

# Ellsworth Kelly, fragmentation and the single form : June 15-September 4, 1990

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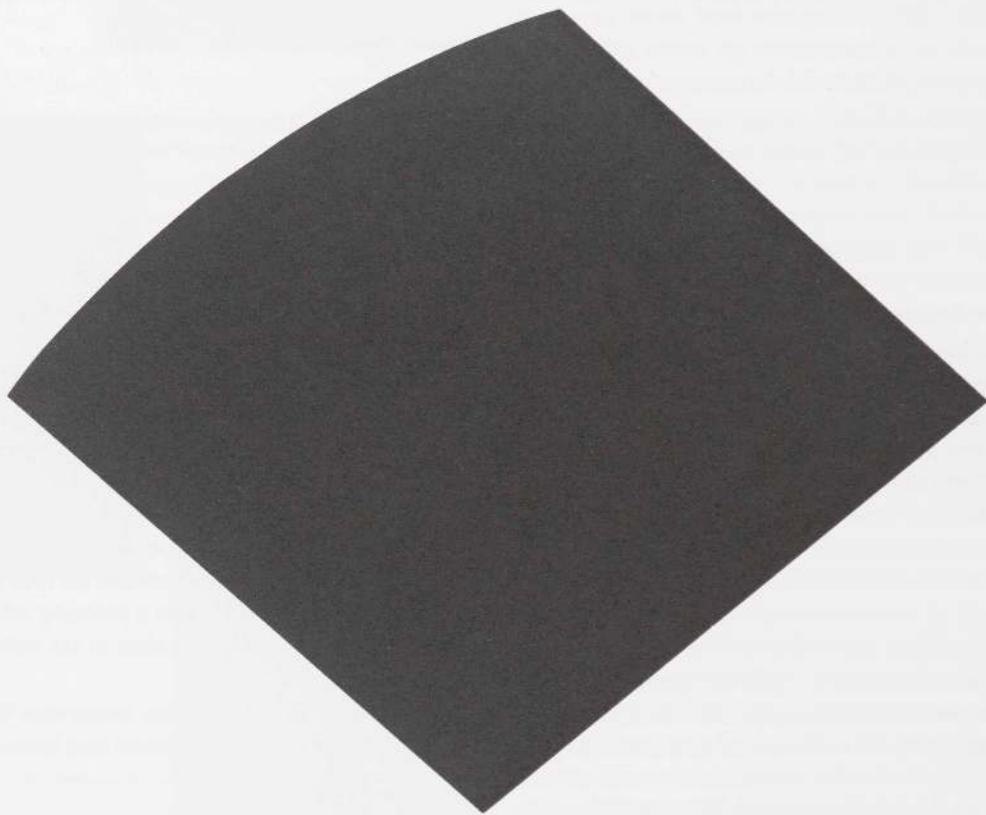
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A R T I S T ' S C H O I C E

# Ellsworth Kelly

FRAGMENTATION AND THE SINGLE FORM



**JUNE 15–SEPTEMBER 4, 1990**

THE ARTIST'S CHOICE SERIES IS MADE POSSIBLE BY A GENEROUS GRANT  
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## Fragmentation and the Single Form by Ellsworth Kelly

The keys of Suprematism are leading me to discover things still outside of cognition. My new painting does not belong solely to the earth. The earth has been abandoned like a house, it has been decimated. Indeed, man feels a great yearning for space, a gravitation to break free from the globe of the earth.<sup>1</sup>... The artist (the painter) is no longer bound to the canvas (the picture plane) and can transfer his composition from canvas to space.<sup>2</sup>

Kasimir Malevich

At the entrance of the Güell park there were some thirty workmen breaking tiles and reassembling the fragments like decorative elements. A bystander said: "How strange! Thirty men breaking pieces and further up, some others are putting them back together. I'll be hanged if I know what's going on!"

From a 1905 article on Antoni Gaudí<sup>3</sup>

Kasimir Malevich conceived the spatial liberation of painting as both a philosophical and a formal act. But however much the modern painter has tried to move from the canvas into space, he has always had to return to the planarity of the surface of the canvas. I have written elsewhere that in my own work I wanted to free shape from its ground, and then to work the shape so that it has a definite relationship to the space around it; so that it has a clarity and a measure within itself of its parts (angles, curves, edges, and mass); and so that, with color and tonality, the shape finds its own space and always demands its freedom and separateness. In sculpture, the work itself is the form and the ground is the space around it. In paint-

ing, the form and the ground have always shared the same surface.

It was in the period from 1949 to 1954, when I lived in Paris, that I first achieved the separation of form and ground in a series of joined-panel paintings. The canvas panels were painted solid colors with no incident, lines, marks, brushstrokes, or depicted shapes; the joined panels became a form, and thereby transferred the ground from the surface of the canvas to the wall. The result was a painting whose interest is not only in itself, but also in its relationship to things outside it.<sup>4</sup>

I feel that one of the most important developments in the history of abstraction has been the artist's

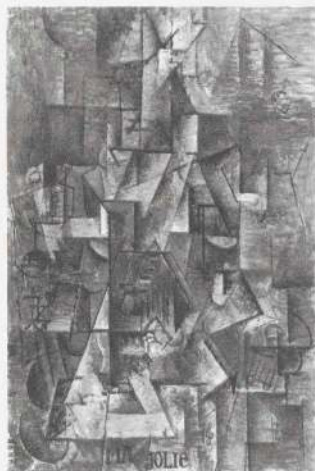
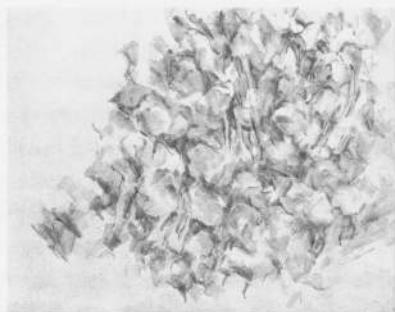
1. Kazimir Malevich, 1878–1935 (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1988), 70.

2. Kasimir Malevich, "Suprematism," *The Non-Objective World*. Reprinted in Herschel B. Chipp, ed., *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1968), 341.

3. "A la entrada del parque Güell hay unos treinta peones rompiendo azulejos y reuniendo los fragmentos como elementos decorativos. Un curioso dijo: ¡Qué cosa tan extraña! Treinta hombres rompiendo piezas y más arriba otros tantos recomponiéndolas. ¡Que me aspen si lo entiendo!" From the satirical journal *L'Esquella de la Torratxa* (Barcelona), 28 (1905). Cited in Juan Bassegoda Nonell, *El Gran Gaudí*, Sabadell (Barcelona: Editorial AUSA, 1989), 451.

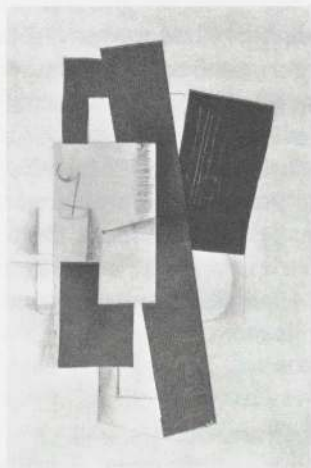
4. These introductory remarks on the nature of my art are drawn from a statement I made for the exhibition catalogue *Ellsworth Kelly* (Los Angeles and New York: Margo Leavin Gallery and Leo Castelli Gallery, 1984).

Cézanne  
*Foliage*, 1895–1900  
17  $\frac{5}{8}$  x 22  $\frac{3}{8}$ "



Picasso  
*"Ma Jolie,"* 1911–12  
39  $\frac{3}{8}$  x 25  $\frac{3}{4}$ "

Braque  
*Guitar*, 1913–14  
39  $\frac{1}{4}$  x 25  $\frac{3}{4}$ "



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. Invited by The Museum of Modern Art to participate in the *Artist's Choice* series of exhibitions, I have selected bas-relief, ceramic tile, collage, painting in watercolor and oil, sculpture, and photography to show how modern artists have used fragmentation, either by calculation or by chance, or have presented a fragment of the visual world as a single form.

In the making of art, fragmentation of forms, whether willfully or by chance, is related to vision. Wherever we look in the world, objects are layered, jumbled together, spread out before us. The Impressionists, Georges Seurat, and Paul Cézanne were among the first artists to try to come to terms with this visual chaos. In fragmenting the traditional visual field through cropping and eccentric perspectives, the Impressionists created visual analogies of informal and random perceptions of the world. With a profound understanding of the elusiveness of vision, Seurat atomized color to map out and stabilize the chromatic complexities of vision, while Cézanne tackled and conceptualized the three-dimensional world in terms of its underlying structures and our uncertain relationships to it.

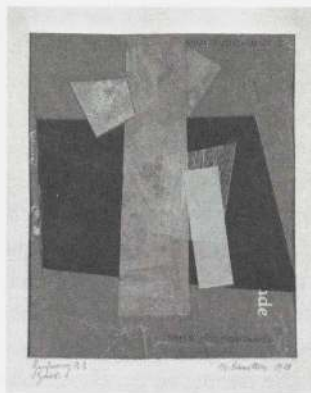
In the work of Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, these concerns led to Cubism and influenced early abstraction. It was only a question of time before these two artists' experiments with form exploded off the surface of the canvas into the literal and contradictory spaces of collage. Although paper collage appears in the nineteenth century, it was not until the second decade of the twentieth century that collage was brought into the modernist fold by Picasso and Braque.



During the early fifties in Paris, I became aware of the automatic drawings of the Surrealists, the collages of Kurt Schwitters, and the early works of Francis Picabia. I also had the advantage of meeting Jean Arp at his Meudon studio, where I saw his work, as well as that of his wife, Sophie Taeuber-Arp. Their collages of 1916–18 were my first introduction to fragmented forms arranged according to the laws of chance. At the same time, I began making my own chance collages. (See back cover.) Although similar in spirit to those of the Arps, their squared component shapes were regular in size and ordered in predetermined rows. The element of chance was introduced in the random placement of each square and in the resulting patterns of fragmented ink brushstrokes. Although I did not know it then, the accidental dimensions of my collages were more like the fragmented tile work of the Catalan architect Antoni Gaudí.

It was not until 1967 when I first visited Barcelona, and in 1975 when I returned, that I saw Gaudí's tile designs for the Güell park and palace and stood in awe of their implications and of what I surmised to be their influence on the work of Picasso and Joan Miró, both of whom spent their early years in Barcelona. The custom of *trencadis*, the system of breaking tiles to be applied to either a concave or convex surface, is thought to have been brought by the Moors into Spain, where it was integrated into the native folk tradition and later adapted by Gaudí for his architectural designs. Any history of chance and fragmentation in modern art should give Gaudí special recognition. Looking at his broken tiles a hundred years after their conception, one is amazed at how eternally present they remain.

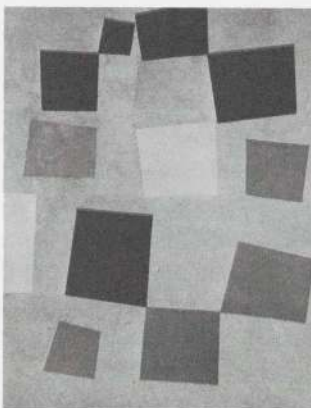
Picasso was nineteen years old in 1900 when he kept a studio in the calle Conde del Asalto, within sight of the Güell palace, which Gaudí completed



Schwitters  
Drawing A 2: Haus. 1918  
7 1/8 x 5 3/4"



Picabia  
New York. 1913  
22 x 29 7/8"



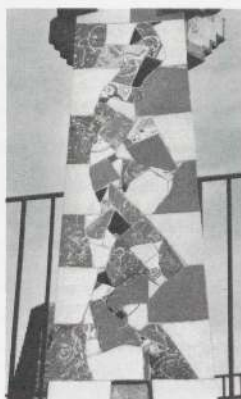
Arp  
Squares Arranged According  
to the Laws of Chance. 1917  
13 1/8 x 10 1/4"



Gaudí  
Tile work, Güell Park, Barcelona.  
1900–03



Picasso  
*Les Femmes d'Alger*. 1907  
 8' x 7'8"



Gaudí  
 Tile work, Güell Palace,  
 Barcelona. 1885–89



Audubon  
*Roseate Tern*. 1832  
 26 1/8 x 20 1/4"



Bell  
*Perched Rock*,  
 Rocker Creek, Arizona. 1872  
 10 13/16 x 8 1/16"

between 1885 and 1889. On the roof, Gaudí covered fourteen chimneys with broken tiles. This work and the fragmented tile walls of the Güell park, begun in 1900, may have contributed as importantly as the work of Cézanne to Picasso's development of Cubism. I have only to look at the right side of *Les Femmes d'Alger* (1907) to see the start of this development, not in the African faces but in the blue area around them.

In 1954, returning to New York after six years in Europe, I spent a great deal of my time in museums. At The New-York Historical Society I discovered all the mixed-media watercolor paintings that John James Audubon made for the celebrated hand-colored aquatints and line engravings of his *Birds of America* (1827–38). In 1832, Audubon painted a roseate tern, then cut it out and pasted it to a sheet of watercolored blue sky, perhaps as an aid to his engraver. He was probably dissatisfied with the original background and had discarded it. Many of the preliminary paintings have collaged elements, focusing attention on the edge of the form and bringing it into relief over the ground, an effect that is paralleled in Audubon's large-scale engravings of birds whose forthright shapes are seemingly razor-cut.

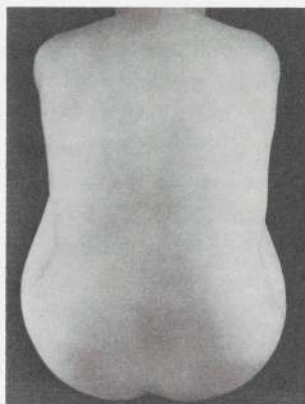
With the opening of the American West, many photographer/explorers documented this country's new and unique landscape. Photography isolates the world through an aperture and gives the photographer the means to see differently, to achieve a spontaneous vision that is direct and uncompromising. In 1872, William Bell photographed *Perched Rock* during a geological survey in Arizona. This natural icon stands like a piece of sculpture, presented by Bell as an image of a single form in space, and predating in its formal concerns abstract painting.



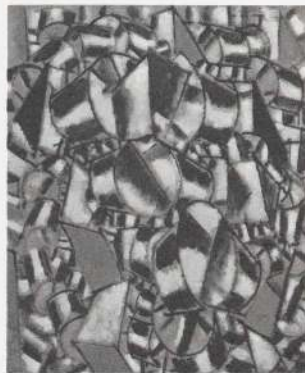
As formalist concerns prevailed in photography, abstraction became a means unto itself. Edward Weston's archetypal nude of 1925, *Mexico D.F. (Anita)*, deals with the relationship between form and ground in a way that is uniquely modern. The form takes over the rectangle. In 1932 Weston wrote:

*Fortunately, it is difficult to see too personally with the very impersonal lens-eye: through it one is prone to approach nature with desire to learn from rather than impose upon, so that a photograph, done in this spirit, is not an interpretation, a biased opinion of what nature should be, but a revelation — an absolute, impersonal recognition of the significance of facts.<sup>5</sup>*

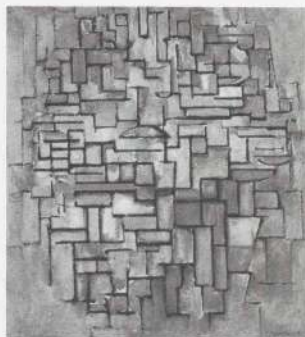
Within the tradition of modernist European painting and sculpture, artists have distilled single forms, often in conjunction with fragmentation. Fernand Léger, Piet Mondrian, and Malevich, for example, were all making Cubist-derived paintings of fragmented forms in 1912, but eventually their compositions were simplified to a few larger forms. By 1915 Malevich was isolating a single black or red square against a white ground, and three years later he painted a white square on white. Recently I realized how closely related the Malevich squares on white are to early Russian icons. Most icons have large borders, a built-in "frame" that is sometimes in slight relief around the icon itself. In his black and red square paintings, Malevich, in effect, blocked out and completely abstracted the specific religious content within the squared border-frames, making color his content. In the icons, holy figures are often found standing or sitting on a platform that is tilted in isometric perspective, assuming a diamond shape like that in Malevich's



Weston  
*Mexico D.F. (Anita)*. 1925  
9  $\frac{9}{16}$  x 7  $\frac{3}{16}$ "



Léger  
*Contrast of Forms*. 1913  
39  $\frac{1}{2}$  x 32"



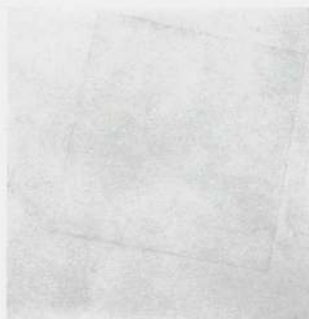
Mondrian  
*Composition in Brown and Gray*. 1913–14  
33  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 29  $\frac{3}{4}$ "



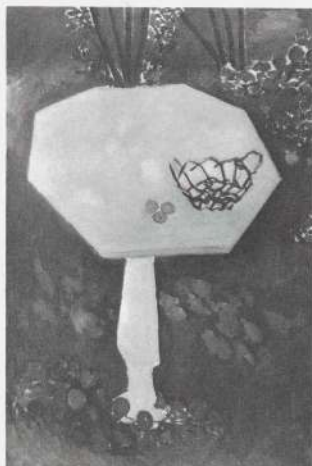
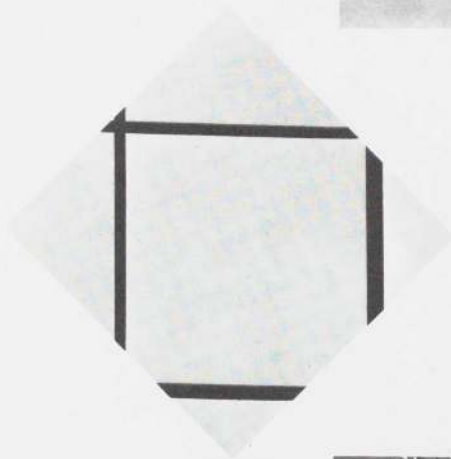
Rublev  
*Old Testament Trinity*. 1410–20  
55  $\frac{7}{8}$  x 44  $\frac{7}{8}$ "

5. "Statement," *Exhibition of Photographs/Edward Weston*, New York, 1932. Reprinted in Robert A. Sobieszek, *Masterpieces of Photography from the George Eastman House Collections* (New York, 1985), 240.

Malevich  
Suprematist Composition:  
*White on White*. 1918  
31 1/4 x 31 1/4"



Mondrian  
*Painting, I*. 1926  
44 3/4 x 44"



Matisse  
*The Rose Marble Table*. 1917  
57 1/2 x 38 1/4"

*White on White* of 1918. The similarities of Malevich's Suprematist paintings to the traditional icons of his Russian culture are structural, formal, and even meta-physical in that there is a shared commitment to picturing transcendental realities.

In his early paintings in Holland, Mondrian used the windmill, apple tree, and church facade as single motifs. Later, influenced by Cubism, he fragmented and increasingly simplified his vision of ocean piers and architectural facades in the plus-and-minus compositions, which led, in turn, to his non-objective paintings. Within a few years, his paintings were constructed of black vertical and horizontal bands and blocks of primary colors. Between 1918 and his death in 1944, he completed a special series of sixteen diamond-shaped canvases known as the diamond paintings, the only instance of the diagonal in his mature work. Compare Mondrian's *Painting, I* of 1926, in which the black bands form a grid (an implied square) that is seen, fragmented, through a diamond-shaped aperture, with Malevich's tilted square set within the square of the canvas. The Mondrian and Malevich paintings reverse each other.

Henri Matisse, late in life, bedridden and unable to paint, turned toward a variant form of collage: cut-and-pasted sheets of paper colored with gouache. It is as if the earlier brushstrokes of this Fauvist had metamorphosed into large sheets of colored paper, which covered the walls of rooms and which seemed to be where his whole lifework was leading: to the freeing of color and form from a ground. An earlier painting of 1917, *The Rose Marble Table* is a rare composition that presents a single form, seemingly cut out from the background and anticipating the late *gouaches découpées* and work derived from them, such as the stenciled pochoir plates from the 1947 portfolio *Jazz*.

*Text continues on back panels.*



Text continued from front panels.

The female figure has been frequently addressed by modern artists as a form to fragment and distill to an abstract yet suggestive shape. In Picasso's *Head of a Woman* (1951), for instance, the diamond form as a face seems to float above the rest of the sculpture. Modern artists have also simplified the curvaceous shapes of the female torso to single forms, which vary widely in expression: for example, Weston's bold photograph *Mexico D.F. (Anita)* (1925); Alberto Giacometti's austere *Woman* (1928), cast in bronze; Miró's whimsical *Relief Construction* (1930), cut out of wood and metal; and Matisse's classical blue and white *Forms* (1947), stenciled onto paper.

Constantin Brancusi's volumetric sculptures are simple forms. For me, his masterpieces are *Fish* (1930) and *Bird in Space* (1928), which rise above their bases as unique shapes. While visiting Brancusi in his Paris studio in 1950, I was impressed by the purified nature of his abstraction and by his creation of simple, often solitary forms. For me, his art was an affirmation; it strengthened my intention to make an art that is spiritual in content.

From the beginning of the twentieth century, modern artists have been preoccupied with fragmenting the world 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.

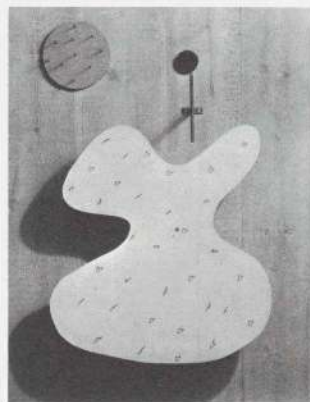
Ellsworth Kelly extends special thanks to Richard Axsom, Xavier Nieto, and Jack Shear for their help with this project.



Picasso  
*Head of a Woman*. 1951  
21  $\frac{1}{8}$  x 14  $\frac{1}{8}$  x 7  $\frac{3}{8}$ "



Giacometti  
*Woman*. 1928  
15  $\frac{1}{2}$  x 6  $\frac{5}{8}$  x 3"



Miró  
*Relief Construction*. 1930  
35  $\frac{7}{8}$  x 27  $\frac{3}{8}$  x 6  $\frac{3}{8}$ "

## List of Illustrations

(An asterisk indicates that the work is not included in the exhibition.)

**Ellsworth Kelly.** *Untitled*. 1988. Oil on canvas, 66 1/2" x 6' 9 1/4" (166.3 x 203.1 cm). Courtesy the artist

**Paul Cézanne.** *Foliage*. 1895–1900. Watercolor and pencil on paper, 17 3/4 x 22 3/8" (44.8 x 56.8 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Lillie P. Bliss Collection

**Pablo Picasso.** *Ma Jolie* (Woman with a Zither or Guitar). 1911–12. Oil on canvas, 39 3/4 x 25 1/4" (100 x 65.4 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest

**Georges Braque.** *Guitar*. 1913–14. Gesso, pasted paper, charcoal, pencil, and gouache on canvas, 39 1/4 x 25 1/4" (99.7 x 65 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest

**Kurt Schwitters.** *Drawing A 2: Haus*. 1918. Collage of cut-and-pasted colored papers and wrapper, 7 1/8 x 5 3/4" (18.1 x 14.6 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase

**Francis Picabia.** *New York*. 1913. Gouache, watercolor, and pencil on paper, 22 x 29 1/8" (55.8 x 75.9 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. The Joan and Lester Avnet Collection

**Jean Arp.** *Squares Arranged According to the Laws of Chance*. 1917. Cut-and-pasted papers, ink, and bronze paint, 13 1/8 x 10 1/4" (33.2 x 25.9 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Philip Johnson

**Ellsworth Kelly.** *Brushstrokes Cut into 35 Squares and Arranged by Chance*. 1951. Ink and collage on paper, 4 x 5 3/8" (10 x 14.1 cm). Courtesy the artist

**Antoni Gaudí.** *Tile work, Güell Palace, Barcelona*. 1885–89. Photograph courtesy Ellsworth Kelly

**Antoni Gaudí.** *Tile work, Güell Park, Barcelona*. 1900–03. Photograph courtesy Ellsworth Kelly

**\*Pablo Picasso.** *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. Version O)*. 1907. Oil on canvas, 8' x 7'8" (243.9 x 233.7 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest

**John James Audubon.** *Roseate Tern*. 1832. Watercolor and collage on paper, 26 1/8 x 20 1/4" (65.3 x 50.6 cm). Courtesy The New-York Historical Society, New York

**William Bell.** *Perched Rock, Rocker Creek, Arizona*. 1872. Albumen-silver print from a glass negative, 10 1/8 x 8 1/8" (27 x 20.2 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase

**Edward Weston.** *Mexico D.F. (Anita)*. 1925. Platinum print, 9 1/8 x 7 1/4" (23.9 x 17.9 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the photographer. © 1981 Arizona Board of Regents, Center for Creative Photography

**Fernand Léger.** *Contrast of Forms*. 1913. Oil on canvas, 39 1/2 x 32" (100.3 x 81.1 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. The Philip L. Goodwin Collection

**Piet Mondrian.** *Composition in Brown and Gray*. 1913–14. Oil on canvas, 33 3/4 x 29 3/4" (85.7 x 75.6 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase

**\*Andrei Rublev.** *Old Testament Trinity*. 1410–20. Tempera on wood, 55 7/8 x 44 3/8" (139.7 x 112.2 cm). Courtesy Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

**Kasimir Malevich.** *Suprematist Composition: White on White*. 1918. Oil on canvas, 31 1/4 x 31 1/4" (79.4 x 79.4 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York

**Piet Mondrian.** *Painting, J*. 1926. Oil on canvas; diagonal measurements, 44 3/4 x 44" (113.7 x 111.8 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Katherine S. Dreier Bequest

**Henri Matisse.** *The Rose Marble Table*. 1917. Oil on canvas, 57 1/2 x 38 1/4" (146 x 97 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Mrs. Simon Guggenheim Fund

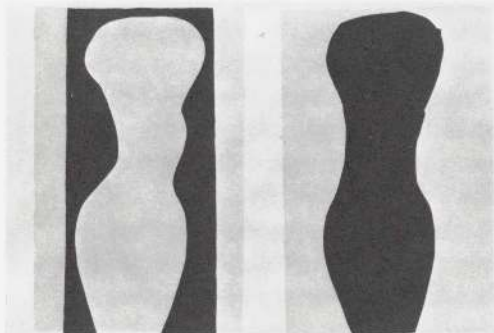
**Pablo Picasso.** *Head of a Woman*. 1951. Bronze (cast 1955), 21 1/8 x 14 1/8 x 7 3/8" (53.6 x 35.7 x 18.8 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Benjamin Scharps and David Scharps Fund

**Alberto Giacometti.** *Woman*. 1928. Bronze (cast 1970–71), 15 1/2 x 6 3/8 x 3" (39.2 x 16.7 x 7.7 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Courtesy Mme Alberto Giacometti

**Joan Miró.** *Relief Construction*. 1930. Wood and metal, 35 7/8 x 27 3/8 x 6 3/8" (91.1 x 70.2 x 16.2 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase

**Henri Matisse.** *Forms, from the portfolio Jazz*. 1947. Pochoir plate in color (stencil), sheet 16 3/8 x 25 3/8" (41.6 x 54.1 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the artist

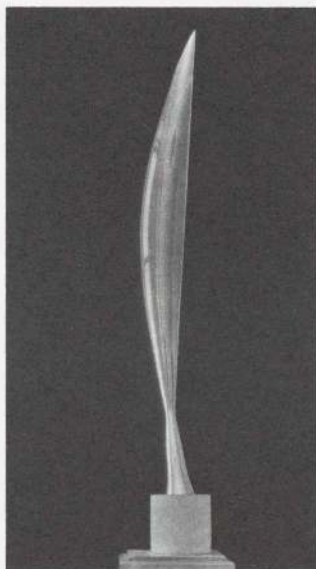
**Constantin Brancusi.** *Bird in Space*. 1928. Bronze (unique cast), 54 x 8 1/2 x 6 1/2" (137.2 x 21.6 x 16.5 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Given anonymously



Matisse

*Forms, from the portfolio Jazz*. 1947

Sheet 16 3/8 x 25 3/8"



Brancusi

*Bird in Space*. 1928

54 x 8 1/2 x 6 1/2"

## Afterword

The history of modern art is often presented as if it were a chain of influences, passed along from one generation of innovators to the next—rather like a series of baton races, with each pioneer's advanced position a point of departure for his or her followers. The linear installation of the permanent collection of The Museum of Modern Art may seem to encourage such a reading of history, as it presents the artists and movements of twentieth-century art in chronological sequence, and tends to group paintings and sculptures in compartmented categories of relationship. But for an artist visiting these galleries, that time line can dissolve, and those categories break down, as he or she constructs a personal "family tree" of favorite ancestors that may defy the order of history and splice together unfamiliar alliances. The time line and the compartments help us learn important points of reference as to how the history of modern art unfolded; but these contemporary artists' alternative vision can teach us something equally valuable, about the way that history has grown, and continues to grow, by unpredictable, personal reinventions of the past. In the present exhibition, the painter and sculptor Ellsworth Kelly, master of a special vocabulary of simplified abstract form in painting and sculpture, provides us with a reordered vision of the possibilities in the Museum's collection, by grouping works from different time periods and in different mediums, that are normally isolated from each other in separate galleries. He has selected two associated groups of works—one featuring the breaking-up of the visual

world, and the surface of the artwork, into multiple fragments; and the other concerned with the isolation by artists of single, unified shapes. These groups of images and objects are assembled on the basis of the forms these works share, regardless of their disparate dates, subjects, and authors.

Such juxtapositions have a powerful visual logic, and at the same time raise provocative issues about styles of interpretation. A Los Angeles couple who collected art in the seventies had customized license plates that read *FORM* on one car, *CONTENT* on the other. Lots of others have shared the notion that these are separable aspects of art; and usually, when the two terms are split, form is the pole of contention. Some partisans of modern art regard the attainment of a "pure" form as the highest goal of the artist's enterprise, and they take a discussion about the formal properties of a work to be a focus on the kernel of the matter. But for others, "formalism" settles only for the husk: to be concerned first of all with the shapes and patterns of a painting or sculpture is, they say, to ignore the roots that link art to external systems of meaning in the life around it, and in history.

Looking at Ellsworth Kelly's art, or looking at art with Ellsworth Kelly, will not settle this debate, but might go a long way toward making it seem beside the point. When he isolates and concentrates on shape, he believes he is at the same time addressing the content, or meaning, of art on a very important and basic level. The form-seeking propensities of the human mind — the abilities to carve out the odd fragment,



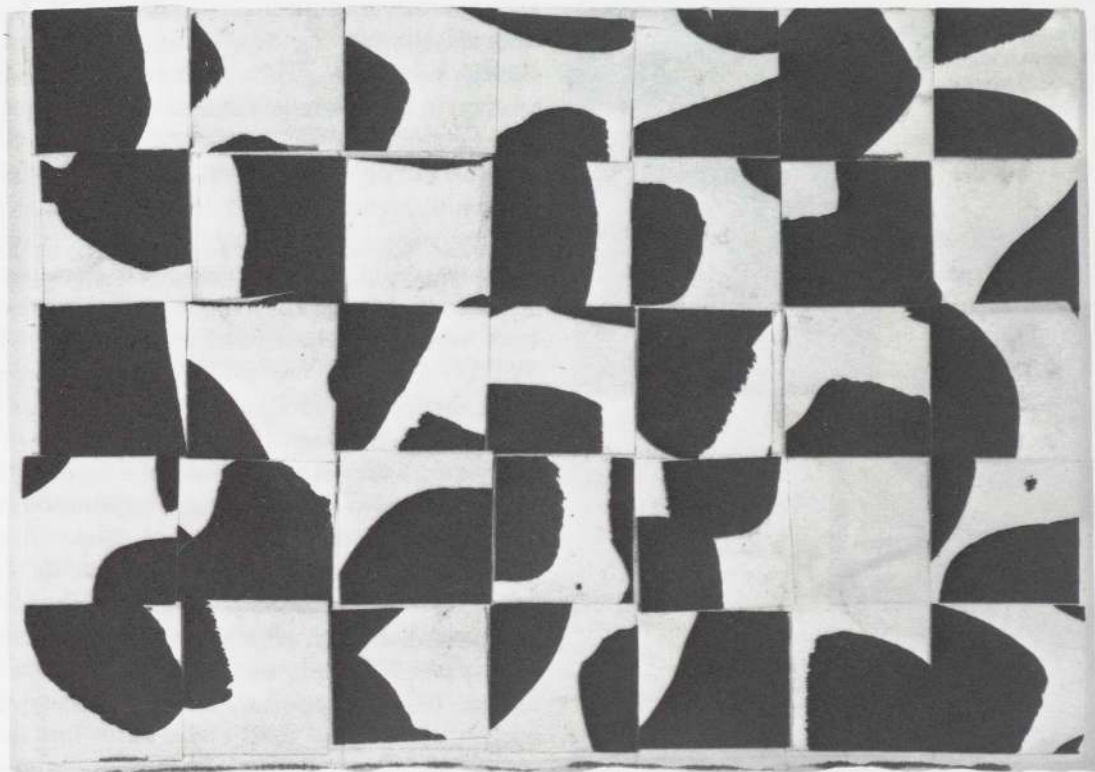
or find the pattern of order; in the flux of experience—are one of its fundamental glories. And as in so much of modern art, where the revelatory is shown to reside in the familiar, Kelly's work expands on this basic, shared quality of looking, and makes from it a new mode of representing the world. An expansive range of human experience, from the equipoise of the body to the orders of architecture, from the broad reach of natural vistas to tiny quirks of shadow and glints of light, are drawn within the compass of his contours and colors; and the combination of unpredictability, refinement, and long-extended consistency in this vision, is uncanny. His shaped canvases and personal geometries of bronze and steel are never merely reductive or arid, but reflect instead a sensibility remarkably open to the serendipitous, chance-driven aspects of perception, and on which the cold hand of formula never falls. Looking across the Museum's collection, he has pulled out for special consideration works in which he feels a similar dialogue, between a concern for the contingencies of perception and a will to impose formal order; is evidently in play.

Cast across the history of modern art, such an eye yields combinations no curator would dare essay. In this small show he has selected, Kelly sometimes takes a familiar historical line (such as the sequence from Cézanne to Picasso to Mondrian) and adds to it a surprising element (such as the fractured ceramic tiles of Gaudí); and sometimes constructs bonds of similarity between worlds—such as those of Matisse's rosy, domestic garden furniture and Malevich's snow-white, cosmic architecture of the spirit—we might have thought irreconcilable. We need not wonder whether these relationships are "real," or have historical substance: their existence within the fabric of Kelly's art is proof enough that they belong, in a special and effective way, to the his-

tory of modern art. That history was not built on the model of the old academies, with styles and rules passed down from one generation to the next. Instead it has involved a series of voluntary associations, small clubs of elective affinity and families of adoption. Similarly, the life of forms in modern art is neither a mystic progress of some deep-buried, innate vocabulary of elemental shapes, nor just a hollow game of borrowed conventions. It is a constant negotiation between the selected lessons of forebears and the confrontation with the peculiar givens of individual experience, each illuminating the other. In constructing for us a version of his adopted family tree, Kelly offers us one account of where that life comes from, and an invaluable insight into how it goes on.

The Museum of Modern Art is grateful to Ellsworth Kelly for selecting this exhibition, and for all the time he has so generously given in its preparation. I join with the artist in extending our gratitude to The New-York Historical Society, and to Holly Hotchner, its director; for the loan of the Audubon watercolor/colage included here. Both of us extend thanks as well to the directors and staff of the Museum's departments of Photography, Drawings, and Prints and Illustrated Books, for the works these departments kindly loaned, and for the assistance each department provided. Special appreciation goes to Anne Umland, Assistant to the Director, Department of Painting and Sculpture, for overall organization of the project. Finally, a tremendous debt of thanks is owed The Charles A. Dana Foundation for the generous grant which makes possible this and future *Artist's Choice* exhibitions.

Kirk Varnedoe  
Director, Department of Painting and Sculpture



Kelly. *Brushstrokes Cut into 35 Squares and Arranged by Chance*. 1951. 4 x 5 $\frac{5}{8}$ "

Ellsworth Kelly

Born 1923, Newburgh, New York.

In U.S. Army Engineers Camouflage Battalion, 1943–45.

Studied drawing with Ture Bengtz and painting with Karl Zerbe at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1946–48.

Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Paris, 1948–50.

In France, 1948–54.

Lives in upstate New York.

FRONT COVER: Kelly. *Untitled*. 1988. 66 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 6' 9 $\frac{1}{4}$ "