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The Museum of Modern Art

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART GIVEN FIVE NEW WORKS BY ELLSWORTH KELLY IN THE MIDST OF A SPECIAL EXHIBITION OF HIS WORK

Gifts of the Artist and Ronald and Jo Carole Lauder Enhance the World's Richest Collection of Kelly's Work

Exhibition Features MoMA Debut of *Sculpture for a Large Wall*

April 13, 1999--Five early works by Ellsworth Kelly, four of them gifts of the artist, were presented today to The Museum of Modern Art, enriching what was already the premier collection of Kelly's work in the world. News of the gifts, announced by MoMA Director Glenn D. Lowry, comes in the midst of the special installation *Ellsworth Kelly: Sculpture for a Large Wall and Other Recent Acquisitions*. On view through July 6, the installation features the first MoMA showing of the monumental sculpture, more than 65 feet long and over 11 feet high, acquired by the Museum last fall. This seminal masterwork is accompanied by several drawings and collages, as well as three major paintings shown at MoMA for the first time: *Three Panels: Orange, Dark Gray, Green* (1986); *Chatham VI* (1971); and *White Curve VII* (1976), works recently donated to the Museum by the Douglas S. Cramer Foundation. Two of the newest gifts are not part of the installation, but were displayed on easels in the exhibition space during a special viewing and discussion at the Museum this morning hosted by the artist and Kirk Varnedoe, Chief Curator of Painting and Sculpture.

The Newest Gifts

The four gifts of the artist include three working drawings for *Sculpture for a Large Wall* (1957), a work that foreshadows key elements of Kelly's mature work. In the drawings, executed in 1956, one can see the artist developing his concept for the sculpture. The three drawings are part of the current exhibition. Another gift of the artist, *Dominican* (1952), is a rare early painting from his years in France (1948 to 1954), in which horizontal bands of gold, white, and gray are emblazoned on a vertical canvas.

The fifth new work, *Meschers* (1951), one of the most beautiful of the artist's early paintings, is a promised gift of Museum Chairman Ronald S. Lauder and his wife Jo Carole Lauder, President of the Museum's International Council. It is named for the French village where the artist conceived it during a 1950 stay. In the painting Kelly juxtaposes slices of royal blue and vivid green in a random, exhilarating arrangement that virtually dances across the canvas. Until now, Kelly held all five of these works in his personal collection.

"The Museum of Modern Art has a long-term commitment to representing, with major works, every phase of Ellsworth Kelly's career," said Mr. Lowry. "We have been able to collect Kelly in greater depth and range than any other institution, through the exceptional generosity of great Museum patrons such as Ronald and Jo Carole Lauder and Trustee Douglas S. Cramer, but also, crucially, through our special relationship with the

artist himself. Ellsworth Kelly has been a great friend and supporter of the Museum, and his generous gifts have been essential to shaping our representation of his work. We look forward to continuing to work with him to further enrich this already unrivaled collection."

The Installation

Sculpture for a Large Wall, the artist's largest work to date and one of his greatest achievements, is the centerpiece of an exhibition in the Museum's third floor galleries that features previous recent acquisitions of Kelly's work. *Sculpture for a Large Wall* is conceived as a four-tier hanging screen, comprising 104 red, yellow, blue, black, and pearl-gray anodized aluminum panels. It was created in 1957 for the lobby of the Transportation Building in Philadelphia's Penn Plaza. In recent years, that building had been abandoned, and the fate of the sculpture was uncertain until Kelly, working with the dealer Matthew Marks, rescued it. In October 1998, Mr. and Mrs. Lauder donated it to the Museum.

"Ellsworth Kelly's career is among the most distinguished in American art, for the acuity of his vision and for the long-term integrity of his focus as a creator," said Mr. Varnedoe. "Few artists have so melded unwavering consistency of investigation with fertility of self-renewal. We are honored by his gifts to this Museum, and especially delighted now to be able to represent so well, and in such variety of scale and format, the early years in which he formed the basis for his art."

In important ways, *Sculpture for a Large Wall* is a summation of all that the artist had learned during his sojourn in Paris in the early 1950s, while it also presages major aspects of his later work. Inspired by sources as diverse as Matisse's joyously colored cut-outs and Le Corbusier's architecture, *Sculpture for a Large Wall* employs the distinctive forms--part organic curve, part geometric cut--that would dominate Kelly's art in the years ahead, and assembles them on a monumental scale. This commission also offered Kelly his first opportunity to realize his youthful ambitions for an architecturally scaled art.

Also featured in the installation is a key painting from the Paris years, *Colors for a Large Wall* (1951), which may be considered the "parent" of the later sculpture and which was a gift of the artist in 1969. Several drawings completed in Paris show the artist developing the chance-based systems of composition and the feel for modules of bright hue that inform the sculpture. *Study for La Combe II* (1950) derived its linear order from the sight of a railing's shadow on a staircase. The large checkerboard collage *Spectrum Colors Arranged by Chance VI* (1951) was composed by filling a progressively shifting number of squares in each row with a color, whose placement and hue were determined by chance. In *Study for Meschers* (1951), Kelly painted a sheet of paper with lines of various kinds, then cut the paper into pieces and reassembled them.

These works on paper were among a group of 15 acquired by the Museum's Department of Drawings in a gift-and-purchase arrangement with the artist last year. The group was shown at MoMA in *Ellsworth Kelly: Fifteen Works on Paper 1949-1958, A Recent Acquisition*, from September 18, 1997 through January 13, 1998. A separate press release is available.

Photographs of the gifts as well as Ellsworth Kelly with *Sculpture for a Large Wall* are available for publication.

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