

The Museum of Modern Art

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ELLSWORTH KELLY RETROSPECTIVE

A major retrospective of paintings and sculpture by Ellsworth Kelly will be on view at The Museum of Modern Art from September 12 through November 4, 1973. Directed by Eugene C. Goossen, art critic and Professor of Art at Hunter College, the exhibition of 50 paintings and sculptures and 25 drawings includes key works tracing the development of Kelly's work from the first mature period in France in the late 40s and early 50s to the most recent Curve series of 1972-3. Mr. Goossen has also written the book Ellsworth Kelly* published by The Museum of Modern Art on the occasion of the show.

Kelly's is a pure, visual art, sensuous and precise, Mr. Goossen says in the exhibition wall label. "But beyond our sheer appreciation of it as art, lie the experiences it recalls or introduces to us of the qualities of the world we live in."

From 1948 through the mid-1950s, when Kelly lived in France, nature and architecture were the main sources of his art. He also found inspiration in Byzantine painting and Romanesque sculpture. For a while he made actual relief pictures of windows and simulations of the incised walls of Paris.

"His White Plaque: Bridge Arch and Reflection, 1952-55, is the presentation in solid material of the evanescent experience of the shapes of light and shadow," Goossen says. The prophetic character of the work during this period, predicting such later styles as the "shaped canvas" and "minimalism", is well illustrated in the exhibition.

During these years he also combined the collage method with suggestions received from Arp's use of chance, letting the elements of a picture find

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* Ellsworth Kelly by Eugene C. Goossen. 128 pages, 18 color plates, 66 black-and-white illustrations, plus 51 reference illustrations. \$12.50 clothbound, distributed to the trade by New York Graphic Society Ltd.; \$6.95 paperbound.

their own arrangement within the rectangle. Kelly extended this principle by establishing grids into which black and white or colors were introduced by mathematical procedures or by random selection from boxes of color chips, as in Seine (1951) and Sanary (1952).

From the late 1950s paintings and sculptures of the kind that gave rise to the term "hard edge" are shown along with a number of early and late "panel" pictures from the Spectrums to the Chatham series. The exhibition concludes with examples of Kelly's current Curve series.

As Mr. Goossen points out Kelly has frequently abstracted portions of his own drawings, many of them derived originally from such fleeting experiences as shadows on a book in a moving bus, the slots in the Brooklyn Bridge pylons, the scarf on a girl's neck, or the accidental overlay of colored papers on the studio table. The twenty-five drawings in the exhibition include many early works from the artist's own collection.

It is the shape of things that Kelly has concentrated on most often. This became particularly clear when he began to make sculpture, carrying over similar forms from his paintings and reliefs. "Although his work seems to have grown continually more abstract, the essence of its origins in experienced fact remains and gives it a verity not present in more arbitrary kinds of abstractionism, which depend less on observation and more on dynamic composition.

"Kelly's color is intentionally subordinate to shape, but it is perhaps because of his particularity about shape that his color resounds with such personal force. Perhaps it is also because of his childhood passion for Audubon's Birds of America and for the distinguishing patterns of the colors of birds that he is now able to use color so lucidly. His capacity to employ tension as a subtle source of pictorial energy probably also derives from his concern with shape. From Rebound (1959) through the Chatham

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series to the recent Curve series, whether through line and area, the juxtaposition of colors, or the bending and flattening process behind the sculptures, he elicits from us a kinesthetic response," Mr. Goossen concludes.

After the New York showing, the exhibition will travel to the Pasadena Museum of Modern Art (January - March); the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (March - May); and the Detroit Institute of Art (June - August).

Ellsworth Kelly was born in Newburgh, New York, in 1923. After a brief period at Pratt Institute, he served in the U.S. Army during World War II as a member of an Engineers Camouflage unit. From 1946 to 1948 he studied at the School of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. He then went to France where he remained until 1954. Since that time he has lived and worked in or near New York City.

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Catalogue, photographs and additional information available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53 St., New York, NY 10019. Phone: (212) 956-7501; 956-7504.
