



Ellsworth Kelly's Chatham Series Presents a Linchpin Moment

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There's a lot of ways to celebrate a 90th birthday—cake, candles, friends and presents all spring to mind. For Ellsworth Kelly's 90th Birthday, the Museum of Modern Art has reunited a series of paintings the artist made after leaving New York City for upstate New York in 1970. "Ellsworth Kelly: Chatham Series" presents the series of 14 paintings that were each named for the town where his new studio was located. This is the first time the series have been presented together in 40 years, according to MoMA.

Each work in the Chatham Series is an inverted eli made from two joined canvases using either black, white, red, yellow, blue or green. Kelly developed the works in an intuitive fashion, according to MoMA. The final paintings are based on studies Kelly made by manipulating paired pieces of colored paper and adjusting the colors and proportions until he was satisfied.



"Chatham III Black Blue" BY Ellsworth Kelly (American, born 1923), 1971. Oil on canvas, two joined panels. 108 x 96 (274.3 x 243.8 cm). Robert and Jane Meyerhoff Collection. © Ellsworth Kelly Photo credit National

Kelly left New York City in 1970 after living and working there since the mid-fifties. He settled in Spencertown in Upstate New York's in Columbia County. He found a studio in nearby Chatham, located above a row of storefronts in a building on Main Street. The spacious studio and disconnect from the pace of New York City and the art world allowed Kelly to embark on a new chapter in his art, said MoMA. After a year, Kelly began the Chatham series named after the town.



“Chatham IV Blue Red-Orange” by Ellsworth Kelly (American, born 1923), 1971. Oil on canvas, two joined panels. 108 x 99 (274.3 x 251.5 cm). The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. Gift of Daniel Melnick. © Ellsworth Kelly Photo credit National

“Ellsworth Kelly: Chatham Series” provides the chance to experience a key moment in Kelly’s artistic development, according to MoMA. Kelly first developed his abstract vocabulary of line, form, and color while living and working in Paris, from 1948 to 1954.

MoMA recounts his artistic development this way:

“Resolving to make what he described as “anonymous” work, Kelly set out to conceal any trace of a personal painterly gesture in his canvases. During this formative period Kelly also began to explore the joining of monochrome expanses together to create multi-panel works, an approach that has endured throughout his career.”



“Chatham XII Yellow Black” by Ellsworth Kelly (American, born 1923), 1971. Oil on canvas, two joined panels. 84 x 76 1/4 (213.4 x 193.7 cm). Collection of the artist. © Ellsworth Kelly Photo credit courtesy Ellsworth Kelly.

The Chatham Series was first exhibited in 1972 at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, NY, one year after the series was completed. Afterwards, the 14 paintings went their separate ways. The MoMA exhibition reunites them for the first time.

“Ellsworth Kelly: Chatham Series” was organized by Ann Temkin, The Marie-Josée and Henry Kravis Chief Curator of Painting and Sculpture.

BASIC FACTS: “Ellsworth Kelly: Chatham Series” opened on May 23 and continues until Sept 8, 2013 at the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53rd Street, New York, NY 10019. An illustrated catalogue accompanies the exhibition. The exhibition is installed on MoMA’s fourth floor in the Alfred H. Barr, Jr. Painting and Sculpture Galleries.

HAMPTONS INSIDER: Kelly was a friend of Jack Youngerman, who lives and works in Bridgehampton, NY. The two men met in Paris on the GI Bill. Both were later included in Dorothy Miller’s landmark show, *Sixteen Americans*, at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in the winter of 1959. Kelly and Youngerman both experimented with single colored canvases and geometric patterns, but while Kelly’s shaped canvases were often irregular, Youngerman sought to explore a radical symmetry of form.

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