Queer Ways of Seeing Queer Ways of Depicting: Ellsworth Kelly’s Afterlives and the Liberatory Burden of Modernist Formalism

J. Zach Hunley
West Virginia University, jzh0001@mix.wvu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://researchrepository.wvu.edu/etd

Recommended Citation
https://researchrepository.wvu.edu/etd/11867

This Thesis is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by the The Research Repository @ WVU with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this Thesis in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you must obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself. This Thesis has been accepted for inclusion in WVU Graduate Theses, Dissertations, and Problem Reports collection by an authorized administrator of The Research Repository @ WVU. For more information, please contact researchrepository@mail.wvu.edu.
Queer Ways of Seeing Queer Ways of Depicting: Ellsworth Kelly’s Afterlives and the Liberatory Burden of Modernist Formalism

J. Zachary Hunley

Thesis submitted
to the College of Creative Arts
at West Virginia University

in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

Master of Arts in
Art History

Kristina Olson, MA, Chair
Rhonda Reymond, Ph.D.
Kasi Jackson, Ph.D.

Department of Art History

Morgantown, West Virginia
2023

Keywords: Ellsworth Kelly, modernist art historical discourse, queer theory, feminist art history, queer formalism, postcards, ephemera, printmaking, architecture

Copyright 2023 Zach Hunley
ABSTRACT

Queer Ways of Seeing Queer Ways of Depicting: Ellsworth Kelly's Afterlives and the Liberatory Burden of Modernist Formalism

J. Zachary Hunley

Ellsworth Kelly (1923-2015) was a prolific artist whose career spanned six decades. During that time, Kelly forged new ground stylistically through his unwavering devotion to formalism. Derived from his keen eye for observing his quotidian surroundings, the masking of readymade sources via abstraction has become the understanding central to scholarship on the artist. Kelly’s practice of veiling the subject also reveals a vast, complex matrix of sociohistorical forces related to and stemming from his positionality as a gay man—the significance of which has been generally discounted or omitted from understandings of Kelly within the art historical canon.

This thesis probes the artist’s oeuvre, seeking new interpretative ground by interrogating the artist’s canonized positionality via close looking at three distinct bodies of work through lenses of critical feminist theories—most notably the idea of queer formalism. In tracing the origins of formalism and its use throughout modernism as a means for reinforcing heteronormative universalities, this thesis will argue that Kelly used his distinctive brand of formalist abstraction as a means of navigating tides of sociopolitical persecution during his time away from the United States on the G.I. Bill in Paris during the Second World War—veiling the subject as a means of veiling the self.

Ultimately, the goal of this research is to examine and interrogate Kelly’s output and canonized understanding by making space for queer visualities and futurity. Seeing Kelly as more than just “another” minimalist or abstractionist, this thesis argues that the artist’s commitment to forms owes its lineage to a queer way of seeing and a queer way of depicting.

Keywords: Ellsworth Kelly, modernist art historical discourse, queer theory, feminist art history, queer formalism, postcards, ephemera, printmaking, architecture
DEDICATION

To those in my life who have shown me it is possible to make the invisible visible and the intangible tangible.

To my loving parents, Donna and Rob Hunley, and my sister, Bethany, for their unwavering support.

To my friend and cohort companion, Sydney Pascarella, my darling partner, Cameron Croston, my dearest childhood friend, Katelyn Damron, and my hiking partner and confidante, Ally Baughman, for their feedback and patience as I took on this significant academic project.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge those on my thesis committee: Professor Olson, Dr. Reymond, and Dr. Jackson for their outpouring of insights, guidance, understanding, and overall support as I worked towards the completion of this thesis. I would like to extend a special thank you to Professor Olson, for seeing my potential as an art historian and writer during an uncertain chapter in my life. It is because of you, Professor Olson, that I find myself fully committed to and immersed within this vitally important and underappreciated field. Your mentorship throughout my years at West Virginia University has allowed me to forge a better understanding of myself as a scholar, a creative, and as an individual. I am grateful.

Additionally, I would like to give thanks to my financial sponsors. To Mrs. Elizabeth Rajam, whose endowment to the art history department at WVU enabled me to take on significant travel to Austin, Texas; New York, New York; Boston, Massachusetts; and Paris, France. The Mesaros Foundation’s Graduate Thesis Research Award also provided financial assistance for my travels. As illustrated throughout this thesis, my visits to these locations proved essential to its completion. I am forever grateful to have been able to experience art by Kelly without barriers to access.

Finally, I would like to thank the staff at the Blanton Museum of Art in Austin, Texas for their hospitality and support during my stay in June 2022. The museum’s curatorial assistant for prints and drawings, Rachel Urbano, also deserves acknowledgment for her organizing and facilitation of my private viewing of dozens of archival prints, paintings, drawings, notes, and models constructed by Kelly. Taking in Austin (2015) alongside this immense amount of primary supplementary materials was transformative to my research. I would also like to thank the staff at Harvard Art Museum, Cambridge, Massachusetts, as well as Morgantown, West Virginia’s Art Museum of WVU curator Bob Bridges, for making work by Kelly available to view for close examination.

My deepest thanks and sincerest gratitude must also extend to Professor Megan Leight, for her continued and unwavering professional mentorship and guidance, as well as my friends in the Visual Resources Library: Sam Hensley, Rebekah Gooding, and Elaina DePetro, for their camaraderie throughout my time in the program at WVU.
Everything is everything

—Lauryn Hill, 1999
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1 No. 5/No. 22 by Mark Rothko, 1950 .................................................................68
Figure 2.2 Number 1, 1950 (Lavender Mist) by Jackson Pollock, 1950 .......................68
Figure 2.3 Blue Green Red by Ellsworth Kelly, 1963 .......................................................69
Figure 2.4 Detail of Sculpture for a Large Wall by Ellsworth Kelly, 1956-57 ...............69
Figure 2.5 Red Blue Green by Ellsworth Kelly, 1963 ......................................................70
Figure 2.6 Untitled by Donald Judd, 1968 ..................................................................70
Figure 2.7 Die by Tony Smith, 1962 ..............................................................................71
Figure 2.8 Untitled by Robert Morris, 1971 .................................................................71
Figure 2.9 Colors for a Large Wall by Ellsworth Kelly, 1951 .......................................72
Figure 2.10 Untitled by Al Loving, 1971 ........................................................................72
Figure 2.11 Blue Rational/Irrational by Al Loving, 1969 ..............................................73
Figure 2.12 Untitled Y by Al Held, 1960 ..........................................................................73
Figure 2.13 Red Blue by Ellsworth Kelly, 1962 ............................................................74
Figure 2.14 Repetition Nineteen III by Eva Hesse, 1968 .............................................74
Figure 2.15 100 Works in Milled Aluminum by Donald Judd, 1982-86 .....................75
Figure 2.16 Untitled (Corner Prop Piece) by Richard Serra, 1969 .............................75
Figure 2.17 Equal by Richard Serra, 2015 ....................................................................76
Figure 2.18 Artforum cover featuring Kelly’s Two Panels, Blue with Small Red, November 1971 .................................................................76
Figure 2.19 La Combe by Ellsworth Kelly, 1950 ............................................................77
Figure 3.1 Black White Black by Ellsworth Kelly, 2006 .................................................77
Figure 3.2 Spectrum IV by Ellsworth Kelly, 1967 ................................................................. 78
Figure 3.3 Brown Monochrome by Ellsworth Kelly, 1949 .................................................... 78
Figure 3.4 Gauloise Blue with Red Curve by Ellsworth Kelly, 1954 ........................................ 79
Figure 3.5 Beauty Contest by Ellsworth Kelly, 1956 ............................................................. 79
Figure 3.6 Asbury Park by Ellsworth Kelly, 1956 ................................................................. 80
Figure 3.7 Paris by Ellsworth Kelly, 1974 ........................................................................... 80
Figure 3.8 Red, Yellow, Blue, Chateau d’Angers by Ellsworth Kelly, 1964 ......................... 81
Figure 3.9 Coucher de soleil - Simpson Bay (Torso) by Ellsworth Kelly, 1984 .............. 81
Figure 3.10 Swimming at Orient Beach by Ellsworth Kelly, 1984 ........................................ 82
Figure 3.11 Les quasi de Marigot (Chest) by Ellsworth Kelly, 1984 ..................................... 82
Figure 3.12 The Island and the Sand (Leg) by Ellsworth Kelly, 1984 ................................. 83
Figure 3.13 St. Maarten/Smile by Ellsworth Kelly, 1974 ..................................................... 83
Figure 3.14 New York/Smile by Ellsworth Kelly, 1974 ......................................................... 84
Figure 3.15 C by Amy Sillman, 2007 ................................................................................... 84
Figure 3.16 EK by Ellsworth Kelly, 1990 ............................................................................. 85
Figure 3.17 EK/Green by Ellsworth Kelly, 1990 ................................................................. 85
Figure 3.18 Jack I by Ellsworth Kelly, 1990 ......................................................................... 86
Figure 3.19 Jack II by Ellsworth Kelly, 1990 ....................................................................... 86
Figure 3.20 Jack III by Ellsworth Kelly, 1990 ..................................................................... 87
Figure 3.21 Jack/Blue by Ellsworth Kelly, 1990 ................................................................. 87
Figure 3.22 Jack/Grey by Ellsworth Kelly, 1990 ................................................................. 88
Figure 3.23 Jack/Red by Ellsworth Kelly, 1990 ................................................................. 88
Figure 3.24 EK/Spectrum I by Ellsworth Kelly, 1990 ...............................89
Figure 3.25 EK/Spectrum II by Ellsworth Kelly, 1990 .............................89
Figure 3.26 EK/Spectrum III by Ellsworth Kelly, 1990 .............................89
Figure 3.27 Jack/Spectrum by Ellsworth Kelly, 1990 ...............................90
Figure 3.28 Self-Portrait by Andy Warhol, 1986 .......................................90
Figure 3.29 Camouflage by Andy Warhol, 1986 .......................................91
Figure 4.1 Austin by Ellsworth Kelly, 2015 ..............................................91
Figure 4.2 Hôtel Saint-Georges, Paris (Self-Portrait) by Ellsworth Kelly, 1948 ..........................................................92
Figure 4.3 Èglise, Marly by Ellsworth Kelly, 1944 .......................................92
Figure 4.4 First page of Ellsworth Kelly’s journal listing places to visit in Europe, 1948.......93
Figure 4.5 Drawings from 12th Century Manuscripts by Ellsworth Kelly, 1948 ..................93
Figure 4.6 Mother and Child by Ellsworth Kelly, 1949 ..............................94
Figure 4.7 Beatus of Saint-Sever, mid-11th century, MS la. 8878, f. 248 Bibliothèque national, Paris .................................................................94
Figure 4.8 North Rose Window, Chartres Cathedral, France, 13th c. .......................95
Figure 4.9 View of Abbaye du Thorman, Sanary-sur-Mer, France, 12-13th c. ..................95
Figure 4.10 Installation view of Stations of the Cross by Ellsworth Kelly, 2015 ...............96
Figure 4.11 Installation view of Stations of the Cross by Barnett Newman, 1960 ................96
Figure 4.12 Scenes from the Life of Christ by Ellsworth Kelly, 1949 .........................97
Figure 4.13 Study for Stations of the Cross by Ellsworth Kelly, 1987 .........................97
Figure 4.14 View of Austin amongst its architectural surroundings, Texas Statehouse in back, June 11, 2022 ..............................................................................98
Figure 4.15 Relief with Blue by Ellsworth Kelly, 1950 .................................................................98

Figure 4.16 Detail of Austin’s doors, June 11, 2022 ....................................................................99

Figure 4.17 Totem by Ellsworth Kelly, 2015 ...............................................................................99

Figure 4.18 Red Floor Panel by Ellsworth Kelly, 1992 .................................................................100

Figure 4.19 Detail of Austin’s ambient lighting system, June 11, 2022 .................................100

Figure 4.20 Details of Austin’s Stations of the Cross interacting with colored light, June 11, 2022
.........................................................................................................................................................101

Figure 4.21 Wide view of Austin’s eastern window featuring colored light, June 11, 2022 ......102

Figure 4.22 Pools of light at 11:10 AM and 11:37 AM, respectively, June 11, 2022 .............103

Figure 4.23 Light flooding Austin’s eastern window and interacting with interior, June 11, 2022
.........................................................................................................................................................104

Figure 4.24 An unknown visitor interacts with Austin’s colored light, June 11, 2022 ..........105

Figure 4.25 Author’s arm and hand casting a colored shadow on the apse wall of Austin, June 11,
2022..................................................................................................................................................106

Figure 4.26 An unknown couple sit in Austin’s western transept arm with the yellow window
illuminating the floor, June 11, 2022 ...............................................................................................107

Figure 4.27 View from interior of James Turrell’s The Color Inside, 2013, June 10, 2022 ......108
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................................................... ii

DEDICATION ........................................................................................................................................ iii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................................................................................... iv

LIST OF FIGURES ................................................................................................................................... vi

TABLE OF CONTENTS ........................................................................................................................... x

CHAPTER 1—INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................................. 1
  Literature Review ............................................................................................................................... 1
  Notes on Purpose and Intent .............................................................................................................. 7

CHAPTER 2—FRAMING THE UNFRAMABLE: CANONICAL REDRESS AND KELLY’S FORMALISM AS QUEER FORMALISM .................................................................................................................. 12
  Situating Kelly Amongst Modernist Formal Discourses ...................................................................... 13
  Defining Queer (and) Formalism for Kelly, Among (Post-)Minimalist Formal Discourses .................. 18
  Connecting the Fragments of Kelly’s Canonized Positionality ............................................................ 26

CHAPTER 3—MAKING ROOM FOR QUEER POSITIONALITY THROUGH QUEER VISUALITIES: KELLY’S WORK IN MEDI UMS OUTSIDE THE CANON ........................................................................ 28
  Pinpointing Kelly’s Standpoint ........................................................................................................... 29
  “Devine Qui Te L’Envoie?” Kelly’s Postcards: Queer Ephemera in Collage ....................................... 36
  Camouflaging the Human Visage: Kelly’s Warholian Dialectic .......................................................... 45

CHAPTER 4—KELLY’S AUSTIN (2015): SANCTIFYING THE (QUEER) FORMAL .......................................................................................................................... 51
  Kelly’s Affinities Beyond the Modern: Medieval Formalism ............................................................... 52
  A Pilgrimage to Kelly’s Temple of Color and Light: Austin’s Queer Formalism ............................... 57

CONCLUSION (FOR NOW…)—BEYOND FORM, LINE, AND COLOR .................................................. 65

SELECTED FIGURES .............................................................................................................................. 68

BIBLIOGRAPHY ................................................................................................................................. 109
CHAPTER 1—INTRODUCTION

*I think what we all want from art is a sense of fixity, a sense of opposing the chaos of daily living. This an illusion, of course. Canvas rots. Paint changes color. But you keep trying to freeze the world as if you could make it last forever. In a sense, what I've tried to capture is the reality of flux, to keep art an open, incomplete situation, to get at the rapture of seeing.*

-Ellsworth Kelly, 1996

... *we cannot escape the medium of our bodies, even as that medium has become increasingly described in terms of social construction, artifice, and performativity. Queerness and the medium are thus parallel. They never meet, but the path they carve out engenders an incredibly productive landscape for discussing identity and the visual arts.*

-William J. Simmons, 2013

Literature Review

This thesis, which explores the oeuvre and life of Ellsworth Kelly (1923-2015) through lenses of social histories and critical queer and feminist (art) theories, makes use of a variety of primary archival sources and documents, supplementary secondary sources, and tertiary digital sources. The foundation of this text ultimately rests on the author’s close, studied observations of a variety of work by Kelly at various museums and galleries ranging from prints and drawings, notes and sketches, to painting and sculpture—many of which have been photographed by the author and represented in the Selected Figures section at the end of this thesis. Works closely examined for the purposes of this project are held at the collection of the Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, Texas; The Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York; Matthew Marks Gallery, New York, New York; The National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge, Massachusetts; and the John Joseph Moakley United States Courthouse, Boston.

---


Massachusetts. Allowing one’s eyes to carefully study the nuances of Kelly’s work at length is essential to informing an understanding of its intricacies.

Scholarly articles and theses were sourced from online academic databases such as JSTOR and EBSCO; however, the primary literary sources consulted for this thesis stemmed from monographic books published on various Kelly projects and exhibitions. Central among these sources are Carter E. Foster and Simone J. Wicha’s *Ellsworth Kelly: Austin* from 2019\(^3\) and 2021’s *Ellsworth Kelly: Postcards*, edited by Ian Berry.\(^4\) Each of these texts offers invaluable details, insights, and perspectives into both bodies of work that have now been posthumously realized and recognized—a fruitful pairing with the fresh, interpretative ends of this text. Taking up these bodies of work was essential in this project, as they each point to the expansive possibilities for fluidity in understanding an artist whose career as wholly expansive but oft viewed as monolithic in nature. Kelly’s *Austin* (2015) demonstrates the distillation of his foundational affinities for architecture, and the recent developments with his lifelong postcard collage practice, veiled by the artist himself from public eyes until their release by his foundation (the president of which is his life partner Jack Shear (b.1953)) in 2021, represents an exciting opportunity for the integration of a multitude of personal and conceptual considerations heretofore segregated from the artist’s public output.

Perspectives on Kelly within the art historical canon were also vital for assessing background that has informed this thesis’ new interpretative lens. E.C. Goossen’s 1973

---


publication for the Museum of Modern Art is cited in nearly every body of research on the artist, and for good reason—it provides ways of viewing Kelly’s practice in terms of his biography beyond “formalist criticism alone.” Yet, it is often used to reinforce the issues this thesis seeks to reckon with, most notably the absence of considerations of the artist’s gay identity. Stemming from interviews with the artist, Goossen provides a view of Kelly: “he was, he says, a ‘loner’ who did not talk early or very much and even had a mild stutter into his teens—[his] independent character, both as a person and as an artist, was formed well before puberty.” This self-described characterization utters a faint whisper of a queer positionality, as Kelly, like all queer individuals during his time, were forced to hide their true sense of self.

Another view of Kelly consulted for this thesis comes from prolific art historian and critical art scholar Yve-Alain Bois, whose landmark essay for the text Ellsworth Kelly: the Years in France, 1849-1954 entitled Ellsworth Kelly in France: Anti-Composition in Its Many Guises seeks to further mediate Kelly’s Dream of Anonymity, articulated further in Bois’s 2013 lecture, with the artist’s formal practice and a consideration of his biography. This scholarship on the artist still finds itself stifled by similar limitations present in the Goossen text. Bois builds upon Goossen’s apt linking of Kelly’s exposure to camouflage during his service in the 603rd

---

6 Ibid., 10.
Engineers Camouflage Battalion during the summer of 1945: “military camouflage, which is, after all, a visual art. This involvement with form and shadow, with the construction and destruction of the visible, was a basic part of his education as an artist.” Bois’s perspective on Kelly’s formal anonymity (the artist’s use of surface to remove any indication of his own hand, the removal of the observed subject, etc.) is posited through a matrix of Kelly’s self-described artistic visuality and mode of image making which rests among modern and contemporary art historical developments and discourses, but does not navigate beyond these confines. Surely there are possibilities for viewing these aspects of Kelly’s practice in a different light? This thesis seeks to chart these new horizons for understandings beyond the canon.

As a roadmap for navigating the ruins of Kelly’s afterlife, a phrase referring to the act of redressing canonical discourses and its impact on/legacies after an artist’s death, Stuart Y. Steck’s expansive doctorate dissertation from 2008, *Veiling the Subject: Ellsworth Kelly and the Discourses of Modernism*, was instructive for this research. To address the stagnation of Kelly scholarship “in terms of its methodological approach to the artist’s oeuvre,” Steck weaves a rich sociohistorical tapestry mending Kelly’s formal concerns directly with his lived experiences as a gay man during the mid-late 20th century—the later of which being an aspect of the artist omitted from prior scholarship. A then-Doctoral Candidate in Philosophy, Steck’s thesis and its implications for Kelly scholarship are discussed at length, with his emphasis on Kelly’s gay positionality wholeheartedly embraced within the theoretical scope of this project. Steck’s contributions to scholarship on Kelly should be celebrated for its drawing of a direct line

---


11 Stuart Y. Steck, “Veiling the Subject: Ellsworth Kelly and the Discourses of Modernism” (Boston University, 2008), 2.
between the artist’s sense of self outside of his practice, informed by its material and historical realities, with his pursuit of anonymity, subject veiling, and austerity via abstraction. This thesis seeks to take Steck’s findings further still by squaring them with the artist’s articulated affinities towards modernist artists (and the medieval) and their legacies by dissecting the role of formalism itself both within and outside of Kelly’s practice.

Formalism, defined here in the author’s terms to demonstrate its conceptual use within this study, is an umbrella term referencing any decision an artist makes when engaging with their preferred medium. Formal elements comprise works of art, such as color, form, line, shape, space, perspective, among others. The practice of visually probing a work’s formal elements to elucidate meaning (i.e., formal analysis) is baked into nearly all art historical analysis. Form does, ultimately, still inform meaning, but, as will be discussed in the coming chapter and across this thesis, whose looking matters. Dianne Harris’s and D. Fairchild Ruggles’s notion in their 2007 essay *Landscape and Vision* that the “Study of the ways people see is as important as studying the objects of the view,” inform this study’s critical examination of formalism both as it was used at the outset of Kelly’s career and its legacy across canonized understandings of his oeuvre.

This brings the review to an essay underlying one of the central lines of inquiry present in this text—the notion of a queer formalism. Scholar, curator, and feminist art historian William J. Simmons’s 2013 *Notes on Queer Formalism* provided an immense degree of inspiration for the critical spirit embodied within this thesis. Simmons’s reckons with the legacy of

---


Greenbergean-style formalism (referring to mid-20th century critic Clement Greeenberg’s (1909-1994) emphasis on painterly style imparting an internal meaning, something that will be explored further in the coming chapter) through a post-structuralist framework that gestures towards the immense need within artistic scholarship to see beyond the frame. As will be discussed at length, Kelly’s abstractions insist viewers do just that. Given Simmons’s examination of figure painters in his essay, it may seem like an unlikely pairing; however, Simmons insists that, by embracing queer forces of indeterminacy and paradox, art historians can gain a widened perspective on the role their own biographies play in shaping their research and writing—forces that have or will ultimately go on to shape the canon.

As with the definition of *formalism* provided above, a preliminary definition of *queer* ought to be established forthwith, though it should be noted that both terms will be explored in relationship to Kelly in the proceeding chapter. Like *formalism*, *queer* is an umbrella term, and the definition offered here will be in the author’s own terms for conceptual clarity and consistency. Queer can refer to anything non-normative. Queer theory challenges prevailing systems, structures, and binaries. Queer has historically been used as a homophobic slur hurled at members of the LGBTQ+ community (meaning a pejorative towards one’s non-normative sexual or gender identity); in recent years it has been reclaimed by LGBTQ+ individuals for its capacity as an all-encompassing identity moniker, for its openness and fluidity. Linking queerness to medium requires a view of queerness as it “‘represents’ an unsure mixture of singular embodiment and a passionate ownership of one’s identity with the refusal of singularity. So too does the medium.”

---

14 Ibid.
Coupling formalism with queer within the context of Kelly gives power to the immiscibility of his depicting, but requires one accept the immiscibility of his visuality.

Other notable sources consulted for this thesis include text and video interviews with Kelly, which offer unique insights into the artist’s ways of seeing himself.\(^\text{15}\) Joan Holladay’s\(^\text{16}\) lecture on Kelly and Romanesque Churches was also vital in demonstrating the material connections between the artist and the art historical canon prior to modernity explored in his work at Austin (2015), along with an understanding of his expansive architectural affinity.\(^\text{17}\)

**Notes on Purpose and Intent**

Simmon’s text lights the path for the formal structure of this thesis. Less about the destination than the journey, this project is comfortable amongst paradox and liminality—seeking further questions instead of offering concrete, final solutions. It acknowledges that there is no way of removing one’s own positionality from their interactions with their medium of choice, and embraces the fact that the perspective of a queer art historian is corporeally connected to the findings presented here. As a result, this thesis does not claim to provide a “definitive” way of seeing Kelly’s personhood or oeuvre—there is no such reality. It merely is an attempt to rectify a

---


\(^{16}\) Joan Holladay is a professor of the history of art and architecture at the University of Texas at Austin, the home institution for Kelly’s chapel.

\(^{17}\) Kelly & Romanesque Churches - Blanton Museum of Art Lunchtime Lecture Series, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bjKqdENH10A.
part of the artist that has been widely left out of the purview of their scholarship, as was
highlighted in the previous literature review. Discourse is infinite, and so is the self. Before
outlining this thesis’ structure, the author would like to briefly explain their experience in
approaching this research subject.

A major theme this project establishes in relationship to Kelly is the notion of self-
regulatory concealment to obscure and protect the body from, in this case, violent
heteronormativity. For Kelly, the majority of his life and career occupied a time and place wherein
LGBTQ+ individuals did not, could not face their world with openness. Homophobia was
systematically codified and sociopolitically reinforced at a cultural level. Stating this fact is not
meant to assert Kelly’s art or his formal style owe the entirety of their development as a result of
navigating these negative forces, but it is a scholar’s task to develop new and enriching
understandings via research and thoughtful critical thinking; seeing Kelly’s life and career without
a tangible and direct consideration of his identity has provided nothing especially new or
particularly useful.

A queer individuals’ decision to conceal their identity is entirely their own. Given the
heated contemporary sociopolitical climate for LGBTQ+ individuals, especially transgender and
nonbinary folks, in the United States, the author here has had to move past their own comfort in the
art historical discipline—rejecting their own self-veiling in order to directly take up a critical
assessment of art history’s structural heteronormativity. Of course, this is an impossible task for
one individual, thus the focus on one specific artist. The author’s affinity for Kelly is longstanding,
and the communal link felt upon learning of the artist’s identity lit the flame for compiling the
scholarship presented in this thesis. In order to determine Kelly’s visuality and positioned
understandings within the canon in this fashion, one must also reject the tendency to veil their positionality as a scholarly researcher/writer.

The following chapter takes up the task of surveying the art historical landscape at the outset of Kelly’s career, touching on formalisms’ role in the late modern movement of Abstract Expressionism, minimalism, and post-minimalism. Determining approximate degrees of difference between Kelly and the former two art historical periods, it is determined that post-minimalism is an apt categorical moniker for Kelly. This chapter posits Kelly’s formalism as *queer formalism*.

Chapter three utilizes this interpretive framework, deploying it towards an examination of Kelly’s nearly career long postcard collage practice and a self-portrait print series from 1990 in order to probe Kelly’s personal and artistic visualities. Chapter four explores Kelly’s queer formalism through the lens of his architectural affinity with his work in *Austin* (2015)—the artist’s final work and only piece of standalone architecture. Chapter five strives to mend the fragments of Kelly’s personal and artistic fragments, acknowledging the fluidity still present in his oeuvre by reckoning with the undeterminability of his artistic legacy—queer theory and feminist art historical scholarship allows us to use formalism to see beyond its emphasis on form, line, and color.

It can certainly be maintained that the biographical considerations of Kelly’s life as they pertain to his practice ought to remain in such a canonized fashion, as these were generally promulgated in the artist’s own terms; however, this text, in the thematic spirit of Steck’s dissertation and Simmons’s essay, begs scholars to reconsider. Yes, Kelly likely did *not* wish for his body of work to be viewed in such terms as these—he actively sought to erase himself from his work as much as possible. Yet, the corporeal links between his artistic output and sense of
self remain abundantly present; the implications of such creative acts deserve space for fluid understandings.

Unlike the scholars mentioned in the literature review, the privilege of conversing with the artist himself for the purposes of this project was not an option due to Kelly’s passing in 2015; what Kelly would think of this thesis’ approach is unknown. Does Kelly’s opinion on or approval of this critical perspective necessarily matter? The answer is an emphatic no. This thesis seeks to piece together the fragments of Kelly’s fragments—his way of seeing his socially mediated self, his realities across time, and, most importantly, the ways in which these cohabitative forces commingle and form dialectics across his way of depicting. It represents a case study of sorts for how the identities of LGBTQ+ artists are routinely minimized within the canon and its self-reinforcing systems that persist in its heteronormativity. Not even the foregrounding of identity and political realities by contemporary LGBTQ+ artists can seem to save them from such erasure, as Felix Gonzalez-Torres (1957-1996), for example, has faced a similar fate in recent memory. This thesis is a plea to the art historical community to recognize the active role it plays in preserving and maintaining its own discourse, and demonstrates its capacity for change. Critically addressing Kelly’s afterlives will help the discipline move in that direction.

---


The liberatory burden, a contradictory phrase used to demonstrate the contradictory nature of formalism for Ellsworth Kelly, as will be demonstrated, rests in the artist’s embrace of a modernist artistic spirit as a means for personal artistic liberation, while simultaneously bearing the weight of and rising beyond his (and our) generation’s heteronormativity. This thesis provides queer ways of seeing Kelly’s queer ways of depicting, and challenges readers to look behind and beyond—to look, and look again. With these preliminary particulars established, it is time to begin looking.
CHAPTER 2—FRAMING THE UNFRAMABLE: CANONICAL REDRESS AND KELLY’S FORMALISM AS QUEER FORMALISM

Kelly used the very language of high modernism as a means of ‘passing’ or ‘straight drag,’ thereby concealing his position as a gay male subject within the homophobic contexts of Cold War culture.

-Stuart Y. Steck, 2008

...sexuality is not something that must be constantly embodied by an artist. While it is a moral imperative to acknowledge gender and sexuality (the personal is political, and it always will be), the character of an artist must not be imprisoned by biography.

-William J. Simmons, 2013

A simple restating of Kelly’s biography would be an easy enough task; his time observing and sketching nature as a child, specifically birds, and his time abroad in Paris during WWII are essential to understanding the development of his formal style. This chapter seeks to determine the more opaque aspects of Kelly’s biography that have not been taken up by scholars outlined in the introduction and posit them as they pertain to queer formalism. More explicit excerpts from Kelly’s biography will also be developed across the remaining chapters. Critical theorist Barbara Heenstein Smith argues that “the process of ‘canonization’ typically acts like a filter, screening out potentially subversive meaning in favor of those themes that communicate a sense of both universality and transcendence,” this chapter argues that prior canonization of

20 Stuart Y. Steck, “Veiling the Subject: Ellsworth Kelly and the Discourses of Modernism” (Boston University, 2008), 60-2.


Kelly has done just that. Traditional perspectives on Kelly have served to negate his identity, though one must also grapple with the reality that the artist himself was, to some degree, responsible for such views in his attempt to remove his gay biography from the work.

The sections in this chapter explore Kelly’s canonized positionality as it relates to formalism associated with late modernism, minimalism, and Post-Minimalism to demonstrate the heightened degrees of difference demonstrated in Kelly’s formalist practice. By connecting Kelly’s output to the former two art historical periods, this chapter provides an overview of the art historical landscape during these periods, and demonstrates the ways in which Kelly’s oeuvre rejects and ultimately queers such approaches. This foundation is necessary in building towards an interpretative queer formalist framework for the artist.

**Situating Kelly Amongst Modernist Formal Discourses**

This section demonstrates the artistic and historical force of formalism as it existed towards the end of modernism with the Abstract Expressionist movement into larger art historical canons surrounding minimalism at the beginning of post-modernism. How have Kelly’s minimal abstractions been situated among other artistic developments from these periods? How does his oeuvre bear the heteronormative impact of these formal discourses? To what (queer) ends does his output reach?

As artists began moving more radically towards nonfigurative abstraction in the 20th century, the growing insistence by those steering the art market, namely critic Clement Greenberg (1909-1995), towards the end of modernism’s reign (a phrase used here to emphasize Greenberg’s synonymity with late modernism, as well as his ultimate falling out of favor as a
critic, i.e., his own reign) delivered the New York School of Abstract Expressionism (AbEx). Artists associated with this movement like Mark Rothko and Jackson Pollock (Figures 2.1 and 2.2) deployed their signature colorfield and action painting techniques, respectively, to illuminate what they perceived as the emotional universalities underpinning the human psyche and experience. These schools of formalist abstraction are categorically not related to Kelly’s approach (Figure 2.3), but represent important distinctions amongst formalism as an evolving (art) historical force during his life and career. Kelly’s formalism combines color and form as one, inextricably linked, unitary force. To understand the heteronormative weight present within these art historical contexts and their impact on Kelly’s life and artistic career, one need look no further than Greenberg’s legacy.

Simmons takes up this task by addressing Greenberg’s emphasis on internal meaning within his heralding of gestural abstraction as seen in the works of AbEx artists noted above. To recall this thesis’ introduction: who’s looking matters. Simmons directs our attention to formalism as it existed prior to and for Greenberg and his followers:

If the medium is the “essence” of the art object, its internal logic, it becomes a sort of aesthetic identity politics. Formalism’s investment in the medium has, throughout art history, suffered from a limited historical awareness and a tendency to privilege normative patriarchal values. Clement Greenberg’s assessment of Jackson Pollock… is exemplary of the mid-century valorization of medium specificity and artistic heroism. Paint became analogous with the (straight, masculine) psyche of the artist, his authority to express himself.


If those doing the looking, the asserting, and the determining of what *is* art and what *is not* art seek to view and assert such deterministic ends through their own, heterosexual internal logic, there is nothing to stop them from grafting a similar reading onto an art object that quite literally exists outside of themselves. There is no question about which group of individuals held (critical) power during this time in history.

To bring this point into further context, in *Avant-Garde and Kitsch*, published in 1939, Greenberg posits his manifesto for what he sees as the righteous coming of non-objective abstraction (stylistic approaches central to the later AbEx movement), an avant-garde artistic force that would save art from degradation by consumerist, kitsch, low culture.⁷⁷ What Greenberg’s heterosexual hubris as a critic maintained throughout the fluid and indeterminant mid-century transition between AbEx, minimalism, and pop art demonstrates is his inability to see beyond the confines of himself and his machismo. According to Shannon Lee, Greenberg: maintain[ed] the exclusion of anyone who wasn’t male or lived outside of New York. The poet Frank O’Hara, who was openly gay, was appalled by the rampant homophobia on display at The Cedar—the notorious AbEx hangout in New York’s Greenwich Village. Lee Krasner, one of the movements most influential painters (also Jackson Pollock’s wife), found the bar to be unbearable: “I loathed the place,” she said, “the women were treated like cattle.”⁷⁸ The critic tried staving off the inevitable decline of his credence within the art world for as long as possible, but his elitist perspective ultimately fell out of favor. He rejected the coming openness embraced by queer artists such as Warhol, seeing pop art as nothing more than a

---


“minor”29 blimp on his perceived radar of artistic good taste—reinforcing and solidifying formalism’s structural heteronormativity. Kelly and his contemporaries, in their unwavering artistic commitment to exploring the formal qualities and limits of abstraction, bear this legacy.

Additionally, it is worth making note of Greenberg’s own attempt to classify, categorize, and curate work by Kelly and his contemporaries, a task the critic took up in his 1964 exhibition for the Los Angeles County Museum of Art where he heralded in what he named *Post-Painterly Abstraction*. The clear, negative implications of such a categorizing were immediately picked up by critics of the exhibition, including the noted Kelly scholar John Coplans in his 1964 teardown of Greenberg’s offerings for *Artforum*:

he has structured the exhibition to assert a personal notion of style; that is, to reveal what in his opinion the major ambitious art after Abstract Expressionism ought to look like and what means it ought to employ to gain this look. For this purpose he goes to quite arbitrary and absurd lengths to lend credence to this view. Whatever means Abstract Expressionism employed, the new style, it seems, demands the employment of the opposite in reaction to its excesses. Abstract Expressionism was loose; the new style is tight. Abstract Expressionism revealed brushstrokes; the new style conceals them….Thus any abstract painter—good, bad or indifferent—who shows at least one or more of the latter characteristics is included.30

Greenberg’s designation purports to stand in categorical contrast to everything his “Painterly Abstraction” (AbEx) represented, inaccurately positing that these artists are reacting against these developments. Greenberg’s inability to “get” Kelly and his contemporaries represents the limitations of his insistence on a certain type of formalism and the need to move past its confines.

---

29 *Clement Greenberg on Pop Art*, n.d., https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZN8uvz0JD5Q.

This is not to say Coplans’s critique is without fault, as he designates Kelly’s approach as “post-cubist,” an early indication of the typecasting Kelly would undergo as his career took off, further lending the baggage of a different type modernist formalism and its discourse to the canonization of Kelly. Donald Judd made the same connection, as will be noted in the following section. Simmons directs us to understand that “Queer is within and outside the masculinist, homophobic confines of our world, phenomena to which the art object is not immune.” Kelly’s objects are not immune either. (Figure 2.4) The linking of his practice with the art historical developments that predated him by critics and scholars bears fruit (as we will see with Austin), but has drastically impacted the ability for his scholarship to navigate into new and uncharted areas.

In examining distinct bodies of Kelly’s work, it will ultimately be determined that the artist’s formalism categorically differs and extends from beyond the scope of modernist formalism, while being wholly indebted to a modernist spirit, itself fraught by discourse stemming from its purported universalities—carrying such forward to his passing in 2015. In confronting the hegemonic aesthetics of minimal art and its particularities by rooting his practice in formalism derived from the observable (i.e., “real world”), Kelly mediated the gap between modernism’s mantra of “art for art’s sake” and minimalism’s insistence on “form for form’s sake.” What, then, does minimalist art tell us about Kelly’s queer formalism?

**Defining Queer (and) Formalism for Kelly, Among (Post-)Minimalist Formal Discourses**

Considering what it means for something or someone to be queer means an equal effort must be made towards a consideration of their/its inherent contradictions, for queer exists as a

---

contradiction itself. Simmons notes the importance of recognizing that analyzing queerness and its relationship with the formal can never amount to a finite, definitive answer, as it inherently intangible.32 *Queer formalism:*

is a paradox. Formalism requires the centrality of an object, whereas queer rejects authorship and universal concepts. Queer subverts singularity while the medium requires it. To find meaning in the internal factors of the medium is to invest in its selfhood, its ability to signify. But isn't this what queer accomplishes? Is this not what we have fought for—the ability to express one’s self, to speak, to be legible to others as a unified agent? Queer rejects unification, however. It advocates for a “queer subject” while attacking the notion of “subjecthood.” Where is the balance?33

It is the second sentence in this excerpt from Simmons’s essay that is of importance to this discussion on Kelly’s queer formalism. For the artist, object centrality, derived from the quotidian, is key towards an understanding of his practice (Figure 2.5); Kelly’s rejection of authorship rests in his obfuscating and disguising of the precise sources/context of his content, and the surface/finely considered craftsmanship of his work reject the universalities associated with modernist schools of formalism—Kelly’s objects merely are.34

This characterization of Kelly’s oeuvre is not to position it towards the same ends of Minimalists as they were for Donald Judd, Tony Smith, and Robert Morris (Figures 2.6, 2.7, and 2.8), though some scholars have found fertile grounds within the practices of these artists for

32 “The move toward queer formalism… cannot be fully explained in a single article or one analytical lens. It is my hope here to offer a set of disjointed thoughts that will coalesce into a question or a basis for further investigation, but never an answer.” William J. Simmons, “Notes on Queer Formalism,” *Big Red and Shiny*, December 16, 2013, http://bigredandshiny.org/2929/notes-on-queer-formalism/.


analysis through queer lenses.\textsuperscript{35} For the purposes of this project, the goals set forth in their commitment to particular aesthetic properties by these Minimal artists bears some important connections with Kelly, namely the removal of the artist’s hand, but non-referential his minimal abstractions are not—as will be demonstrated throughout this thesis. Kelly’s minimalist practice inhabits both the external (his veiling of the figure through an abstract lens opens the door for individualized viewer interaction, as the subject depicted is removed from its moorings) and the internal (his decision to depict form derived from the observable eschews the “purely” formal creations of Minimalists like Judd and others who actively sought to break from such relations, though, it is worth pointing out that these “pure” formal creations were derived from conceptual systems devised by these artists like Judd themselves, i.e., internal nonetheless).

Presenting this information, then, is not to canonize Kelly as a Minimalist. He, and indeed the Minimal artists named above, never characterized his practice in such terms, which is why this project seeks to root an understanding in terms of formalism first and foremost. Yet doing so in the context of Kelly continues to present inherent contradictions similar to the previous point of discussion. Formalism extends to all artists, across all times, in reference to their decisions in interacting with their medium of choice.

\textsuperscript{35} David Getsy is one such scholar: “Out of this mix of influences, I found myself engaged with what, at first, might seem like camp’s antithesis—Minimalism. What could gray polyhedrons and steel plexi boxes say to queer politics? For me, it was in the tactic they shared: the outright refusal of the rules of convention and medium (‘neither painting nor sculpture’), the hyperbolic performance of those rules as a means of critique or parody, and—most of all—the shift of emphasis from maker to user. Even through there seemed to be little queer politics in Minimalism, I realized I could draw queer politics out of Minimalism, according to its own logic… there is something powerful in Minimalism’s move of denying the artist’s hand and the concomitant refuels of the artwork as an autographic expression of the artist’s psychology or, indeed, as referential in any way. Instead, Judd, Andre, Morris, et al., opened the meaning of the sculptural encounter to viewers and their real-time spatial and bodily relations.” Jennifer Doyle and David J. Getsy, “Queer Formalisms: Jennifer Doyle and David Getsy in Conversation.,” \textit{Art Journal} 72, no. 4 (Winter 2013): 58–71, 62.
The topic of color is another central item for this discussion on Kelly’s formalism as queer formalism, for his trademark dynamism owes much of its effectiveness to his keen eye as a master colorist. With regard to his use of color (Figure 2.9), Kelly stated:

I came back [from France] in 1954, and I think I brought back a different kind of color. If you think of Rothko and Barney Newman, of course they were great colorists—very different, though. Rothko was more muted, and I felt my color came from Kandinsky and, say, 1912 Léger. He was painting color when Picasso and Braque were doing gray. So my first show back in the United States was half the early pictures, and it was just too bright for everyone.36

Kelly may have produced work alongside minimal artists, he was close friends with Agnes Martin; however, his practice was informed by earlier art historical developments independent of those concerns of minimalists like Judd,37 outside from what was noted above, though those concerns can more holistically be attributed to artists’ responses to the crisis of painting after modernism in the age of mechanical reproduction.38 Kelly, at least at the outset of his career in the U.S. articulated above, clearly felt his use of color maintained some degree of difference from the prevailing formalist stylistic trends (i.e., queer).

Art historical movements became a tricky and generally messy force to pinpoint and cohesively conceptualize following modernism, too, and Kelly’s canonization across time bears witness to this. He is most commonly associated with color field and geometric, hard-edge abstraction, though his commitment to naturalism seems to resist the latter. Artists associated


with hard-edge painting, like Al Loving or Al Held (Figures 2.10, 2.11, and 2.12) produced work certainly more stringently related to both formal realms, with Loving demonstrating a more overt interest in geometry through his rigid systems. Donald Judd seemed to contradict himself by declaring Kelly to be, at the time, “one of the best painters in their thirties,” before determining that: “‘Hard-edge-painting,’ primarily defined by Ellsworth Kelly’s work, is mainly old abstraction. It employs the new scale and simplicity, though somewhat abridged, and has some of the new specificity of color but also uses the old abstract space, composition, and color.” The art historical forces that delivered Kelly’s art to the world could be investigated and discussed ad infinitum. Formalism does not belong to one art historical movement nor to any one precise deployment by any one specific artist.

39 Both artists also associated with the Ab. Ex. movement.

40 In considering Kelly’s specific relationship with Geometric Abstraction in general, Kelly stated: “When I was in Paris in the early fifties, I felt that I was on to something quite different from the kind of geometric abstraction that had happened earlier and was still current in France. There was a while school of geometric artists who had developed from the Constructivists; to avoid it I felt I had to turn about-face from this and do something else.” Mark Rosenthal, Artists at Gemini G.E.L.: Celebrating the 25th Year (New York: Abrams, 1993), 79.


42 Author’s emphasis; recall Coplans’s observations on page 17.


44 Though he would go on to make the qualifier in a later note from 1969 that “I haven’t changed my mind about the paintings I was writing about, the Arpish ones, but Kelly’s later rectangular paintings are another case. At the time I had seen only one early sectional rectangular painting in a Green Gallery show but didn’t know there were more like it and took it for a fluke.” See: Donald Judd, “Barnett Newman,” in Donald Judd Writings (New York: David Zwirner Books, 1964), 152–59, 159.

45 As Judd stated in his essay Specific Objects: “movements no longer work; also, linear history has unraveled somewhat.” See: Donald Judd, “Specific Objects” (New York: David Zwirner Books, 1964), 134–45, 136.
Kelly’s formalist practice is rooted in seeing color and form as being forces which playfully inform one another (Figure 2.13). They cannot exist outside of each other. Kelly’s style was influenced by the modern (though his understanding of art history extended far beyond), is interested in the post-modern, and exists in the contemporary. Simmons states that:

queer is both immaterial and corporeal. It is conceptual and reliant on the medium. It is deconstructive and authorial. It is the Self and the Other, together in perpetuity but not mapped onto each other. It is a multiplicity of media that lack a hierarchy, but it is not post-medium. The oeuvre of the queer formalist, like queerness itself, is invested in the interspace between and among paradoxes.46

Kelly was invested in depicting the interface between and among the paradoxes of seeing and of being seen, and it proved to be fertile grounds for artistic exploration across his gestalten career. To that end, it is also worth exploring Kelly in the context of Post-Minimalism—a phrase bearing discursive weight here, as it reaches across several art historical periods, movements, and broad developments.47 For the purposes of this project, the discussion will be kept to a short aside.

The term was first coined by noteworthy historian, critic, and curator Robert Pincus-Witten in 1971.48 Those familiar with Pincus-Witten’s writings in this area are likely not surprised that his scholarship would be folded into the conversation of this thesis following the discussion thus far; Post-Minimalism, Pincus-Witten notes, applies to “grandly disenfranchised sectors of the community—blacks, gays, women.”49 Applying this term to those specific groups


was in response to minimalism’s exclusionary tendencies stemming from the heteronormativity of those at its supposed forefront.

Kelly himself also directly articulated the degrees of formal stylistic difference he felt in relationship to minimalism, and explicitly Judd:

I feel like I could compare my sculptures with let’s say Minimalism. Like [Donald] Judd’s pieces are very finished. Boxes. They are a finished statement. And I feel that I don’t want my pieces necessarily to be statements. I want them to be fluid, somehow, to relate to all the elements around them. I don’t want them to be an end in themselves. You understand that?\textsuperscript{50}

Kelly’s articulated sentiments here reflect not only his embrace of flux and openness in a manner minimal artists did not, but demonstrate why Kelly’s practice extends beyond the movement’s scope. Still, Kelly clearly maintains an affinity towards minimal art’s relational, gestalten spatial qualities, among others, and the dialectic between Kelly’s output and minimal aesthetics persists. What scholars choose to make of this stylistic interplay as a result—whether or not they acknowledge Kelly’s articulated desire for the (queer) forces of fluidity against the grain of minimalists like Judd—will ultimately determine how or what formalist analysis renders. Scholars can see Kelly’s art objects or they can see elements lying around and beyond them.

In a manner similar to Greenberg, Donald Judd’s stature as both a minimal artist and a critical writer allowed him to exert a certain degree of heteronormativity over the rest of the art world. Critic Pepe Karmel noted in 1995 that: “the grids and cubes of 1960’s Minimalists like Frank Stella, Robert Morris and Donald Judd were inherently masculine forms: thinly disguised

symbols of the oppressive military-industrial complex.”\textsuperscript{51} While the nuances of Karmel’s observations on minimalism’s heteronormativity may seem a bit dated (Stella’s work in particular has changed drastically since the ’90s; he was also a close friend of Kelly), there is no question about the degree of machismo and critical exclusion shared between straight critics like Greenberg and Judd—hence the need to characterize these varying approaches to minimal art with a term such as Post-Minimalism.

Central figures examined by Pincus-Witten through his lens of Post-Minimalism\textsuperscript{52} include artists such as Eva Hesse and Richard Serra. For the former, in works such as \textit{Repetition Nineteen III} from 1968 (Figure 2.14), she adhered to the gestalten cohesiveness of minimalist art (see Judd’s \textit{100 Works in Milled Aluminum}, Figure 2.15) towards a “a newfound consideration of themes and media previously deemed too feminist, or ‘soft,’ according to the Minimalist canon.”\textsuperscript{53,54} Serra’s work such as \textit{Untitled (Corner Prop Piece)} from 1969 and \textit{Equal} from 2015 (Figures 2.16 and 2.17) are viewed as Post-minimal due to their emphasis on process,\textsuperscript{55} while his use of raw materials such as lead and steal demonstrate a connection to the broader material interests stemming from the lineage of Minimalism.


\textsuperscript{54} Would Kelly’s use of naturalistic curve across his oeuvre, for example, be considered in similar terms within a similar framework?

In an essay for *Artforum*’s November 1971 issue, which coincidentally features Kelly’s *Two Panels: Blue with Small Red* from 1970 (Figure 2.18) along with a review of his new paintings, Pincus-Witten, in tracing Hesse’s use of Post-Minimalist aesthetics towards the sublime, notes:

In the recent past Post-Minimalism was occasionally referred to as “Anti-Minimalism”—a name which strikes a false note because it engenders a notion of “Maximalism” (whatever that might be)—but equally because it in no way suggests the complexities of option which Minimalism rendered possible, new solutions toward which several Minimalist artists themselves evolved. Robert Morris and Robert Smithson are cases in point. Post-Minimalism is preferable nomenclature—in much the same way as we say “Post-Impressionism”—because it covers a multitude of possibilities, from process-oriented experience to an art of purely intellective activity such as we can find in the Conceptualist movement.\(^56\)

Demonstrating the breadth of Post-Minimalism’s artistic capacity in this quote, Pincus-Witten’s scholarship in this arena provides the necessary foundation for the remainder of this project.

Kelly often presented as a monolithic figure whose style and approach to art making encompasses the areas discussed throughout this thesis thus far, yet his work as a Post-Minimalist and his exploratory probing of and tangible grasp on a variety of artistic mediums and techniques towards varied ends resists these ridged categorizations and points to the interpretative possibilities within a critical feminist art historical framework maintained by this thesis.

**Connecting the Fragments of Kelly’s Canonized Positionality**

Kelly’s oeuvre is as dynamic as his abstractions, and, while his identity as a gay man does not constitute solid enough grounds to canonize his formalism as *queer* formalism—queerness,

---

in fact, rejects the stability of identity—it does clearly manifest across his body of work. What’s more, his positionality as a gay man during a time when such was met with violent, institutionalized disapproval and the role served during his enlistment in the U.S. armed forces certainly do pertain to his formalist tendencies. The ways in which these social forces cohabitate and form dialectics across the span of Kelly’s working life are largely disregarded within the art historical canon, by Bois and others, as seemingly irrelevant. In using the queer formalist framework established in this section, in conjunction with often overlooked elements of Kelly’s personal history, the remainder of this project seeks to change this misrepresentation of the artist’s career, as well as his legacy.

If post-modernism’s “goal” was to decenter and diffuse internal meaning found in the output of modernists, Kelly toed that line across six decades. Modernist formalism reached for the eternal, for minimal artists, the external—formalism for its own sake. And what do Kelly’s forms suggest? Not the relational, obdurate weight of heteronormative masculinity, but rather the desire to render the observational as unintelligible (Figure 2.19) (relational referring not only to the gestalten formal qualities of minimalist art, but the ways in which heterosexual masculinity maintains its organized order in relation to outwardly imposing a degree of otherness
generate57).58

This is the notion at the crux of this project’s argument: the idea that what makes Kelly’s work queer is not that the artist himself was, though, as will be discussed in the coming section, his positionality certainly manifests to varying degrees across his oeuvre. Rather, this thesis


argues that the artist’s practice—defined in terms by Kelly himself in direct relation to formalism—serves as a force for connecting formalism and its transitory (modernist) spirit while evading singular categorization. Kelly embodied formalism to prove the manners in which, for himself, it could manifest beyond the shadowy haze of its purported universalities. Kelly queered formalism not only as it was known in a traditional sense, but in a manner which extended its reach to realms of queer positionality and visibility across post-modern and contemporary art historical periods. This act constitutes a *queer formalism*.

---

CHAPTER 3—MAKING ROOM FOR QUEER POSITIONALITY THROUGH QUEER VISUALITIES: KELLY’S WORK IN MEDIUMS OUTSIDE THE CANON

The basis for my painting was to find something away from personal art. I wanted something outside of myself, to get away from my personality... At that time, immediately after the war, all art seemed to me like something of the past and I wanted to get onto something new. I was searching for another way to compose a picture.

-Ellsworth Kelly, 1992

I always liked Ellsworth’s work, and that’s why I always painted a blank canvas. I loved that blank canvas thing and I wish I had stuck with the idea of painting the same painting like the soup can... When someone wanted one, you would just do another one. Does anybody do that now? Anyway, you do the same painting whether it looks different or not.

-Andy Warhol, 1981

This chapter seeks to support the assertion of Kelly’s formalism as queer formalism by examining several bodies of work that have either been examined historically by the art community or are now beginning to see new, interpretative light. This chapter continues to couple aesthetic, formal analysis with sources derived from art theories and queer scholarship, along with a consideration of the historical sociopolitical climate Kelly found himself working and living in. It will provide a clearer view of the artist as someone who was able to shed the historical burden of modernist formalism (whose shadow continues to persist as a force for heteronormative erasure) towards his aesthetic and personal liberation as a queer artist and individual via queer formalism.

---


Pinpointing Kelly’s Standpoint

Prior to engaging in an examination of specific pieces from Kelly’s oeuvre as they pertain to notions of the artist’s personal standpoint as a gay man, this section will attempt to redress the minimization of aspects of Kelly’s biography and gay positionality within the canon. Steck’s thesis on Kelly provides this vital biographical and sociohistorical context. In the epigraph for their introductory chapter, Steck explicitly grounds the outset of their research themes derived from critical feminist epistemologies. Quoting Michael Leja’s *Reframing Abstract Expressionism*:

Works of art are often sites where the issues or questions a community or culture finds urgent, fundamental, or troublesome are elaborated and negotiated… Visual representation is, consequently, a vehicle for the increase of knowledge, both scientific and nonscientific. But knowledge is ideological: what passes for knowledge at any given moment is radically conditioned by a complex of regnant interests, values, utilities. What may seem at first a pure discovery, an objective truth emergent in visual representation — linear perspective is a good example — is later revealed as a culturally specific, ideologically engaged, contingent construction.

The ways in which Steck uses this framework to elucidate fresh analytical views of Kelly’s artistic output are exemplary for the means of this project.

---

62 “Standpoint” referring to the feminist theory of standpoint epistemologies, or the notion that, according to Judith Lorber, knowledge is derived from one’s “view of the world from where you are located physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially” See: Judith Lorber, *Gender Inequality: Feminist Theories and Politics*, 4th ed (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 12. Joey Sprague emphasizes in their definition of standpoint its roots in social mediation, with knowledge being “achieved rather than obvious, a mediated rather than immediate understanding.” See: Joey Sprague, “Seeing through Science: Epistemologies,” in Feminist Methodologies for Critical Researchers: Bridging Differences, 2nd ed. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 32–62, 47.


64 “Kelly scholarship has remained fairly stagnant in terms of its methodological approach to the artist’s oeuvre.” See: Stuart Y. Steck, “Veiling the Subject: Ellsworth Kelly and the Discourses of Modernism” (Boston University, 2008), 2.
Steck’s thesis works towards an understanding or reading of Kelly’s oeuvre against the groundswell of critical literature from the arts community in similar terms to those outlined in previous sections, most centrally the notion that “Kelly’s canonical status is predicted upon a modernist myth; namely, the belief that his art operates within an autonomous realm of experience, and thus transcends both history and culture.”

Grounding their ideas in the literature of theorists such as Michel Foucault, among others, Steck strives to break from a traditional canonization of Kelly’s output by noting that “the very act of de-politicizing Kelly’s art is itself political. In fact, by repressing certain kinds of historical information, it binds us to those aspects of Kelly’s work that are most compelling.”

Reading Kelly’s body of work in a

---

65 Stuart Y. Steck, “Veiling the Subject: Ellsworth Kelly and the Discourses of Modernism” (Boston University, 2008), 6.

66 It is worth noting that “what passes for ‘knowledge’ and ‘truth’ should be viewed with a certain degree of skepticism, and we should be especially wary of those critical pronouncements that come wrapped in the guise of neutrality. This is a point that was made clear by Foucault, who warned that knowledge itself is always produced within specific system of power, and thus serves as an instrument of domination and control...In short, power asserts itself by producing modes of cultural discourse - whether social, [political, scientific, aesthetic, or juridical - that are both prescriptive and proscriptive in nature.” See: “Intellectuals and Power: A Conversation Between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze,” Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews, edited by Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 207-8. Quoted in: Stuart Y. Steck, “Veiling the Subject: Ellsworth Kelly and the Discourses of Modernism” (Boston University, 2008), 8.

67 Stuart Y. Steck, “Veiling the Subject: Ellsworth Kelly and the Discourses of Modernism” (Boston University, 2008), 11.
manner that eschews from centering formalism as it exists for ends associated with modernism\textsuperscript{68} demonstrates its liberatory capacity for the artist, “not only [allowing] him to enter into the authoritative discourse of high modernism, but [enabling] him to negotiate (and at times circumvent) issues of political power, artistic subjectivity, and sexual identity.”\textsuperscript{69}

This sociopolitical climate experienced by Kelly during the 1940s and ’50s was one of immense turmoil—grappling not only with the aftermath of the World War II, but the prosecutorial and hysterical environment of McCarthyism at the outset of the Cold War as well. During this time, Paris, where Kelly lived from 1948-1954 while serving under the G.I. Bill, offered a sanctuary for artists and queer individuals, shielding them from the uncertain landscape

\textsuperscript{68} Steck discusses the ways in which a traditional canonization of Kelly by the art historical community functions towards these normative ends, highlighting two such examples that, to the author here, humorously characterizes Kelly in terms which see it as guarding against the onslaught of radically new post-modern aesthetic sensibilities and perceived commercialization, seen as a threat by the respective authors. Critic Barbara Rose characterized Kelly’s work: “[I]n today’s context of moral confusion and aesthetic chaos, Kelly speaks to us of fundamental values we see gradually eroding, in a voice of unequivocal clarity and authority we seldom hear in our sermons or speeches, or for that matter in our vast cultural production of dizzy nonsense and obfuscating jargon. Ellsworth Kelly’s art, in its rigor, self-abnegation and clarity reflects what America was supposed to be, not what is has become. That this vision of America exists at all keeps alive the hope that our embattled culture may still be redeemable.” Art historian James Meyer is quoted by Steck as canonizing Kelly: “To this day, Kelly works against prevailing tends: a painter of formal and esthetic intent carrying on at a moment when content suppresses form. In the face of painting’s current enervation, Kelly continues to persevere, making a case for the medium’s vitality by producing work that is insistently his alone.” See: James Meyer, “Unfashionably Late,” \textit{Artforum} (October 1996): 95, 139. Barbara Rose, “Ellsworth Kelly’s New Paintings: The Search for Reasonable Order,” \textit{Ellsworth Kelly: Curves/Rectangles}, exh. cat. (New York: Blum Helman Gallery, 1989), n.p. Quoted in: Stuart Y. Steck, “Veiling the Subject: Ellsworth Kelly and the Discourses of Modernism” (Boston University, 2008), 4-6.

\textsuperscript{69} Stuart Y. Steck, “Veiling the Subject: Ellsworth Kelly and the Discourses of Modernism” (Boston University, 2008), 14.
further west. Steck most centrally explores the impact of this context on Kelly’s formulation of his aesthetic sensibilities and artistic voice as being intrinsically linked; Kelly himself would describe his practice in a 2008 interview as not being impervious to resting in dialogue with the sociopolitical context of its creation—describing his black and white paintings during that time (Figure 3.1) as being in reaction to the U.S.’s war with Iraq. Despite this, Kelly certainly did not readily engage in such discussions around identity and the ways in which it imprinted itself across his oeuvre, however, “it is important to remember that he did not live in a vacuum. Nor was he immune to the demands and exigencies of postwar society. If anything, his tendency to steer clear of both personal matters and political issues can be traced back to the

---


71 Artist Al Held was also in Paris on the G.I. Bill and recounted his time there as being “the most liberating time of my life. Paris was a free-association graduate school … We felt we were part of a movement.” See: Merle Schipper, *Americans in Paris: The 50s*, n.p. Quoted in: Stuart Y. Steck, “Veiling the Subject: Ellsworth Kelly and the Discourses of Modernism” (Boston University, 2008), 19.


73 To quote from Kelly’s interview with VernissageTV, an internet-based, artist-run “TV art project,” at Art Basel Switzerland conducted in 2008: [Interviewer]: “You mentioned war, and I read the two words: serious and disciplined together with your work. I mean if you would say, or would you say that serving war had an influence to your work?” [Kelly]: “Oh that was the Second World War, but right now if you mention war, you’re talking about Iraq and the trouble we got into, and it’s very controversial in America and everywhere and I think the pictures I’ve been doing recently, lot of black and white paintings (Figure 3.1), and I think they’re about the war and my reaction to the… to the conflict that artists have with, I mean if you live in a time when things are going on that are so controversial, that you can’t help but pick that up you know and, and very… I mean this is a black and white picture but it doesn’t really, because the curves, it doesn’t really think of it but if you have a very large area of black on top of a white picture, I feel that when I finished it, this one picture in this past year, I said ‘that’s my comment on the war,’ it’s like, uhh, you know like here it is in front of your eyes… I’m not really a political artist. I love color in life… I think I want my paintings to have good spirit.” Interview with Visual Artist Ellsworth Kelly at Art Basel, 2008, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YaIH4H7gFQY, 4:52-7:06.
intensely repressive nature of the times.” It is in acknowledging these material realities that this project explores queer temporalities across the artist’s working life.

Coming of age and developing as an artist during the repressive sociopolitical climate of the Second World and Cold Wars, Kelly’s branded school of austerity in abstraction is perceived in such a way as to further reinforce the artist’s hesitancy in expressing his own identity. These were the prevailing tides in the violently heteronormative social climate of the time. There is nothing incorrect about discussing an artist’s self-categorized formalist practice in terms derived from such; however, there are dangerous precarities in doing so that can ultimately lead to the stifling of scholarship and outright erasure of personal identities—amounting to further subjugation and marginalization.

Steck’s dissertation is rooted in a social-historical framework and what he says “represents a form of cultural archeology.” Whereas his work interrogates the canonization of Kelly through similar lenses associated with feminist epistemologies and queer theories, this thesis strives to mediate the traditional art historical perception of Kelly and its emphasis on formalism with very real, material and tangible aspects of the artists positionality by highlighting bodies of work outside the canon (excerpts from his postcards and less examined prints) alongside Kelly’s all-encompassing architectural affinity (coming in the final chapter). The primary distinction between Steck’s scholarship and the one presented here is that, in questioning Kelly’s entrance into the art historical canon as being a force for modernism into the late 20th and 21st centuries and (rightfully) centering the artist as the distilled embodiment of his

74 Stuart Y. Steck, “Veiling the Subject: Ellsworth Kelly and the Discourses of Modernism” (Boston University, 2008), 24.

75 Ibid., 72.
historical context (representing the internalization of his hostile sociopolitical surroundings) it somewhat minimizes the artist’s affinity towards modernist and medieval artists and their legacy. This is not to say this is approach is invalid, the author here most certainly does not hold such an opinion, but that it is less suited for the disciplinary goals of this project (Steck’s dissertation is, again, in philosophy, not art history).

The work presented here then seeks to mediate these two methodological approaches, keeping central Kelly’s methodical and learned artistic techniques/ways of seeing from the modern past (the discussion on formalism in previous sections) alongside the understanding that he was more than the sum of those parts. This is the liberatory burden of modernist formalism for Ellsworth Kelly: an artist whose canonized oeuvre is a singular force for the modernist spirit of visual formalism, an artist whose canonized oeuvre bears the weight of all heteronormative baggage associate with such, and an artist who was able to seek refuge and both personal and artistic liberation in realms beyond its confines, as a gay man, unwaveringly, across six decades.

To demonstrate the significance of this chapter, it is worth briefly detailing one specific case wherein Kelly was at the direct, receiving end of the violently powerful, heteronormative bureaucratic apparatus of the United States government, specifically the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Steck paints a vividly detailed portrait of the violent sociopolitical context for homosexuals in the United States during the era of McCarthyism across their dissertation, touching specifically on a case that will now be examined here.

Kelly’s close friends, artists Bernard Chaet and Ralph Coburn, were questioned by the FBI in 1951 on Kelly’s behalf following his application to a night watchman position through the U.S.’s Marshall Plan Program in Paris, “Apparently, the investigators were particularly
concerned about Kelly’s sexuality,” … “According to several of his friends, Kelly was actively involved in the gay community when he lived in Paris.”\textsuperscript{76} The artist’s years in France are rightfully viewed by art historians as being the time for Kelly’s coming of age and artistic development; however, even the nation’s comparatively liberal sociopolitical climate could not shield the artist from the homophonic cultural forces in the United States. In grounding the following subsections in this critical intellectual spirit, the author here seeks to continue forging ahead towards Steck’s insistence “upon the necessity of approaching Kelly’s artistic practice in terms of his sexual identity; for it will open up the artist’s work to a different mode of theoretical and historical analysis, and thus help to reaffirm its significance within discussion about art, identity, and power.”\textsuperscript{77}

This is the point to shift discussion to specific works from Kelly’s output that highlight and center the artist’s queer positionality. The bodies of work central to this project include those not taken up by Steck due to their public newness, and excluded in general discussions surrounding Kelly’s career, likely due to the nature of their veering from the aesthetic tenets comprising his signature style (the pitfalls of its preeminence in Kelly scholarship articulated above). The selection of these specific aspects of Kelly’s oeuvre demonstrate not only the rare surfacing of the artist’s personality, but for conversation surrounding the ways in which the

\textsuperscript{76} In a telephone interview with Steck on April 29, 2002, artist and close friend of Kelly’s during his years in Paris relayed stories of Kelly’s participation in a “gay network and a gay communications system.” Additionally, in an interview with Steck on June 30, 2001, Coburn recounted the interaction with the FBI: “I was terrified. The FBI’s investigation was very unsettling. There was always the possibility of slipping up and saying something wrong. I didn’t want to say anything incriminating - that could be used against Ellsworth of myself. In hindsight, the consequences of revealing the wrong information could have been disastrous for both of us.” See: Stuart Y. Steck, “Veiling the Subject: Ellsworth Kelly and the Discourses of Modernism” (Boston University, 2008), 81.

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 101.
formal considerations going into the work demonstrate the continued deployment of queer formalism, and their capacity to provide overall enrichment for Kelly’s art historical canonization. To ignore the diversity of Kelly’s body of work is to continue in the minimization of his selfhood as a queer individual.

“Devine Qui Te L’Envoie?” Kelly’s Postcards: Queer Ephemera in Collage

If one is to say that “there is relatively little visual information in Kelly’s art that elicits an immediate response,” this is certainly not the case for his postcard collages—an enormous body consisting of approximately 400(!) works produced from 1949 to 2005. While certainly less formally rigorous than the output of his studio practice (Figure 3.2), Kelly’s postcards are no less monumental (despite their diminutive format) and demonstrate the holistic formal considerations the artist was unwaveringly committed to across his career. They also demonstrate

78 Ibid., 49.


80 Ian Berry notes that considering Kelly’s postcard output in a linear fashion alongside noteworthy events/milestones in the artist’s life “constituted a kind of freedom from the studio.” and “comprise a compilation of experiences, a journal of travel, creative play, and relationships.” “The decade of the 1970s includes a significant number of cards made in St. Martin in the Caribbean, where he would travel to stay with artist Jasper Johns, who had a home on the island. The mid-1980s—particularly around the time he met photographer Jack Shear, who would become his life partner—was another prolific period for Kelly’s postcard collages. This intensity of collage production waned in the 1990s, in part due to the decline in print quality of mass-produced picture postcards, which Kelly did not appreciate.” See: Ian Berry, “Foreword,” in Ellsworth Kelly: Postcards (Saratoga Springs, NY: The Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College, 2021), 7.

81 In his conversation with Kelly, Hans Ulrich Obrist stated that he “always thought they were masterpieces.” “The postcards are so fascinating, because they are all large-scale unrealized projects. All the scale of buildings. The postcards are really the fulfillment of your early ‘statement’: I’m not interested in painting to hang on walls of houses. These are really billboard sized; these are like the Egyptians, the Chinese; the postcards are both microscopic and macroscopic.” See: Ellsworth Kelly and Hans Ulrich Obrist, Ellsworth Kelly: Thumbing through the Folder: A Dialogue on Art and Architecture with Hans Ulrich Obrist. (New York: D.A.P., 2010), 21.
the artist’s embrace of mass-produced, consumer culture (recall the historical implications of such sources with formalism from the conversation around Greenberg). Kelly’s personality and humor abound. The rough-around-the-edges nature of some of these collages illuminate a side of Kelly many might (perhaps rightfully) assume had never surfaced in a tangible fashion. Widely held privately by the artist until 2021, the postcards and research discussed in this section amount to some of the first scholarship written on the subject—a very exciting prospect. As will be demonstrated, Kelly’s postcard collages represent some of the most overtly queer components of the artist’s oeuvre. They also represent the key to unlocking an aspect of Kelly’s architectural affinity, as will be highlighted in the coming chapter.

Before moving into an overview of the more figurative components of Kelly’s postcard output, it is worth pausing to consider, in the artist’s own words, the significance these works had on his studio practice. Discussing his first postcard, *Brown Monochrome* (1949, Figure 3.3), Kelly stated:

I sent a postcard in 1949 from Paris to a friend in the south of France. The face of the postcard was my first monochrome in brown ink. It was an old postcard I bought from a bookseller on the quay of the Seine. On the address side is said in French “Devine Qui Te L’Envoi?” [Guess Who Sent This?] I didn't sign it. My message was an abstract drawing.83

---

82 “During his lifetime, most of these works were held privately by the artist, only occasionally making their way into institutional collections. Many were sent to friends and colleagues as personal correspondences, though many more were kept in his studio.” See: Ian Berry, “Foreword,” in *Ellsworth Kelly: Postcards* (Saratoga Springs, NY: The Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College, 2021), 7.

The use of the monochrome panel in Kelly’s mature style is an aspect of his output heavily discussed by scholars—and it its significance to the artist begins with this small, humble work on paper.84

In discussing Gauloise Blue with Red Curve (1954, Figure 3.4), Kelly recalled:

The first postcard that I did when I first came back from Paris in 1954 I sent to a friend. It had a piece of a Gauloise cigarette blue paper and a red curve. And it was the first curve I did. Most of the early Paris works were not curves. The curve was a new direction for me in New York. For the next ten years I began again to make form and ground paintings until around 1965 when I returned to making paintings in multiple panels which continues to the present.85

Again, the seemingly simple act of combining found objects manifests across Kelly’s oeuvre and is foundational to his practice; however, here, the clear anchoring to the quotidian rests at the surface. Kelly’s postcards functioned as a laboratory for the artist to invent and experiment86 with new ways of utilizing form and color.87

It is surprising, or perhaps not, that the first monograph publication of Kelly’s postcards (published 2021) contains essays which skirt around issues pertaining to the artist’s identity and the ways in which this output demonstrates issues that could be illuminated by critical theory.

Tricia Y. Paik, one of the most preeminent Kelly scholars, even acknowledges in their essay that:


87 Of this first collage, Kelly stated: “The blue was French; the red curve was the new world.” See: Tricia Y. Paik, “Sights of His Life,” in Ellsworth Kelly: Postcards (Saratoga Springs, NY: The Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College, 2021), 312–23, 314.
As discussed in the previous section, Kelly’s reluctance to share certain aspects of his personal life are likely due to his coming of age during a time of immense surveillance and sociopolitical prosecution. Paik reduces the interpretative import of some of the representational elements, noting in passing their “fragments” of “celebrities, advertisements, or homoeroticism.” The scholar here hopes to offer a reconciliation of these supposedly distinct Kellys. Noting these shortcomings is not intended to in any way diminish the work by Paik, Klich, and Eisenthal. In fact, these authors offer immense and valuable insight into various aspects of this hitherto unexamined body; however, their methodologies remain indebted to a canonization of Kelly (that will no doubt remain essential to understanding Kelly at both personal and artistic levels) that bears the brunt of all its issues highlighted in previous sections.

In turning now to specific highlights from Kelly’s postcards to achieve the critical ends of this project, the author here hopes to take up the torch of Kelly scholarship, mediating their

---

88 Ibid., 316.

89 Ibid., 318-9.


critical framework with the goals of the first scholarly publication on this body of work cited above. In order to (attempt to) eschew from the traditional formal concerns associated with Kelly’s formalist practice, the postcards highlighted here will most centrally be those demonstrating figurative, representational concerns. Many of Kelly’s postcards feature the artist’s characteristic affinity towards monochromatic color and geometric/naturalistic form (some of which will be highlighted in the coming chapter). The ones discussed here break from that tradition. One commonly shared characteristic amongst all of these works, and indeed Kelly’s practice as a whole, is the visual theme of fragmentation. In the artist’s own words:

I feel that one of the most important developments in the history of abstraction has been the artist’s struggle to free form from depiction and materiality. Fragmentation and the focus on a single form have been two solutions in my own work for emptying shape of representational content and for projecting it into a new space.

Across these figurative postcards, Kelly ventures out of the nonrepresentational realm to scenes seemingly narrative in nature, towards themes of queer identity and demonstrating an engagement with/embrace of mass consumer culture, among many others.

Beginning with two postcards of the same year, *Beauty Contest* and *Asbury Park* (1956, Figures 3.5 and 3.6), Kelly directly addressed the former (Figure 3.5) in his conversation with Hans Ulrich Obrist: “This was one of the first ones. On the left side is the face of a friend of mine and on the right side is the back of his head. What was inside his head is a ‘beauty contest’

---

92 “May this project be the start of more discovery and continued scholarship on this distinctive and revealing body for work.” Ian Berry, “Foreword,” in *Ellsworth Kelly: Postcards* (Saratoga Springs, NY: The Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College, 2021), 7.

and the colors red green blue.”94 This rather straight forward interpretation demonstrates the artist’s persistence with discussing his work in purely formal terms, even in most figurative of work. Whether or not the seemingly random amalgam of imagery comprising the “beauty contest” itself bore any tangible relation to conversation between Kelly and the friend mentioned in the above quote is unknown—it certainly bears an interesting interpretive connection with Asbury Park.

In this second collage, the layering of specific imagery over a bright, pleasant photograph of at least three women smiling, hand-in-hand, strolling along the beach at Asbury Park seems to portray a darker narrative. The use of a baseball bat being gripped by masculine, white-knuckled hands over top a pair of legs and a fragment of a torso, along with the eerie deployment of a dog’s open mouth featuring its curled, outstretched tongue, seems to relate to notions of heteronormative violence against women carried out by men. This is, of course, purely speculative. However, this work demonstrates the narrative/storytelling capacity possessed by these postcards.

Kelly’s conversation with Obrist in 2010 is the only instance the author here has been able to locate of the artist himself discussing his postcard output. The artist characterized these works in a rather interesting fashion. Speaking directly to the piece Paris, 1974 (Figure 3.7):

“[H.U.O] Very often in these postcards, the body is part of it, unlike in your other work.” “[EK] Yes. You see, here, the real flesh, a navel, covering the architectural spire of the Nôtre Dame

---

‘flêche.’” … “They’re like paintings.”95 Precisely which qualities possessed by these works were perceived by Kelly as reflecting those of paintings (beyond the connection to his own painting practice) is an interesting point of consideration, though one might reasonably assume their more overt representationalism (literal photographs) and deployment of figuration fell in line with more traditional (i.e., “painterly”) modes of image making. These works are certainly more gestural and compositionally activated than works Kelly produced in the studio.

One could argue these postcards constitute a meaningful comparison to the Modernist tradition of working en plein air, though distinctly Kelly. The tears and occasional application of paint (especially in Red, Yellow, Blue, Chateau d’Angers, Figure 3.8) are much more gestural in nature, with an activated, fibrous surface, compared to Kelly’s signature application of color across his oeuvre. We see Kelly break from his affinity toward the finely attuned, seemingly untouched surface (again towards Steck’s import regarding the veiled subject), allowing us to garner a more intimate and personal glance at the artist through this body of work. The term compositionally activated is used above to delineate again from Kelly’s mature style of image-making, which is certainly active compositionally, though here we see his trademark dynamism deployed across photographic and readymade paper sources (i.e., dynamic or activated towards different ends).

Continuing to move towards a discussion on the overt usage of the human body in Kelly’s postcards, Kelly’s words again serve as guide:

From the beginning of the twentieth century, modern artists have been preoccupied with fragmenting the word and seeking essences of form and experience. Since then, artists

have measured themselves against, and have elaborated upon, these impulses within the embrace of a modern tradition that continues into the future.\(^\text{96}\)

This quote continues to demonstrate the ways in which Kelly’s self-described role as an artist is rooted in the torch-bearing of a supposed “modern tradition” through to contemporary times.\(^\text{97}\)

The use of “essences” to further relate to the notion of fragmentation also bears exploratory weight, specifically alongside Kelly’s use of the term “experience.” What experiences are being fragmented by Kelly? And how is this accomplished through the “essences of form”?

While Kelly’s desired formal anonymity through his mature work represents a form of asex-ing (i.e., the removal of any sexual import), Kelly’s personal history outlined above bears witness to what likely motivated his embrace of nonfigurative abstraction. The privacy he experienced with his postcard practice, ensuring they were only seen by close friends and lovers, granted Kelly a sense of comfort and freedom. It also granted him, potentially for the first time, the freedom to be as explicit in artistic medium about his sexuality as he cared to be.

In postcards likely sent to his life partner Jack Shear\(^\text{98}\) such as *Coucher de soleil - Simpson Bay (Torso), Swimming at Orient Beach, Les quasi de Marigot (Chest), and The Island and the Sand (Leg)*, all from 1984 (Figures 3.9, 3.10, 3.11, and 3.12), we see the fragmented being of homoerotic longing. The first work listed features centrally the pelvis and thighs of a man, his erect penis on full display, situated somewhat humorously amongst the rays of the setting sun. The remaining collages feature, respectively, the hairy torso of a man, a closely

---


\(^\text{97}\) This will be more directly addressed in the section centering Kelly’s self-portrait output.

cropped view of a man’s chest, and a vertically oriented view of a shin and foot. The idea of (queer) unintelligibility appears again in Kelly’s oeuvre. These postcard collages, with dozens upon dozens of examples, feature fragmented body parts and human visages (Figure 3.13 and 3.14)—all without their anchor to the real world, positioned in and amongst touristic views of landscape.

Kelly’s particular use of the human form also bears an interesting connection to queer formalism highlighted by Simmons, who relates his comments to artist Amy Sillman’s C from 2007 (Figure 3.15):

C approaches the realm of concept and limitless expressivity while maintaining the outlines (not confines) of "real" bodies. As Ewa Lajer-Burcharth points out in her text to accompany Amy Sillman: one lump or two, "Through repeated re-presentation, figuration was transformed into abstraction, bodies—reduced, voided—turned into shapes, lines, colors, and forces," an operation that one can see throughout Sillman’s and Eisenman’s careers. Sillman presents a kind of painterly sadomasochism. Though the body is reduced to pulp, its integrity remains. The (queer) body is reincarnated as paint.99

Following Simmons’s observations and connecting them with Kelly’s figural collages, the bodies on display are also fragmented and reduced to their parts, with their (queer) bodily essences being reincarnated as (queer) ephemera.

Kelly’s queer formalism in these postcards rests also in their act of disruption. Kelly asserts the body into pictorial scenes as one—abruptly inserting form where it does not belong, where it had not belonged. They also reified for Kelly his positionality as a gay man, and are now free to assert his identity outward to the public—explicitly conveying his queer way of seeing himself and his surroundings. Kelly’s postcard practice is also queer in that it challenges prevailing understandings of his practice; it unlocks new possibilities for looking at and

interacting with the artist’s oeuvre. These postcards have a self-expressive liveliness that underpins all of his work outside of this specific medium—one must look close enough to uncover it.

Kelly’s postcards will be examined again as they relate to his architectural affinities in the final chapter of this thesis. To keep with this chapter’s theme of highlighting works outside the traditional Kelly canon, this final section will focus on highlights from his printmaking practice that again relate to the notion of corporeal fragmentation and veiling, as well as the integration of a perspective on printmaking in line with the queer theory goals of this project.

**Camouflaging the Human Visage: Kelly’s Warholian Dialectic**

The prints examined in this final section of the chapter constitute a lithographic series of self-portraits and portraits of Kelly’s life partner, Jack Shear. These works have not been centrally examined in prior Kelly scholarship, much less through the interpretative lenses provided for by this thesis. Building upon the excerpts from Kelly’s personal history in France during WWII, this section will continue to demonstrate the ends Kelly achieved in fragmenting and veiling the subject—this time the visage of himself and his partner. This rare artistic self-representation will be discussed in relation to works by Andy Warhol (1928-87), along with a theoretical consideration of printmaking as an inherently queer medium itself to ground the interpretation posited here.
Richard Harding’s essay *Print as other the future is Queer* situates printmaking within what he calls a “‘painting normative’ culture.” To quote Harding at length:

My premise here is that hetero-normative masculinity is positioned as alpha with all other forms of masculine performance situated beneath this mode of representation. This gender performance is played out and repeated over and over. With each social situation our gender performance changes and morphs creating nuances that are inevitable, similar to the editioning or production of various print mediums.

Harding’s observations provide interesting points of connections with Kelly’s positionality in the art historical canon examined in the previous chapter, with these notions of gender performance, hegemonic masculinity, and self-regulation being directly tied to Kelly’s embrace of subject veiling as a form of (self-)camouflage.

Before moving into an examination of printed works that convey these points of thematic and theoretical import, one must understand the material connection between Kelly and camouflage. Steck observes:

The significance of Kelly’s modernist masquerade cannot be overstated. By conceiving his “painting/objects” as a means of camouflage and concealment, Kelly not only renounced conventional notions of artistic expression, but he effectively emptied high modernism of its metaphysical meaning and socio-political content.

This practice of camouflaging was something directly taken up by Kelly during his time as a *camoufleur* during his service in the 603rd Engineers Camouflage Battalion, a top-secret unit known unofficially as the “Ghost Army,” beginning in March 1945. Steck makes immense

---


101 Ibid.

102 Stuart Y. Steck, “Veiling the Subject: Ellsworth Kelly and the Discourses of Modernism” (Boston University, 2008), 62.

103 Ibid., 126.
Strides in redressing the minimization such exposure had on Kelly. Looking at Goossen’s MoMA catalogue highlighted in this thesis’ introduction, Steck cites Goossen’s linking of the camouflage to pure formalism as being an “oversimplification of the artist’s method of picture-making… regard[ing] Kelly’s engagement with camouflage as if it occurred within an art historical vacuum.”

Kelly’s task during this time was to “fool the enemy…,” and, as Steck and the research provided here argue, this fooling carried over into his mature practice—“these two seemingly disparate phenomena… came to fruition at exactly the same moment in history, and were thus inextricably bound to one another from their very inception.” This brings us to Kelly’s lithographic prints of himself and his partner, as well as their connection to Warhol.

In a series of approximately twelve lithographs executed in 1990, Kelly, in a manner similar to the figurative postcards examined above, obliterates himself and his partner through a matrix of color and form, as was his artistic hallmark in fragmenting and veiling the quotidian. His self-portraits in EK and EK/Green (Figure 3.16 and 3.17) feature only a hint of his bodily essence: the curve of his right shoulder and the exposed outline of his head, the shadowy contours of his smiling face being the only observable bodily details. Jack I, II, and III, (Figures 3.18, 3.19, and 3.20) offer three distinct views of the artist’s partner, with Jack/Blue, /Grey, and /Red (Figures 3.21, 3.22, and 3.23) offering these same images posited through their respective colors. All much more closely cropped than his self-portraits, these feature, respectively: a furrowed scowl, a calm, linearly detailed glance, and a broad, toothy smile.

104 Ibid., 135, 137.
106 Ibid., 137.
The variations in textural surface qualities with these prints is astonishing, Kelly injects these images through a system that realized his desire of anonymity. In his own terms on this series in an interview for the publication *Artist of Gemini G.E.L.*, Kelly stated: “I tried to make it look as though each image was something that I hadn’t done. I wanted to obliterate my own hand in some way, and also to have that allover surface. I’ve always wanted to get the personality out of the work.” Despite the clear, explicit personality that comes through in these prints, Kelly insisted he was maintaining his self-regulated goal of anonymity.

When asked about the series’ seemingly overt connection to or echoing of “a couple of precedents, including works by Andy Warhol,” Kelly initially ignored the art historical line being drawn, but would later in the same 1993 interview for the Gemini G.E.L. publication state:

> I know that people might probably pick up on the fact that repeated faces on a spectrum are like Warhol, even though I had done a spectrum as early as 1952; Andy has said that he liked my early monochromatic canvases. But I think that we each come to the same thing from different avenues, which allows new things to happen. I wanted to enlarge the faces so that they became texture, almost indistinguishable.

Referencing Warhol’s prior comments from 1981 where he cites Kelly’s influence (situated at the outset of this chapter; perhaps this section should be titled “Warhol’s Kellian Dialectic”), Kelly had a clear understanding that audiences might highlight these art historical dialectics.

Most impressive in this series are the prints *EK/Spectrum I, II, III,* and *Jack/Spectrum* (Figures 3.24, 3.25, 3.26, and 3.27). The former three feature Kelly’s self-portrait broken apart across his yellow-green color spectrum, each with a different level of color saturation. Jack’s

---


108 Ibid.

109 Ibid., 79.
Spectrum features his smiling face. Broken apart over six distinct rectangles of color, these prints represent the obliteration of the body, veiled with and reasserted as the medium. These observations recall those of Simmons’s queer formalist readings of Silman’s C in the previous section—the queer bodies of Kelly and his life partner are reincarnated with medium, as ink.

Warhol’s widely examined 1986 Self-Portrait series, as well as his Camouflage series of printed paintings (Figures 3.28 and 3.29), one could argue, constitute a similar act.

These works by Warhol are taken up by Steck in his dissertation (though interestingly Kelly’s prints detailed above are not) specifically as they pertain to Warhol’s affinity for Kelly’s use of the monochrome panel. Warhol’s celebrity persona was just that—a self-regulated veiling. Bob Colacello, a friend and business associate of Warhol, characterized the act of camouflaging for Warhol as “a compulsion, a strategy, and a camp … He camouflaged who he was, where he came from, what he thought, and how he felt … But most all, he camouflaged his feeling.” Meditating on Colacello’s words here, along with Steck’s observations that “For Warhol, abstraction was a way of being taken more seriously as an artist. It was a way of gaining acceptance from the arbiters of good taste,” one can clearly see the dialectic between these two landmark art historical figures. Warhol and Kelly each bear the heteronormative weight of late modernism’s emphasis on formalism; veiling their subjectivity and removing themselves from their works creation was a self-preservation strategy.

---

110 Stuart Y. Steck, “Veiling the Subject: Ellsworth Kelly and the Discourses of Modernism” (Boston University, 2008), 139.


112 Ibid.
To return to Harding’s essay, he highlights Jean Baudrillard’s observations in his 1983 text *Simulations*: “Being and appearance are melted into a common substance of production and work.” As Kelly’s print series demonstrates:

> It is this coming together of production and work or in this context, image through print production that continues to fascinate print-based artists. Like the Queer community, it is by constantly moving through unknown territories and revisiting old ones that have or have not changed that we can position ourselves within the current art world without concerns for apology or the victim role of ‘other’.

As focus turns now to the final chapter of this work, exploring Kelly’s architectural affinity through the lenses established thus far, it is time to continue moving through older territories of Kelly scholarship in order to move through those parts, or fragments, still unknown.

---


114 Richard Harding, Ibid.
CHAPTER 4—KELLY’S AUSTIN (2015): SANCTIFYING THE (QUEER) FORMAL

Painting simply is in no position to present an object for simultaneous collective experience, as it was possible for architecture at all times...

-Walter Benjamin, 1935

An art using pure colors expressed in simple monumental forms adapts itself easily to modern building. The glass and steel reinforced concrete structures have created a new form and a new space to work upon. The monochrome buildings demand color, and the spaces demand an image on a large scale—powerful statements which are very much alive.

-Ellsworth Kelly, 1957

Ellsworth Kelly’s Austin (2015, Figure 4.1) represents many things. For the artist, it was his first holistically conceptualized and distinctly independent work of architecture. Though Kelly would not live to see its completion, its posthumous unveiling by the Blanton Museum of Art in 2018 was informed entirely by the artist’s direction established prior to his passing in 2015. This chapter will continue with this thesis’ goal of taking up recent and under-examined bodies of work by Kelly, this time with a project that appears wholly indebted to and inextricably linked to past art historical developments (this time medieval art and architecture).

The first section of this chapter will highlight some of the sources of inspiration for Kelly’s work at Austin, demonstrating the clear and direct linking of the space with the art historical developments of the medieval past. This information is posited at the outset of this chapter so as to establish not only the sources of the formal properties deployed by Kelly in this work, but the heightened degrees of difference between Austin and those spaces dedicated to Christian worship. As a secular space, it will be argued that Austin represents the sanctification of

---


formalism—namely form, line, and color. What is to be made of Kelly’s engagement with Christian art and architecture, and what can queer formalism illuminate beyond an artist’s mere affinity?

This historical background in necessary prior to seeking answers to these questions, which will be explored more directly in the chapter’s second section. Recounting the author’s visit to the space in June 2022, section following the first will pull in some of the queer formalist readings established in the previous chapters and connect them to this—Kelly’s final and only work of standalone architecture. Seeing the space as a work of installation art, an art which changes viewers’ perceptions of or associations with a specific space, these actions will be determined to constitute a queering of religious, Christian basilica spaces. Austin’s recent opening on February 18, 2018 presents a fresh, unexplored opportunity within broader Kelly scholarship to continue probing the artist’s propensity for formalism as one rooted in queer formalism. Using the queer ways of seeing established in earlier chapters, this chapter will offer a new way to see Kelly’s queer way of interacting with architecture.

Kelly’s Affinities Beyond the Modern: Medieval Formalism

This first section will trace a history of the sources that inspired Kelly’s Austin (2015), offering an abridged overview of Kelly’s affinity towards medieval art and architecture. Building towards the author’s primary, experiential analysis during a visitation in June 2022, this first section will provide vital background into understanding Kelly’s chapel space. The space’s architectural plan and style are wholly indebted to these past art historical developments, but, as

---

with previous chapters, the fluidity of its formal properties extend far beyond a rigid, singular understanding.

Characterized by the work’s home institution at the University of Texas at Austin’s Blanton Museum of Art as “his most monumental work of art,” envisioned as a “place of calm and light,” Kelly hoped that people would “go there and rest [their] eyes, rest [their] mind.”

The space:

reveals itself as you move around and through it and continuously changes in response to the sunlight… Austin unites the ideas and motifs Kelly developed throughout his career and takes them in entirely new directions. The colored glass windows, for instance, are the first Kelly spectrums to be translated into glass — the only Kelly windows in the world — and the black-and-white panels are his first works in marble.

Discussion throughout this section will center some of the observational sources from which the forms comprising its structure were derived.

As has been noted throughout this project thus far, if one seeks the influential source of Kelly’s artistic approach, they will look no further than the years he spent in France during his first stint in 1944 as a member of the 603rd Engineer Camouflage Battalion and again on the G.I. Bill, settling at the Hôtel Saint-Georges in Paris from 1948-54. (1948, Figure 4.2). Kelly’s numerous sketches during this time illuminate the precise areas of focus which were, unsurprisingly, rooted in more base-level admiration for form, curve, and line as opposed to the ornate decoration of their interior and exterior spaces. (1944, Figure 4.3)

---


119 Ibid., 9.

120 Ibid., 67.
In discussing Kelly’s relationship with Romanesque Churches, Joan Holladay, Professor in the Department of Art and Art History at The University of Texas at Austin, characterize’s his output during his nearly seven years in France following World War Two:

Kelly’s words and drawings attest to a particular affinity for Romanesque monuments and their decoration, but what he developed in the plan, the elevation, and the decoration for Austin, shows a knowledge of medieval art from the early Christian period through the late Gothic.\(^1\)

Kelly was systematic about viewing not just architectural spaces, but manuscripts as well (Figure 4.4). His exposure to such demonstrate his interests in underlying geometries as well as bright color (see Drawings from 12th Century Manuscripts, 1948 with his depiction of the Beatus of Saint-Sever and the related Mother and Child, 1949, Figure 4.5 and 4.6).\(^2\) Next, Kelly’s Austin will be explored through its stylistic relationship with romanesque and medieval architecture—highlighting the latter’s influence with regard to the former’s stained glass, interior atmosphere decoration with the stations of the cross. Holladay’s thoughtfully researched findings extend far beyond these areas and extensively details Kelly’s affinity for the romanesque, medieval, and


\(^2\) “Some of Kelly’s drawings from this period in Paris recorded details from medieval manuscripts that he examined at the Bibliothèque nationale, the French national library, or the Bibliothèque byzantine, a repository of manuscripts and other works from the early Christian Church from the late antique period through the medieval… the model for this drawing (Figure 4.7) in the manuscript known as the Beatus of Satint-Sever, an illustrated manuscript of the Apocalypse, the book of Revelation, with a commentary by the 8th-century monk Beatus of Liebana. This is one of the most important manuscripts, not only of the Bibliothèque nationale, but of all Romanesque manuscript painting. The most lavishly illustrated of a large group of these Beatus apocalypse manuscripts, we appreciate it particularly for its bold use of bright colors to portray those figures… and the backgrounds in front of which they stand. The figures themselves are given dramatic poses and gestures, and the flatness with which the color is applied is also typical of Romanesque painting. Notice not only the absolutely symmetrical pose of the angel that interests Kelly, but the way in which is turned the drapery into abstract shapes… In making these abstract shapes Kelly is doing away with the indications of folds and flattening the drapery more completely than the medieval artist already has. If Kelly has here drawn from the central figure in the composition, the fanciful little naked figure at the bottom of the page shows how carefully he was looking at seemingly minor details… Think about this use of color in light of Kelly’s later color block paintings.” See: Ibid., 8:29-11:54.
gothic; much has been omitted for the sake of relevancy, though some excerpts have been included as footnotes. The items listed above, detailed below, are included so as to establish the functional differences between these historic spaces and Kelly’s work at Austin.

Kelly embarked on a lengthy excursion outside of Paris around Easter in 1949; towards the end of Kelly’s travels he visited Chartres cathedral and found himself fascinated by the ornate rose window occupying its northern transept (Figure 4.8). The band of twelve square blocks positioned on their corner points confounded Kelly during his first viewing: “How can someone 12th century do that, to make it tumble. They look like they’re moving. And so I worked it out, how they informed it—because all the points are pointed toward the center. That was something that occupied my mind for a long time.” As will be discussed in the following section, Kelly’s rose window in Austin is directly derived from Chartres; however, its pure color panes allow for a more direct interplay with the sun’s rays—allowing for a tumbling of light that extends beyond the confines of the window itself.

With regard to interior atmosphere, Kelly was directly influenced by one space in particular—the Abbaye du Thornet at Sanary-sur-Mer. (Figure 4.9) In visiting this site, Kelly was particularly struck by the atmosphere cultivated within its sparse and unadorned interior:

---

123 “Kelly’s studies also took him outside of Paris. His drawings and his later discussions about influence on his work place great importance,” on this trip. See: Ibid., 12:00-02.


125 “Kelly spent Christmas of that same pivotal year, 1949, at Sanary-sur-Mer on the southern coast of France between Marseille and Saint-Tropez. I assume it was at this time that he visited the Cistercian abbey, Abbaye du Thoronet. The Cistercians were what we call a “reformed order,” they felt that the mainstream Benedictines had become too wealthy and distracted by worldly affairs... The Cistercians also advocated simplicity of worship and of worship spaces. Note the eschewal of all decorative elements including stained glass and the exceedingly precise cutting of the ashlar masonry.” See: Ibid., 32:56-34:02.
Visiting the cloister of Thoronet in southern France, I felt at home because of the way the monks built it in the 12th century. It is infused with their spiritual belief. Religion is very different today to us, and it’s hard to believe that something so beautiful, like a Romanesque church, the stones, the whole architecture, could have been created because of it.  

The purity of the Abbaye’s interior was something deeply admired by Kelly, and Austin’s interior, with its restrained interior decoration, allows for the clear infusing of Kelly’s spiritual belief—his devotion to formalism.

Kelly’s *Stations of the Cross* series (1987, Figure 4.10), beyond Austin’s floorpan, represents the most direct dialogue with Christian chapel decoration. The decision to hang marble relief panels representing the fourteen stations in his reductive black and white color field style continues in the artistic tradition of reducing Christian iconography through an abstract lens. Kelly was intrigued by figural renditions of the Stations, and indeed observed

---


128 “Kelly’s original idea for the panels was to embed them into the walls of the building so that they were fully integrated into the structure, though he hanged them into relief panels for *Austin*.” Ibid., 87.

129 See also Barnett Newman’s *The Stations of the Cross*, 1960 (Figure 4.11)
these more classical examples during 1949. (*Scenes from the Life of Christ*, 1949, Figure 4.12)\textsuperscript{130} The *Study for Stations of the Cross* (1987, Figure 4.13) offer’s Kelly’s annotations which point to the precise sources of inspiration and interpretation with Catholic iconography, yet their planar stature and use of stark black and white offers room for interpretation outside of these confines.\textsuperscript{131} Kelly’s fragmentation of the Stations’ customary pictorial renditions through his formal vocabulary again speaks to the artist’s desire for fluidity and openness through art. It also demonstrates the queer formalist practice of corporeal obliteration through medium, as was discussed in the preceding chapter.

**A Pilgrimage to Kelly’s Temple of Color and Light: *Austin’s* Queer Formalism**

This section will offer the author’s recounting of their time spent in *Austin* over the course of several days. In an attempt to convey not only Kelly’s queering of traditional Christian worship spaces but his queer formalism as well, excerpts from Simmons’ essay will again be

\textsuperscript{130} Holladay describes the historical background of Stations of the Cross in chapel settings: “My penultimate example takes me to the very end of the Middle Ages. The Stations of the Cross that Kelly designed to decorate the white walls of *Austin* come from the devotional practice of pilgrims in Jerusalem. By the mid-15th century, visitors to the Holy Land trace the footsteps of Christ visiting the sites of his passion. Franciscan friars brought this tradition back to Europe where they built recreations of the holy sites. These were also visited by pilgrims and typically in lieu of a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Later versions did away with the elaborate architectural structures, opting to concentrate instead on the scenes of the narrative portrayed in similar frames or structures, so that their intricate connection as part of a longer story was made apparent. In 1686, the Pope gave the Franciscans permission to erect so-called “Stations” inside their churches—a privilege that was extended to the churches of the other orders in 1731. At the same time, the number of stations was firmly fixed as 14. The faithful said prayers at each station, either on their own or in the company of a priest.” See: Kelly & Romanesque Churches - Blanton Museum of Art Lunchtime Lecture Series, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bjKqdENH10A, 29:10-30:30.

\textsuperscript{131} “‘Black and white’ evokes something basic, elemental, and decisive. We often use these oppositional non-colors symbolically, to represent light and dark, good and evil, purity and impurity. Either may represent infinity or emptiness. Kelly was well aware of these connotations…” Carter E. Foster and Simone J. Wicha, *Ellsworth Kelly: Austin* (Santa Fe: Radius Books and the Blanton Museum of Art, 2019), 111.
interwoven into the discussion to achieve similar interpretive ends as with the artist’s postcards and self-portrait print series. The theme most central to this final section is one of individual perception. As a time-based architectural space, Austin offers viewers an ever changing experience that directly connects with another major theme of this thesis—the notion of veiling. Sublimated and experiential, the interactivity of Austin’s parts cultivates an atmosphere that enables individuals to take ownership of their interpretational functioning of the space, while simultaneously insisting that visitors bear witness to the artist’s formal sanctity.

Located on grounds of the Blanton Museum of Art at the University of Texas at Austin, the starkly bright façade illuminates Austin’s structural plan rooted in resembling the Greek cross. Austin’s rigid verticality appears effortless as it gracefully transitions into the smooth curves of its barrel vaulted roof—the rather uniform limestone exterior (especially when viewed from a distance) delimitates its space as being clearly defined and separate from its surroundings. (Figure 4.14). The southern façade featuring the color grid windows appears starkly flat, and its latitudinal space out from the transept arms make it appear in a manner not uncharacteristic of one of the relief panels (Figure 4.15), but here on a monumental, architectural scale. With the bright sun of a mid-day Texas afternoon, the panes of stained glass appear dark and indeterminable—stoic, even—beckoning the uninitiated forward towards its entrance. One gets a sense that the space is referencing traditional chapel architecture, but clearly asserting its aesthetic sensibilities towards distinctly different, functional ends.\footnote{132 “Both a church’s external appearance, and its place in the landscape, often helped distinguish it from the surrounding buildings and pointed to its status as a sacred sit.” See: Sarah Hamilton and Andrew Spicer, “Defining the Holy: The Delineation of Sacred Space,” in \textit{Defining the Holy: Sacred Space in Medieval and Early Modern Europe} (London: Routledge, 2006), 1–23, 6.}
Approaching the front of Austin, one must pull back on its heavy and obdurate wooden doors (Figure 4.16) before entering into the space. This threshold\textsuperscript{133} delineates the (profane) space outside of Austin from its (yet to be defined as sacred) interior; a mediation between the bright and sunny surroundings of Austin and the filtering of the natural (and dim ambient) lighting present in its interior. This activation of one’s optical senses as they pass through Austin’s entrance is made especially effective by the form of the its exterior; it hides no structural form not also present and apparent in its interior—Austin is a crucible at the intersection of form, color, and light.

Once one’s eyes adjust to Austin’s interior lighting conditions, they are met directly by the apsidal Totem (Figure 4.17). Its sweeping forward momentum imbued by its form creates an assertive presence in the space, equally derived from its sheer, towering, vertical monumentality. The work’s positioning within the space again denotes its functioning as being something wholly apart from traditional associations with its functioning; Totem stands rooted on the floor, in lieu of a raised altar, with ample space for circumambulation.

The notion of circumambulation is central to Christian worship spaces, as individuals would move around the ambulatory and behind the altar to pay respect to sacred relics or the stations of the cross. For Kelly, the act of circumambulation bears an interesting point of consideration, as the artist had long sense considered an individual’s role in interacting with his work. For a comparative example, Red Floor Panel from 1992 (Figure 4.18) allows viewers to

---

\textsuperscript{133} “The threshold that separates the two spaces also indicates the distance between two modes of being, the profane and the religious. The threshold is the limit. the boundary, the frontier that distinguishes and opposes two worlds—and at the same time the paradoxical place where those worlds communicate, where passage from the profane to the sacred world becomes possible.” See: Elaide Mircea, \textit{The Sacred & The Profane: The Nature of Religion}, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1957) 25.
walk around its perimeter. Viewer perspective is thus dependent on one’s proximity to its edge, as well as one’s height above it. As a result, the precise nature of the work’s shape is not only indeterminable (recall notions of queer interminability from previous chapters), but it appears to change structure entirely when circumambulating. The interactivity of light and color with the various surfaces in Austin, as will be described next, continues with Kelly’s interest in allowing individuals to play a role in their experience with the work—rejecting singularity in a manner shared with forces of queerness.

In line with the atmospheric goals of the space sought after by Kelly and outlined in the previous section, the ambient lighting is kept to an absolute minimum—shielded by a solid cover and thus gently reflected into the space by the ceiling. (Figure 4.19) This care in crafting the interior lighting bespeaks of the vital centrality of the space’s harvesting of natural lighting through its stained glass windows. Its presence touches, quite literally, every surface within Austin as a visually arresting, sensorial force.134

This imparting of color on Austin’s various interior surfaces was first apparent to the author when viewing the panels of the Stations of the Cross from angled vantage points. Their matte surface textures seem to grab ahold of and absorb light from the windows (Figure 4.20), bringing spectrum colors to planes where they would otherwise be absent. The visibility of this light is also dependent on one’s proximity to and position around these panels. This connecting

134 Hamilton and Spicer note that “Churches, and the sacred spaces around them, were not only distinguished from the surrounding physical landscape, but also by more sensory distinctions.” Though they reference aural experiences from “church bells [echoing] across the landscape” as a means for call to prayer, Kelly’s use of visual senses, as pointed to in this project across his oeuvre, reach an elevated and holistically-defined realm not only unique to Kelly’s artistic lens, but a realm of ecstatic care the reaches the sanctification of the parts comprising it. See: Sarah Hamilton and Andrew Spicer, “Defining the Holy: The Delineation of Sacred Space,” in Defining the Holy: Sacred Space in Medieval and Early Modern Europe (London: Routledge, 2006), 1–23, 7.
of the Stations with color would not have been viewed by Kelly himself given his passing in 2015 before Austin’s completion, so it is a curious point of consideration surrounding his intent, especially within an art historical context surrounding stained glass’s functioning within more traditional contexts. Given Kelly’s exacting specificity centrally consulted during the work’s construction, as well as his understanding of and interests in art history outlined previously, it is difficult to conceptualize how such a significant aesthetic interplay between the stained glass and marble panels could take place without him being cognizant of such.

What’s more, given the light’s natural source, there is a certain particularity of the atmosphere cultivated within Austin that stems from its time-based and seasonal nature. As the sun moves across the sky throughout the day, so too does the trajectory of its interplay with Austin’s stained glass. Viewing the work at several points throughout the day, the author witnessed the sun entering in through the western windows immediately upon its opening for the day. (Figure 4.21) This direct light creates soft, jewel-toned puddles of color (Figure 4.22) that not only interact with the interior features of the structure in a more direct fashion (Figure 4.23),

135 Kelly also wanted to cover the walls of Austin with work so as to minimize the possibility of other work being shown in the space: “Kelly likely did not wish for the building to become a gallery for the work of other artists.” See: Carter E. Foster and Simone J. Wicha, Ellsworth Kelly: Austin (Santa Fe: Radius Books and the Blanton Museum of Art, 2019), 82.

136 “Kelly ultimately made every aesthetic decision, from the scale, proportions, and orientation of the building to the type and arrangement of the exterior stone and even the texture of the grout used between the stones.” See: Ibid., 10.

137 Kelly also attended the prestigious Ecole des Beaux-Arts at the outset of his G.I. Bill, though “while the École Beaux-Arts was steeped in history, Kelly quickly became frustrated with the overcrowded classrooms and the academic curriculum, which had barely changed since the 19th century. Having recently graduated from the Boston Museum School - where students were trained to depict the human figure in highly expressionistic terms - Kelly was eager to experiment with new forms of visual expression, especially ones that were less subjective and anthropocentric in nature. Accordingly, after painting the requisite nude for admission to the academy, he stopped attending classes altogether.” See: Stuart Y. Steck, “Veiling the Subject: Ellsworth Kelly and the Discourses of Modernism” (Boston University, 2008), 26.
but provide for participatory, individual transformation in entering into their rays— one becomes the spectrum itself. (Figure 4.24 and 4.25) As the evening approached, the yellow pane in the monstrance form of the east window cast its shadow, overtaking a bench in the transept. (Figure 4.26) The angle at which the sun penetrates Austin varies seasonally as well, offering an every-changing viewer experience wholly in tune with the elemental, natural environment. These observations bear similar interpretative import to those deployed with Kelly’s work in the previous chapter, again derived from Simmons’s observations around Sillman’s C (Figure 3.15): while in Austin, one becomes obliterated by its harvesting of light, and is reincarnate as color.

In conceptualizing Austin in this fashion, the space becomes a clearly immersive one not just as a result of it being an architectural structure, but as a form of installation art as well. Viewer interaction is individualized based on time spent in the space and the time the space itself is viewed, in a conceptual manner reminiscent of work by light and space installation artists like James Turrell (an artist whose work is also on display at UT Austin, Figure 4.27). Connecting Austin with notions of time in sacred spaces of churches, Hamilton and Spicer note that “Churches were however more than distinctive buildings in the landscape, they stood as beacons of order against the chaos of the world through determining human relations between the sacred

---

138 “In transmitted light, they turn the hard geometry of the actual windows into soft, blurry pools of colored light that move spectacularly and slowly across Austin’s interior.” See: Carter E. Foster and Simone J. Wicha, Ellsworth Kelly: Austin (Santa Fe: Radius Books and the Blanton Museum of Art, 2019), 104.

139 “Three large, multi-light windows create a play of radiant, shape-shifting colors on the interior surfaces, a play that constantly changes with the position and intensity of the sun. There is thus a time-based aspect crucial to the experience of this artwork, a cycle of light that unfolds over the four seasons and the calendar year. At night, viewed from the outside, the windows emit a jewel-like glow.” See: Carter E. Foster and Simone J. Wicha, Ellsworth Kelly: Austin (Santa Fe: Radius Books and the Blanton Museum of Art, 2019), 103.
and the profane.”\textsuperscript{140} With \textit{Austin}, Kelly “expressed that ‘color is life, and life-giving.’” Like many sacred spaces, \textit{Austin} instills a sense of tranquility and joy, encouraging visitors to be in the present and temporarily leave everything else behind.”\textsuperscript{141}

This goal was met with abundant triumph during the author’s visitations; individuals of all backgrounds and groups of all sizes were those participants observed bearing witness to Kelly’s combination of religious architecture and its interplay amongst the formal elements sanctified within the space. “Although inspired in part by religious iconography and architecture, Kelly envisioned \textit{Austin} as a work of art and as space for contemplation.”\textsuperscript{142} At \textit{Austin}, the everyday becomes viewable though an otherworldly and atmospheric lens with such a high degree of technical finesse and care amongst craft that conveys a clear sense of sanctification of the distilled visual elements comprising what lies beyond its confines.

Kelly’s gestalt marks a successful mediation between the secular and profane, elevating the latter to the former by immortalizing and sanctifying elements derived from and comprising the everyday (i.e., profane). In so doing, Kelly successfully queers traditional associations with Romanesque and Gothic architecture by circumventing their functional purposes as structures dedicated to worshiping a Christian god, towards ends of making color, light, and form tangible and experiential through its participatory and time-based nature.

\begin{flushright}
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
Austin is arguably Kelly’s enduring legacy. While the concluding chapter will argue that Kelly’s legacy is still fluid, the work’s distillation of the elements Kelly sought to explore and depict across his career, as well as its finality in being his last and most monumental work, makes it the keystone of his decades wide oeuvre. As a work that has yet to be widely taken up by scholars, its inclusion in this thesis was important for several reasons: it represents Kelly’s work more clearly in line with his signature, singular style than those included in chapter two, but it also demonstrates with explicit clarity Kelly’s affinity towards fluxivity and openness. Interpreting Austin through the queer lenses of this thesis, it serves to demonstrate the possibilities that exist for Kelly’s wider canon, as they are both open to the changes brought by time and perspective.
CONCLUSION (FOR NOW…)—BEYOND FORM, LINE, AND COLOR

*Queer does not require someone to ‘interpret’ or ‘find’ it. But if no one does, who will?*
-William J. Simmons, 2013

*the past changes, too. Everybody rewrites it.*
-Ellsworth Kelly, 1996

This thesis has been an exercise for the author in exploring their discontent with the current state of scholarship on Ellsworth Kelly—a discontent shared with the author at as they themselves have navigated systems of heteronormativity and homophobia across their own life. The impetuous for this research came after learning of Kelly’s identity as a gay man. While Kelly’s art had always been deeply admired, it remained enigmatic and maintained a precarious independence when viewing the adjacent formal approaches of his contemporaries; learning of this shared link made the fragments of his depicting begin to fall finally into place. Upon turning to scholarship to seek further clarity still, it was shocking to uncover such an interpretative lapse. As Kelly’s art directs one to observe, the uniformity in examinations of his life and work required further observation as well. What was uncovered has been presented here, itself fragmented through different theoretical and interpretive lenses.

Kelly’s selfhood and oeuvre are vast, examining as much work as possible was the only way the development of this thesis took hold. There remain bodies of work outside commonly

---


canonized views still to discuss, such as his 1944-1992 practice of self-portrait drawings\(^{146}\) (wherein he casts himself again in a performative dialogue with modernist portraiture) and his photographic output\(^{147}\) (demonstrating his literal way of seeing). Both of these bodies of work were at one point as unknown to the general public as his postcards, and for unsurprising reasons:

> I felt that they were personal; I’ve done portrait drawings and photographs that I’ve never shown. I didn’t feel they were central to the other work, but then, the longer I looked at them, the more I lost that feeling. They were just like playing, and they became more important because of their chance effect.\(^{148}\)

These bodies of work, along with the remainder of his enormous postcard collage output, among others still, are fertile grounds ripe for further exploration—through the lenses offered here and others outside, and those still to come.

This thesis is among the first art historical examinations of Kelly’s postcard output and his work at Austin; it is among the first art historical examinations of Kelly’s practice as it pertains to his gay identity; and it offers the first critical reading of Kelly’s school of formalism, synthesizing the components above, as queer formalism. In so doing, it posits queer ways of seeing Kelly’s queer ways of depicting; in interrogating Kelly’s afterlives, it finds a queer futurity.

Connecting feminism and queer theory with art history demonstrates the latter’s fluidity as an interface with culture, with making and understanding culture, and with making and


remaking culture as history itself. Kelly embraced change following his move to New York after his years in France, and continued to do so throughout his career. Why should his history remain the same? “The form of my paintings is the content,” Kelly has stated.\footnote{Susan Daniel-McElroy, ed., \textit{Ellsworth Kelly} (London: Tate Pub., 2007), 10.} As this thesis has demonstrated, the content of Kelly’s form extends far, far beyond this self-characterization and far, far beyond his formal commitment to line, form, and color. Towards the end of his life, Kelly said: “I’ve always lived in the present—present tense—and I think I’d like my paintings to be in the present tense.”\footnote{\textit{Ellsworth Kelly on Abstraction} (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 2014), https://www.sfmoma.org/watch/ellsworth-kelly-explains-abstraction/.} The author here hopes they have demonstrated the ways in which Kelly’s oeuvre can be examined in \textit{this} present, and that other scholars, in different areas of art history and across disciplines, will continue to do the same for their subject of choice.

\textit{We must continue looking.}
Selected Figures

**Figure 2.1:** No.5/No.22, 1950 (dated 1949 on reverse)
Mark Rothko
Oil on canvas
9’ 9” x 8’ 11’ 1/8”
Photo by author, June 21, 2022
Museum of Modern Art,
New York, NY

**Figure 2.2:** Number 1, 1950 (Lavender Mist), 1950
Jackson Pollock
Oil, enamel, and aluminum on canvas
87 x 118 in.
Photo by author, Sept. 25, 2019
National Gallery of Art, East Building,
Washington, D.C.
**Figure 2.3:** *Blue Green Red*, 1963  
Ellsworth Kelly  
Oil on canvas  
91 x 82 in.  
Photo by author, June 23, 2022  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,  
New York, NY

**Figure 2.4:** Detail of *Sculpture for a Large Wall*, 1956-57  
Ellsworth Kelly  
Anodized aluminum, 104 panels  
11’ 5” x 65’ 5” x 28”  
Photo by author, Feb. 16, 2023  
Museum of Modern Art,  
New York, NY
**Figure 2.5:** *Red Blue Green*, 1963  
Ellsworth Kelly  
Oil on canvas  
83 5/8 x 135 7/8 in.  
Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego,  
San Diego, CA

**Figure 2.6:** *Untitled*, 1968  
Donald Judd  
Brass  
22 x 48 1/4 x 36 in., 240 lb.  
Museum of Modern Art,  
New York, New York
Figure 2.7: *Die*, model 1962
Tony Smith
Steel
72 3/8 x 72 3/8 x 72 3/8 in., 500 lb.
Whitney Museum of American Art,
New York, New York

Figure 2.8: *Untitled*, 1965, reconstructed 1971
Robert Morris
Mirror glass and wood
each cube: 35.984 x 35.984 x 35.984 in.
Tate Modern,
London, England
Figure 2.9: Colors for a Large Wall, 1951
Oil on canvas, sixty-four panels
7’ 10 1/2” x 7’ 10 1/2”
Photo by author, June 21, 2022
Museum of Modern Art,
New York, NY

Figure 2.10: Untitled, 1971
Al Loving
Acrylic on three joined canvases
Photo by author, June 23, 2022
Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York, NY
Figure 2.11: *Blue Rational/Irrational*, 1969
Al Loving
Acrylic on canvas
57 7/8 x 126 15/16 in.
Photo by author, Feb. 24, 2022
The Cleveland Museum of Art,
Cleveland, OH

Figure 2.12: *Untitled Y*, 1960
Al Held
Acrylic on canvas,
72 1/8 x 48 in.
The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum,
New York, NY
Figure 2.13: Red Blue, 1962
Ellsworth Kelly
Oil on canvas
90 x 69 7/16 in.
Photo by author, Feb. 22, 2023
The Cleveland Museum of Art,
Cleveland, OH

Figure 2.14: Repetition Nineteen III, 1968
Eva Hesse
Fiberglass and polyester resin, nineteen units
Each 19 to 20 1/4 x 11 to 12 3/4 in. in diameter
Photo by author, June 21, 2022
Museum of Modern Art,
New York, NY
Figure 2.15: *100 Works in Mill Aluminum*, 1982-1986
Donald Judd
Chinati Foundation, Marfa, Texas

Figure 2.16: *Untitled (Corner Prop Piece)*, 1969
Richard Serra
Lead plate and pole
Photo by author, June 28, 2022
Harvard Museum of Art
Boston, MA
Figure 2.17: Half installation view of Equal, 2015
Richard Serra
Forged weatherproof steel, eight blocks
Each block 60 x 60 x 72 in.
Photo by author, June 21, 2022
Museum of Modern Art,
New York, NY

Figure 2.18: Artforum cover
featuring Kelly’s Two Panels, Blue with Small Red, November 1971
Figure 2.19: *La Combe*, 1950
Ellsworth Kelly
Oil on canvas
38 x 63 11/16 in.
Whitney Museum of American Art,
New York, NY

Figure 3.1: *Black White Black*, 2006
Ellsworth Kelly
Painted aluminum, three joined panels
60 3/4 x 230 x 1 7/8 in.
Matthew Marks Gallery,
New York, NY
Figure 3.2: *Spectrum IV*, 1967
Ellsworth Kelly
Oil on canvas, thirteen panels
9’ 9” x 9’ 9”
Photo by author, Feb. 16, 2023,
Museum of Modern Art,
New York, NY

Figure 3.3: *Brown Monochrome*, 1949
Ellsworth Kelly
Postcard collage
Figure 3.4: Gauloise Blue with Red Curve, 1954
Ellsworth Kelly
Postcard collage

Figure 3.5: Beauty Context, 1956
Ellsworth Kelly
Postcard collage
Figure 3.6: *Asbury Park*, 1956
Postcard collage
Ellsworth Kelly

Figure 3.7: *Paris*, 1974
Ellsworth Kelly
Postcard collage
Scanned by author from: *Ellsworth Kelly: Postcards*, page 75.
Figure 3.8: *Red, Yellow, Blue, Chateau d’Angers*, 1964
Ellsworth Kelly
Postcard and paint

Figure 3.9: *Coucher de soleil - Simpson Bay (Torso)*, 1984
Ellsworth Kelly
Postcard collage
Scanned by author from: *Ellsworth Kelly: Postcards*, page 188.
Figure 3.10: *Swimming at Orient Beach*, 1984
Ellsworth Kelly
Postcard collage
Scanned by author from: *Ellsworth Kelly: Postcards*, page 188.

Figure 3.11: *Les quasi de Marigot (Chest)*, 1984
Ellsworth Kelly
Postcard collage
Figure 3.12: *The Island and the Sand (Leg)*, 1984
Ellsworth Kelly
Postcard collage

Figure 3.13: *St. Maarten/Smile*, 1974
Ellsworth Kelly
Postcard collage
Scanned by author from: *Ellsworth Kelly: Postcards*, page 78.
Figure 3.14: *New York/Smile*, 1974
Ellsworth Kelly
Postcard collage

Figure 3.15: *C*, 2007
Amy Sillman (b. 1955)
Oil on canvas,
45 x 39.1 in.
Photo from artnet.com
Figure 3.16: *EK*, 1990
Ellsworth Kelly
Two-color lithograph
47” x 38”
Gemini G.E.L.,
Los Angeles, CA

Figure 3.17: *EK/Green*, 1990
Ellsworth Kelly
Two-color lithograph
47” x 36”
Gemini G.E.L.,
Los Angeles, CA
Figure 3.18: *Jack I*, 1990
Ellsworth Kelly
One-color lithograph
47 x 37 1/2 in.
Gemini G.E.L.,
Los Angeles, CA

Figure 3.19: *Jack II*, 1990
Ellsworth Kelly
One-color lithograph
47 x 38 in.
Gemini G.E.L.,
Los Angeles, CA
Figure 3.20: *Jack III*, 1990
Ellsworth Kelly
One-color lithograph
47 x 39 in.
Gemini G.E.L.,
Los Angeles, CA

Figure 3.21: *Jack/Blue*, 1990
Ellsworth Kelly
Two-color lithograph
47 x 36 1/4 in.
Gemini G.E.L.,
Los Angeles, CA
Figure 3.22: *Jack/Gray*, 1990
Ellsworth Kelly
Two-color lithograph
47 x 38 in.
Gemini G.E.L.,
Los Angeles, CA

Figure 3.23: *Jack/Red*, 1990
Ellsworth Kelly
Two-color lithograph
47 x 37 1/2 in.
Gemini G.E.L.,
Los Angeles, CA
Figure 3.24: *EK/Spectrum I*, 1989
Ellsworth Kelly
Twelve-color lithograph
25 5/8 x 92 in.
Orange County Museum of Arts,
Costa Mesa, CA

Figure 3.25: *EK/Spectrum II*, 1990
Ellsworth Kelly
Six-color lithograph
25 5/8 x 94 in.
Gemini G.E.L.,
Los Angeles, CA

Figure 3.26: *EK/Spectrum III*, 1990
Ellsworth Kelly
Six-color lithograph
14 3/4 x 40 in.
Gemini G.E.L.,
Los Angeles, CA
Figure 3.27: *Jack/Spectrum*, 1990
Ellsworth Kelly
Six-color lithograph
25 1/8 x 92 1/2 in.
Gemini G.E.L.,
Los Angeles, CA

Figure 3.28: *Self-Portrait*, 1986
Andy Warhol
Acrylic and silkscreen on canvas
80 x 80 in.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York, NY
Figure 3.29: *Camouflage*, 1986
Andy Warhol
Synthetic polymer paint and silkscreen ink on canvas
76 x 76 in.
The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc.

Figure 4.1: *Austin*, 2015
Ellsworth Kelly
Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, TX
Figure 4.2: *Hôtel Saint-Georges, Paris (Self-Portrait)*, 1984
Ellsworth Kelly
Ink on paper
12 1/4 x 17 5/8 in.
Ellsworth Kelly Foundation

Figure 4.3: *Église, Marly*, 1944
Ellsworth Kelly
Ink on paper
8 1/4 x 5 1/4 in.
Blanton Museum of Art,
Austin, TX
Figure 4.4: *First page of Ellsworth Kelly’s journal listing places to visit in Europe*, 1948

Figure 4.5: *Drawings from 12th-Century Manuscripts*, 1948
Graphite on paper
7 3/4 x 10 in.
Photo by author, June 10, 2022
Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, TX
Figure 4.6: *Mother and Child*, 1949
Ellsworth Kelly
Oil on linen
29 x 17 in.
Photo by author, June 10, 2022
Blanton Museum of Art,
Austin, TX

Figure 4.7: *Beatus of Saint-Sever*, mid-11th century
MS la. 8878, f. 248
Bibliothèque national,
Paris, France
Figure 4.8: *North Rose Window*, 13th century
Chartres Cathedral,
Chartres, France
Image Wikimedia Commons

Figure 4.9: View of *Abbaye du Thorne*, 12-13th centuries
Sanary-sur-Mer, France
Image Wikimedia Commons
Figure 4.10: Installation view of Stations of the Cross, 2015
Ellsworth Kelly
Black and white marble panels
40 x 40 in.
Blanton Museum of Art,
Austin, TX

Figure 4.11: Installation view of Stations VI-VIII, Stations of the Cross, 1962-4
Barnett Newman
Oil on canvas
Each 78 1/8 x 60 in.
Photo by author, Sept. 8, 2022
National Gallery of Art, East Building,
Washington, D.C.
Figure 4.12: Scenes from the Life of Christ, 1949
Ellsworth Kelly
Graphite on paper
5 1/4 x 8 1/4 in.
Photo by author, June 10, 2022
Blanton Museum of Art,
Austin, TX

Figure 4.13: Study for Stations of the Cross, 1987
Ellsworth Kelly
Graphite and ink on paper
12 1/2 x 19 in.
Photo by author, June 10, 2022
Blanton Museum of Art,
Austin, TX
Figure 4.14: View of Austin amongst its architectural surroundings, Texas Statehouse in back
Photo by author, June 11, 2022
The University of Texas at Austin,
Austin, TX

Figure 4.15: Relief with Blue, 1950
Ellsworth Kelly
Oil on wood
44 7/8 x 17 1/2 in.
Photo by author, June 21, 2022
Museum of Modern Art,
New York, NY
Figure 4.16: Detail of *Austin*’s doors
Photo by author, June 11, 2022
Blanton Museum of Art,
Austin, TX

Figure 4.17: *Totem*, 2015
Ellsworth Kelly
California redwood
18’ tall
Photo by author, June 11, 2022
Blanton Museum of Art,
Austin, TX
Figure 4.18: *Red Floor Panel*, 1992
Ellsworth Kelly
Acrylic on canvas on wood
1 x 316 1/2 x 478 3/4 in.
Photo by author, June 24, 2022
Matthew Marks Gallery,
New York, NY

Figure 4.19: Detail of *Austin’s* ambient lighting system
Photo by author, June 11, 2022
Blanton Museum of Art,
Austin, TX
Figure 4.20: Details of Austin’s Stations of the Cross interacting with colored light
Photos by author, June 11, 2022
Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, TX
Figure 4.21: Wide view of Austin’s eastern window featuring colored light
Image by author, June 11, 2022
Blanton Museum of Art,
Austin, TX
**Figure 4.22:** Pools of light at 11:10 AM and 11:37 AM, respectively
Photos by author, June 11, 2022
Blanton Museum of Art,
Austin, TX
Figure 4.23: Light flooding Austin’s eastern window and interacting with interior
Images by author, June 11, 2022
Blanton Museum of Art,
Austin, TX
Figure 4.24: An unknown visitor interacts with Austin’s colored light
Photo by author, June 11, 2022
Blanton Museum of Art,
Austin, TX
Figure 4.25: Author’s arm and hand casting a colored shadow on the apse wall of *Austin*
Photo by author, June 11, 2022
Blanton Museum of Art,
Austin, TX
Figure 4.26: An unknown couple sit in Austin’s western transept arm with the yellow window illuminating the floor
Photo by author, June 11, 2022
Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, TX
Figure 4.27: View from interior of James Turrell’s *The Color Inside*, 2013
Black basalt, plaster, and LED lights
224 x 348 x 276 in.
Photo by author, June 10, 2022
University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX
Bibliography

Architectural Record. Vol. 121. 5, 1957.


Clement Greenberg on Pop Art, n.d.. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZN8uvz0JD5Q.


“Penn Center Transportation Building and Concourse.” Architectural Record 121, no. 6 (May 1957): 190–96.


The Ghost Army. PBS, 2013.


