

# The Museum of Modern Art

## THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ANNOUNCES MAJOR GIFT OF 25 ELLSWORTH KELLY SKETCHBOOKS FROM JACK SHEAR

### Approximately 1,700 Pages of Sketches Shed New Light on Kelly's Process and Innovation, Making MoMA Key Repository for Study

**NEW YORK, NY, March 3, 2021**—The Museum of Modern Art has received an exceptional gift of 25 sketchbooks by Ellsworth Kelly (American, 1923–2015), providing invaluable insight into the career of one of the 20th century's most celebrated artists. Containing some 1,700 pages of drawings and collages by Kelly, the books, which have rarely been seen or published, offer vast opportunities for new scholarship and exhibition. This generous gift from Jack Shear, Kelly's partner for over 30 years and president of the Ellsworth Kelly Foundation, makes MoMA—together with the artist's foundation—the definitive repository for such materials.

"Ellsworth Kelly, who once said all his works began with drawings, made no secret of the unique role his sketches played in his art," said Christophe Cherix, the Robert Lehman Foundation Chief Curator of Drawings and Prints at MoMA. "Spanning four decades of boundless experimentation, these sketchbooks provide the incomparable opportunity to think about Kelly's singular accomplishments in fresh and innovative ways. I am deeply grateful to Jack Shear and the Kelly Foundation for this momentous gift to the Museum and its many audiences."

Beginning in 1948, when a young Kelly lived in Paris on GI Bill funds, through 1989 when the artist was working in his studio Spencertown, New York, the sketchbooks record the artist's thought processes, distinctive methods, and most decisive breakthroughs in his search for new forms reduced to their most essential parameters. Including drawings in simple graphite, ink, or vibrant felt-tip pen, watercolor, and collages of pasted papers, the group documents Kelly's travels from Paris to the South of France to Holland, reflecting on forms from the plant life of Puerto Rico and St. Thomas to New York's Brooklyn Bridge. From early portraits to automatic drawings, chance *trouvailles* to plans for paintings, sculptures, and print portfolios, the treasures that lie within these pages are an ideal complement to MoMA's extensive Kelly holdings.

Mr. Shear said, "Ellsworth loved MoMA, and I can think of no better home for these works. He did not show his sketchbooks during his lifetime because they contained ideas that he still wanted to explore—Ellsworth constantly looked backward and forward in time. Drawing provides an unparalleled insight into the mind of an artist, and I hope that this gift may inspire artists working today to consider MoMA as a repository for their sketchbooks."

Three of the sketchbooks from the gift have been added to the current exhibition [Degree Zero: Drawing at Midcentury](#), organized by Samantha Friedman, Associate Curator, Department of Drawings and Prints, and on view on the Museum's second floor through June 5, 2021.

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**MoMA**

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