko Chapel and the Rothko Chapel paintings by Mark Rothko were commissioned by John and Dominique de Menil as a permanent installation for an artist's work and as a contemporary ecumenical sanctuary dedicated to exploring the diversity of the world's religious and human rights traditions. The Chapel was dedicated in 1971. The *Broken Obelisk* is a sculpture by the American artist Barnett Newman and purchased by the de Menils. It is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and is twenty-six feet high and made of cor-ten steel. This amazing sculpture stands in a reflecting pool outside the Chapel.







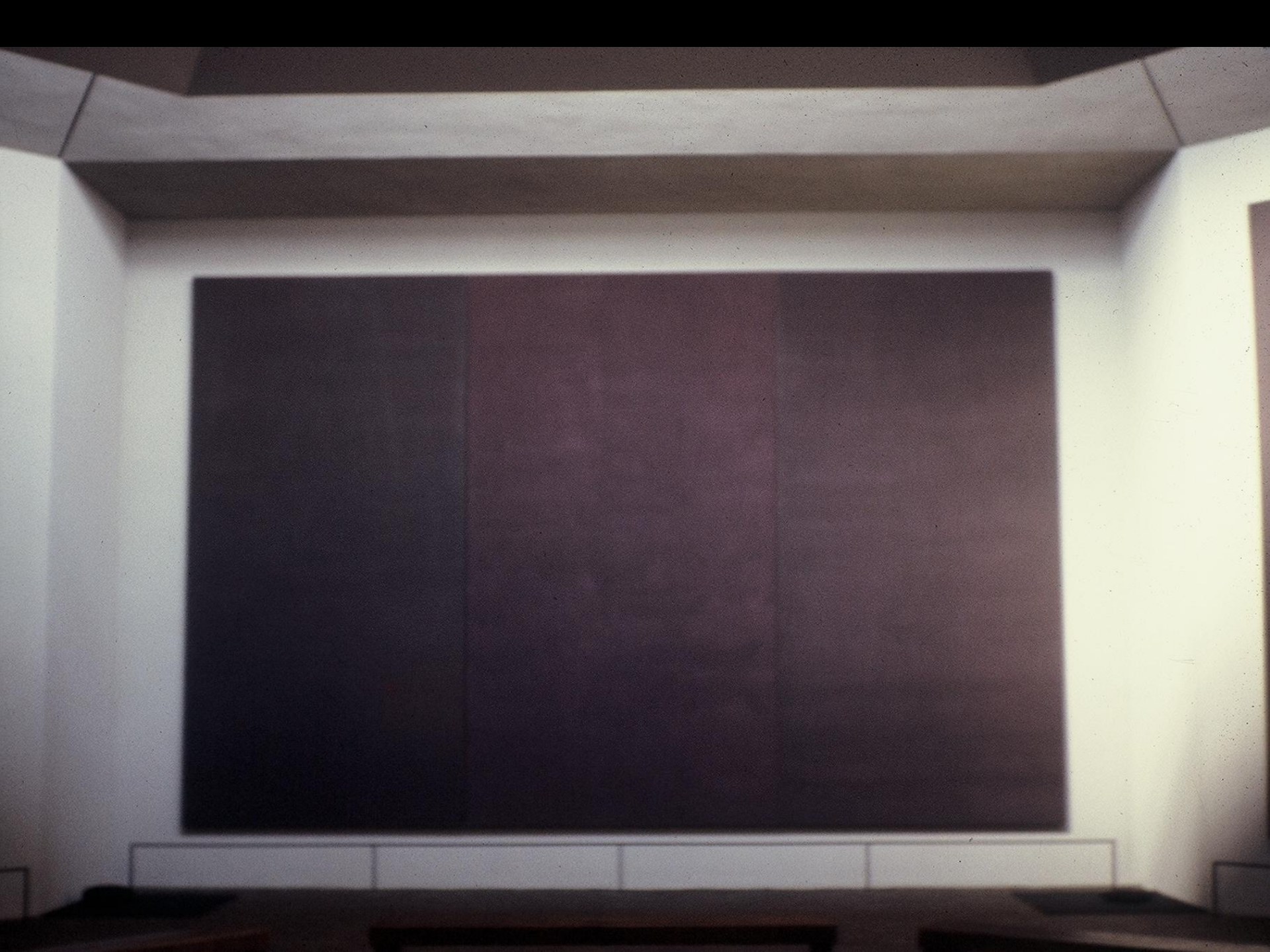






INSIDE THE ROTHKO CHAPEL

As we move into the Rothko Chapel, selections include: the great North Triptych in the center of the Chapel – a truly magnificent group of paintings. Photo compositions also include: the north-east corner painting and the triptych on the eastern wall. I find the Chapel paintings with their colors at the dark end of the chromatic scale, quite beautiful. Indeed - mysterious and profound. However, the Houston sunlight is so bright that coverings over the skylight were necessary. The shadows cast on the paintings (seen here) by the skylight coverings were considered problems and received intense criticism.





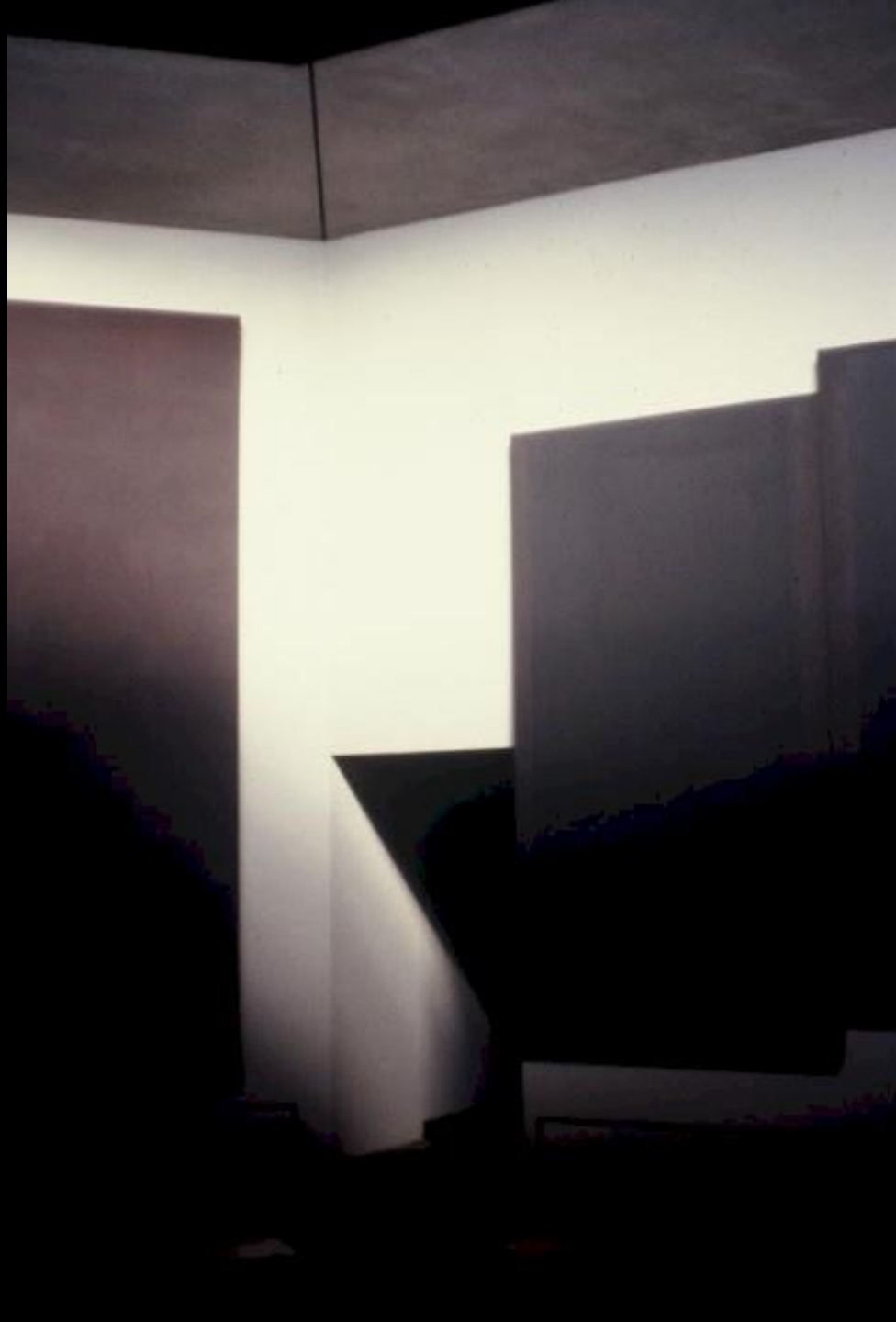
LIGHTING ISSUES

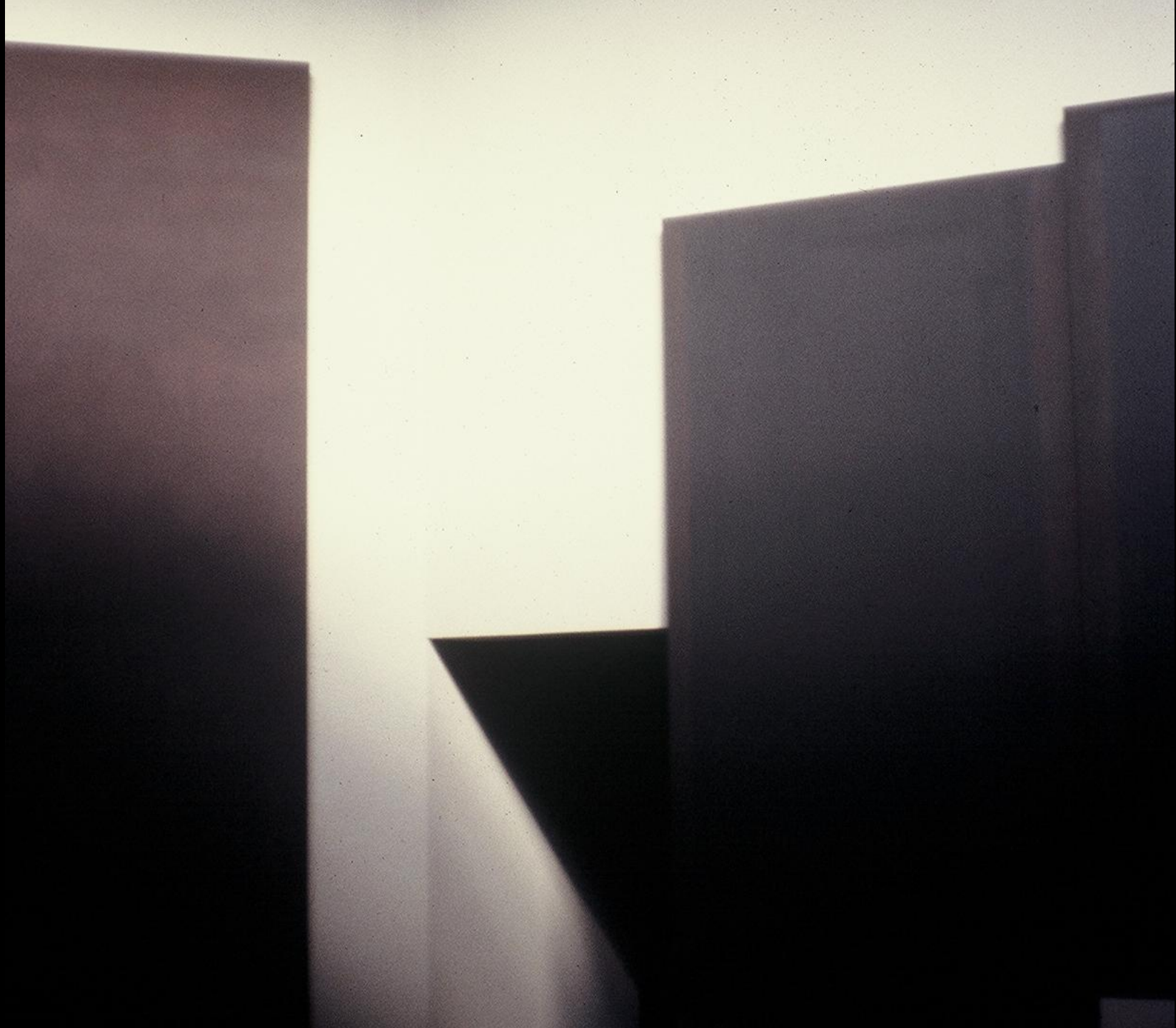
According to Sheldon Nodelman in his book *Rothko Chapel: Origins, Structure, and Meaning*, Rothko was concerned with the lighting – very concerned. In his 69th Street studio in New York, Rothko had put a parachute type fabric over the oculus in the studio to mitigate the strength of the light. When the Chapel first opened in 1971 no such light modulation solution was in place. The intensity of the light in Houston was sometimes so overwhelming that you could not even see the paintings. On other days with cloud cover shadows were cast on the paintings.

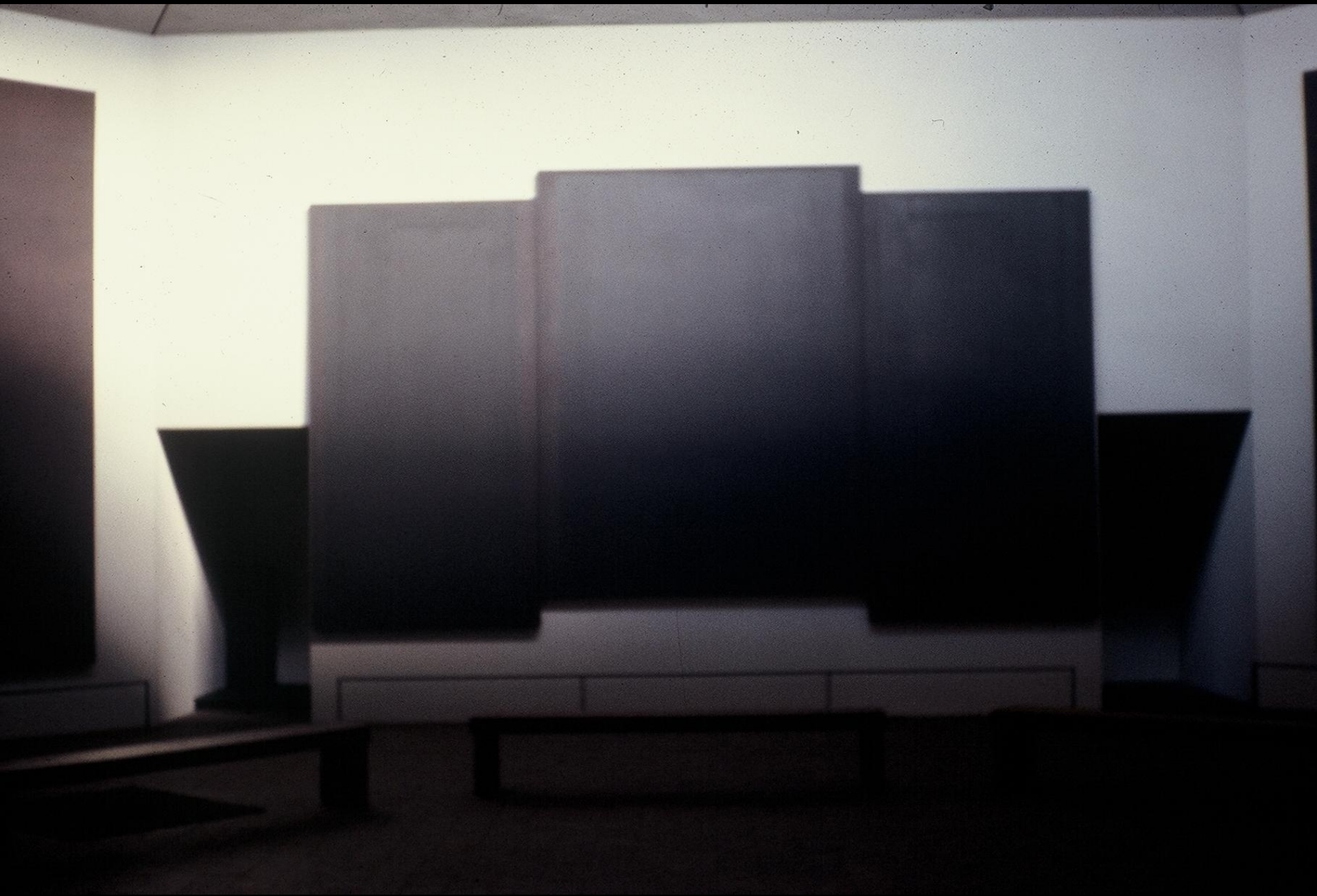












THE ROTHKO CHAPEL SKYLIGHT REVEALED

Around 1979 ,I was able to photograph (with permission) part of the removal of one of the paintings from the west wall for conservation as well as the Chapel skylight open and unobstructed. Mark Rothko originally designed the Chapel with an open skylight in mind, but due to the intensity of light in Houston, it was determined that too much ultra-violet radiation could damage the paintings. The solution was to cover over the skylight. But here, in several photos, we see the skylight uncovered. Let the Light shine!























THE WHIRLING DERVISHES OF MEVLANA JALALLUDIN RUMI

The Rothko Chapel is a great performance space, both inside and outside. The *Whirling Dervishes* of Mevlana Jalalludin Rumi performed here in October, 1979. We see the *Sema* Dance against the background of the Barnett Newman *Broken Obelisk*. The Dance Leader in the center is dressed in black. If I remember correctly, one of the Sufi musicians was blind. Group photos of the Dervishes follow with a final portrait of one of the Sufi musicians – the Flute Player – near the reflecting pool and the *Broken Obelisk*.





















HASIDIC MUSIC AND HEBRAIC WORKSHOP

The Hasidic Music and Hebraic Workshop was conducted by Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach. The first group of photos show the arrival of Dominique de Menil in her trusty Mercedes. And a photo of Jody Blazek (Menil Foundation) Dominique, and Anne Mead (then Directory of the Rothko Chapel) The next group show the Rabbi performing on the guitar outside against the backdrop of the Chapel. The photos of the guests on the Rothko Chapel lawn are composed as a homage to Seurat's *Afternoon at the Grand Jette*.



















THE DANCE OF THE SAILORS FROM THE *SHAR SHALOM*

Dominique de Menil had heard that there were a group of Jewish sailors aboard the *Shar Shalom* docked in the Houston Ship Channel who were great fans of the Rabbi. She asked several of us to go out and pick them up and bring them back to the concert. They were overjoyed to meet the Rabbi. Several of the following photos show them holding hands and dancing in celebration. The *Dance of the Sailors*.



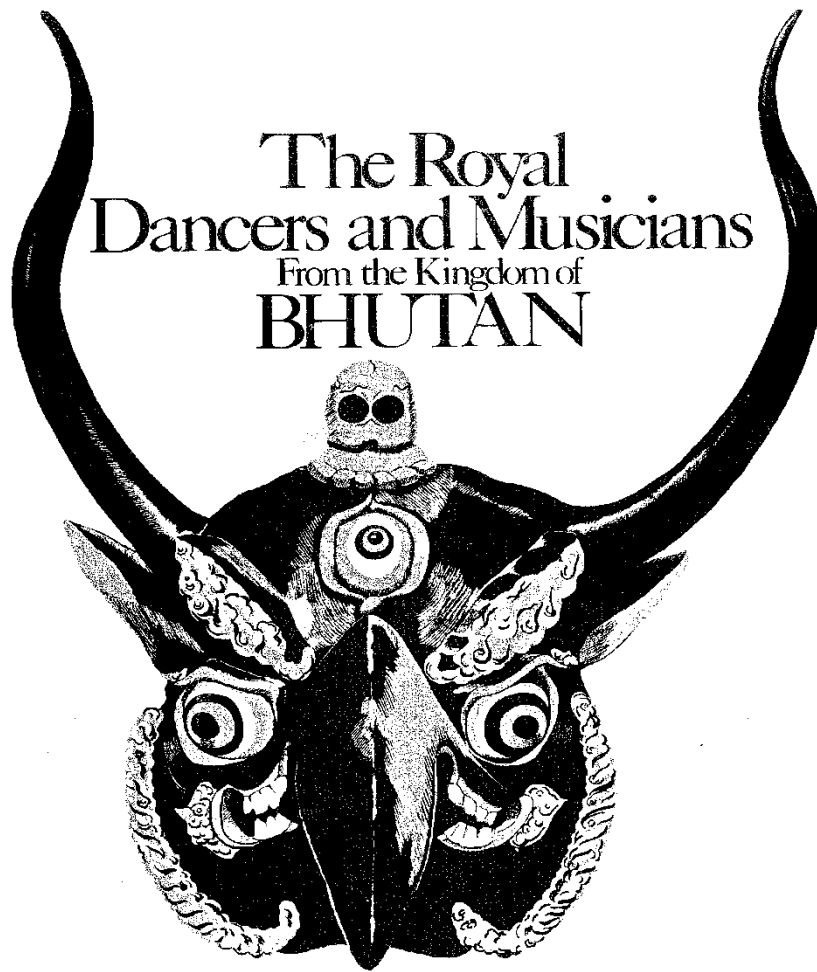








The Royal Dancers and Musicians From the Kingdom of BHUTAN



HOUSTON

April 8 through 11, 1980

Sponsored by
The Rothko Chapel and The Asia Society / Houston

Free Public Performances

(over)





























FLASH FORWARD TO 2019

In April, 2019 I went with friends to hear a program on the Rothko Chapel at the University of Houston. It was titled *Texas Light: The Art and Architecture of the Rothko Chapel* with David Leslie, current Director of the Rothko Chapel and Christopher Rothko, Mark Rothko son among others. Very interesting discussion and then came the bombshell. They plan to close the Chapel for a major re-do and add several new buildings to the Rothko Chapel “campus”.

Rothko Chapel

in partnership with

UNIVERSITY of
HOUSTON

GERALD D. HINES COLLEGE of ARCHITECTURE and DESIGN

presents

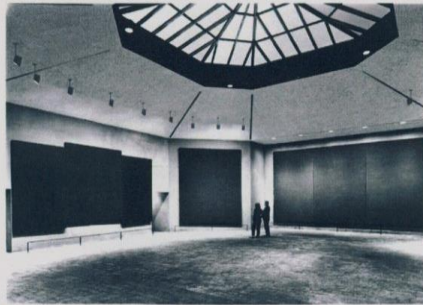
**Texas Light: The Art & Architecture
of the Rothko Chapel**

Monday, April 8, 2019, 6pm



Texas Light: The Art & Architecture of the Rothko Chapel

Monday, April 8, 2019, 6pm



Introductions

Alan Bruton,

*Associate Professor & Director Interior Architecture,
Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture & Design,
University of Houston*

David Leslie,

Executive Director, Rothko Chapel

Program Participants

Christopher Rothko,

Former Chair of the Rothko Chapel Board of Directors

Stephen Cassell,

Founding Principal of Architecture Research Office (ARO)

George Sexton,

Founder and Principal of George Sexton Associates

Moderated by Sandra Zalman,

*Associate Professor and Program Director of Art History,
University of Houston*

LO AND BEHOLD

And then - Lo and Behold! The old issue of the lighting was back! They are going to upgrade the skylight – always a source of controversy – in the Chapel and add very high tech advanced lighting controls. At the date of this lecture, it has been over 48 years since the Chapel opened in February 1971. By 1973 the lighting of the paintings in the Chapel had become a major issue (as briefly discussed above). An avalanche of criticism had poured forth. A Cross to Bear for Dominique de Menil. But bear it she did.

SOME THOUGHTS

Menil Museum chief conservator Brad Epley interviewed Richard Serra - one of my favorite artists/sculptors - as part of the Menil Museum and the Whitney Museum Artist Documentation Program (full interview at adp.menil.org). During the interview Serra was talking about four Rothkos on view at the Menil Museum. He said "You have four Rothkos on view which have great emotional weight." For me, as a self-made Romantic, the Rothko Chapel Murals have always had great emotional weight. From Day One. They have that weight all the time. Come Hell or High Water. Come Rain or Come Shine. On Good Light Days or Bad. Day and Night.

SOME THOUGHTS

I have lived in the Menil Properties in the Rothko Chapel neighborhood for over 40 years now and that great emotional weight is ON all the time. I can *feel* the paintings even if I am not there *seeing* them. When they are all standing tall together in the Chapel, as Mark Rothko intended, they are a Mighty Band of Brothers and Sisters. A Mysterious Stonehenge in their Octagon.

FAST FORWARD AGAIN

It is now October 2020. The Chapel is open with timed reservations required because of COVID.

Mask Wearing and Social Distancing are also required. I have gone twice and love the new skylight. I plan to go once a week to observe the effects of changes in the natural light on the paintings. Great to see them all assembled there again! They still feel wonderful. The New Suzanne Deal Booth Rothko Chapel Visitor House is Open and looks great. I like all the new landscaping but I liked the old landscaping as well. Time Marches On!



FIN

Enjoyed sharing with you these selections from my photo collections of Rothko Chapel and related events. The Chapel was designed as a sacred space to house the mural paintings by Mark Rothko and be a permanent installation for them. After 40 plus years they are still standing!

Comments may be addressed to:

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