Artist Resources – Ellsworth Kelly (American, 1923-2015)

Ellsworth Kelly served in a unit known as the Ghost Army during World War II. Read about how his experience with camouflage impacted his artistic style.

In 1956, Betty Parsons Gallery installed Kelly's first New York exhibition. See installation images on the Ellsworth Kelly Foundation website. He was later included in major New York exhibitions, including MoMA's Sixteen Americans (1959) and the Jewish Museum of Art’s Primary Structures (1966).


Kelly was the inaugural artist to participate in the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art’s MATRIX series in 1975.


In 1996, Ellsworth Kelly: A Retrospective was organized by the Guggenheim Museum and covered five decades of the artist’s career. The exhibition then traveled to the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, The Tate Gallery, and Haus der Kunst in Munich.


Read a 2011 interview with the artist and Gwyneth Paltrow for Interview Magazine and watch a studio visit with Kelly and his longtime friend, Agnes Gund, President Emerita of the Museum of Modern Art.

The exhibition Ellsworth Kelly: Schwarz & Weiß at the Haus der Kunst was the first comprehensive retrospective of Kelly’s black and white works.

Kelly also curated exhibitions throughout his career. In 1990, he curated Artist’s Choice: Ellsworth Kelly Fragmentation and the Single Form at MoMA. Other exhibitions include a 2014 exhibition of Matisse drawings at the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum and Monet/Kelly at the Clark Institute the following year. Read a review of the Clark exhibition by Holland Carter, “When an Abstract Artist Falls in Love with Monet.”

In 1986, Kelly began designing Austin, a 2,715 square foot stone chapel for the Blanton Museum of Art. The designs were finally realized in 2018. Read more about Kelly’s final project in Artforum and Artnet.

The United States Postal Service released a set of Ellsworth Kelly stamps in 2019.

**West Coast Landscape Study**, 1958

Oil on canvas

Private Collection; L2021:182.1

After serving in the 603rd Engineers Camouflage Battalion during World War II, Ellsworth Kelly used the G.I. Bill to study at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Kelly’s hard-edge, bright, minimalistic, color field works, often employing multiple canvases, were unlike other postwar American painting in the United States in the 1950s, marking a truly innovative departure. **West Coast Landscape Study** was painted when the artist lived in Manhattan’s Coenties Slip neighborhood alongside fellow artists Agnes Martin (1912–2004), Jack Youngerman (1926–2020), and Robert Indiana (1928–2018). The abstracted landscape builds from saturated black, green, and blue bands of color that evoke layers of earth, greenery, and sky. A thin red vein, presumably lava, runs beneath the brown layer of the painting that suggests the earth’s crust. This telling detail points to the volcanic geology of the west coast landscape in the painting’s title.

*On view February 16 – May 22, 2022*