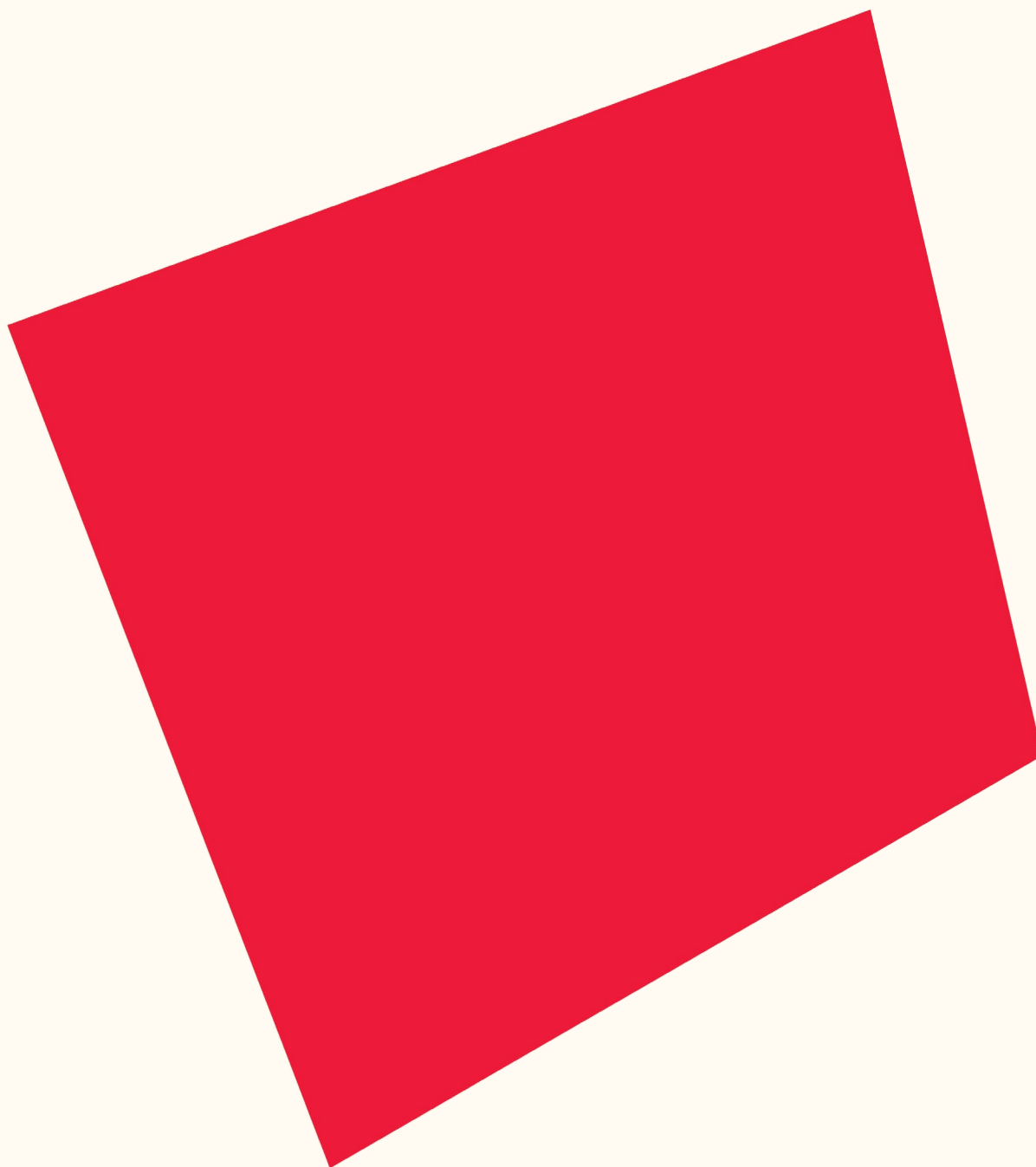


Ellsworth Kelly: Prints and Paintings

January 22–April 22, 2012



Ellsworth Kelly as Printmaker

For more than fifty years, Ellsworth Kelly (b. 1923) has been recognized as a leading American painter and sculptor. His art of emphatic form and vibrant color—lyrical and serenely self-confident—is a finely wrought distillation of observed shapes in nature. Kelly has also been an ambitious printmaker, deploying his dynamic geometry of squared, angled, and curved forms to great effect in his graphic editions.

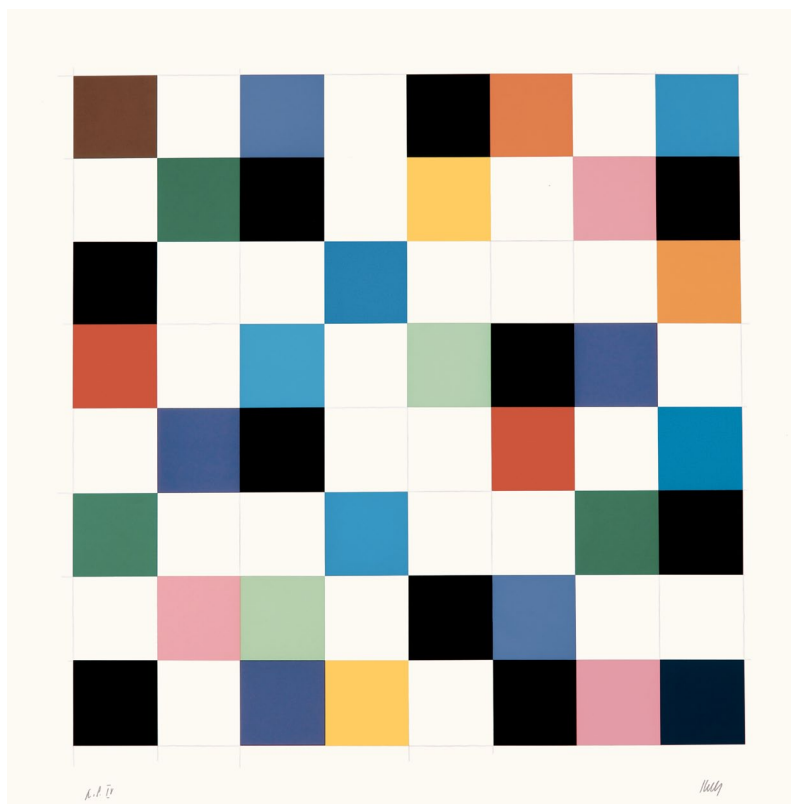
Born in Newburgh, New York, Kelly studied at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn until he was drafted into the U.S. Army, spending the majority of his military service in Europe. From 1948 through 1954, he lived in Paris, where he absorbed the influence of the French inheritors of Cubism and Surrealism. He abandoned figuration and easel painting in favor of a vocabulary of simple geometric shapes and swatches of brilliant color.

Kelly took up printmaking in a concerted fashion in the

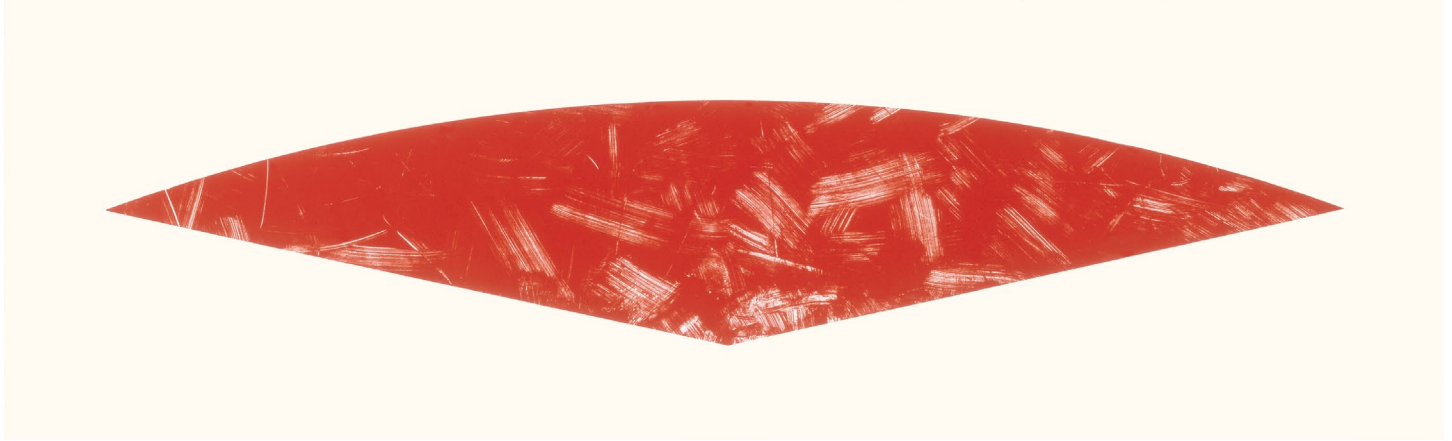
mid-1960s, when he produced his Suite of Twenty-Seven Lithographs with Maeght Éditeur in Paris. Since then he has collaborated primarily with Gemini G.E.L., the celebrated publishing workshop in Los Angeles. Kelly has created 336 editions, with the majority of the prints falling into twenty-three series. Although he has explored intaglio and screenprinting methods, lithography has been his medium of choice.

Kelly's prints may appear to be simple responses to the paintings. In fact, the artist typically develops an idea first in a collage or drawing, before realizing it as a painting, sculpture, or print. These preliminary studies, meticulously preserved over the years, form a repository of ideas to which Kelly may return for elaboration. Usually, the source collage or drawing is manifested first as a painting, with the print following—but not necessarily immediately or simply.

Kelly's prints restate rather than reproduce his work in other media. Leaving his studio and entering the print workshop, the artist engages in fruitful collaboration and exploration. For example, the prints have been safe haven for incorporating chance gesture and texture, elements associated with the artist's weathering metal and wood sculptures, with no counterparts



Colors on a Grid, 1976
Screenprint and offset lithograph, 48¼ × 48¼ inches
(122.6 × 122.6 cm)
Collection of Jordan D. Schnitzer



Red Curve (State I), 1988
Lithograph, 26 × 84 inches (66 × 213.4 cm)
Collection of Jordan D. Schnitzer

in the paintings. Printmaking requires the artist to articulate his exacting standards, while accepting the exigencies of the process. When Kelly appropriates an idea from his storehouse of drawings and collages as the basis for a print, abstract shape must be meticulously calibrated in size and in relationship to ink mixtures and paper dimensions. To implement Kelly's precise instructions requires extraordinary skill on the part of his lithographic printers.

Throughout his career, Kelly has examined curvilinear shapes, which suggest subtle allusions to the biomorphic forms of abstract Surrealists such as Joan Miró, Jean Arp, and Constantin Brancusi, all of whom he met while in Paris. The recurrence of pure curved shapes reveals Kelly's forthright, sustained engagement with an anti-illusionistic project. Suspending these shapes on stark white paper, Kelly ensures that the margins are "thought out as much as color and shape—much more so when shape is not rectangular."

At the same time, Kelly has produced seventy-two lithographs with recognizable botanical subjects, commenting in 1969 that "the drawings from plant life seem to be a bridge to the way of seeing that brought about the paintings of 1949 that are the bases for all my later work." Derived from spontaneous drawings on transfer paper, these lithographs—along with ink and pencil drawings of similar subjects—comprise a single graphic genre addressing plants, flowers, vegetables, and fruits. In his exploration of graceful natural forms, Kelly delights in the special properties of various drawing media, attuned to distinctive qualities of the line as he moves from pencil to ink to litho-

graphic crayon.

Despite the association of Kelly's work with bold color, black has featured importantly in his paintings and sculptures, for example the black-patinated bronzes and painted metal sculpture. More than half of his prints are black-and-white compositions, the palette alluding to "the classic printed image" and nodding to the importance of monochrome in the history of printmaking.

Kelly's prints, no less than his paintings and sculptures, have their own distinctive voice. While his paintings and sculptures assert their totemic presence and tangible physicality, his prints register equally important aspects of his vision: intimacy, delicacy, and ethereality. Varied in scale but consistent in their formal integrity, Kelly's prints bear witness to his commitment to the phenomenal world.

RICHARD H. AXSOM

Collector's Statement

When I was fourteen years old, I bought my first painting, and since then, while I appreciate all visual and performing arts, my principal passion has been for contemporary art, especially prints. That initial acquisition started a lifelong pursuit, not only to be surrounded by art, but also to build a collection that could be shared with the public. After several museums borrowed works for exhibitions, I realized that if I were able to acquire a significant number of prints and multiples, I might be able to share these with diverse audiences. During the last twenty-five years, I have organized more than eighty exhibitions that have traveled to fifty museums around the world. Pieces from my collection are loaned gratis, and I also help fund educational programs tailored to individual community needs.

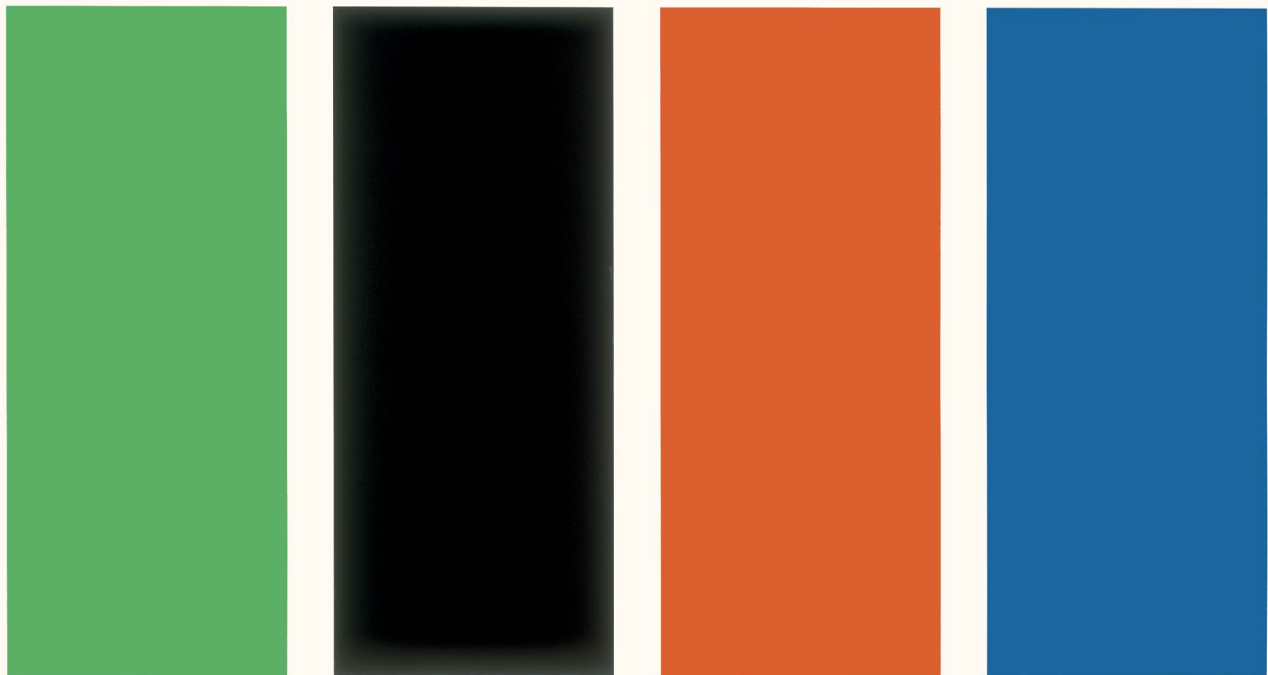
I purchased my first Ellsworth Kelly print in 1993 and have been steadily adding to my Kelly collection ever since. For me,

Kelly's work is perfectly complete, defined, and resolved. He is a master colorist, and the simplicity of his images after he worked hard to make them look so effortless is, to me, an astounding accomplishment. Kelly's work is full of boundless energy, while at the same time, it embodies complete stillness and calm. I love the tension between those two forces.

Waking up each day without art around me would be like waking up without the sun. When you live with art like Ellsworth Kelly's around you, your mind and soul are surrounded with the beauty of life and the creativity of the human spirit.

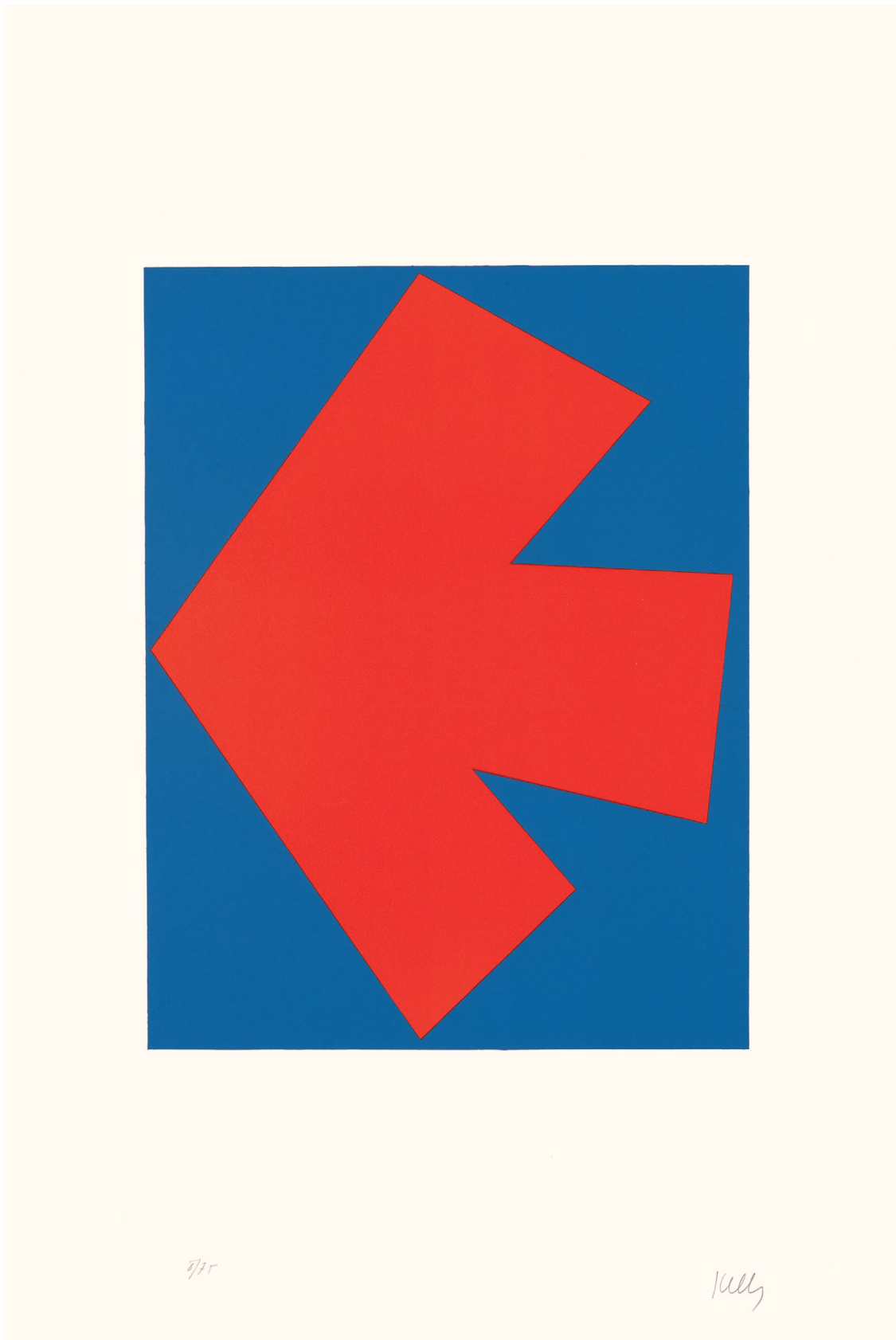
My sincere thanks to Michael Govan, LACMA Museum Director; Britt Salvesen, LACMA Curator of Prints and Drawings; and Stephanie Barron, LACMA Senior Curator of Modern Art; as well as all of the staff at LACMA who helped make this exhibition possible. I hope everyone who sees this exhibition of Ellsworth Kelly prints and paintings is as inspired and moved by it as I am.

JORDAN D. SCHNITZER

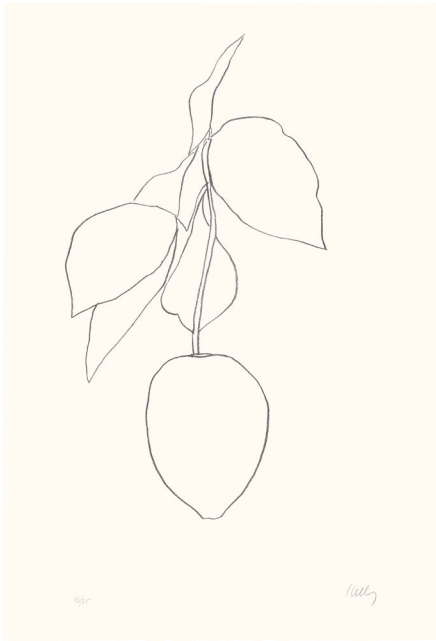


Ellsworth Kelly

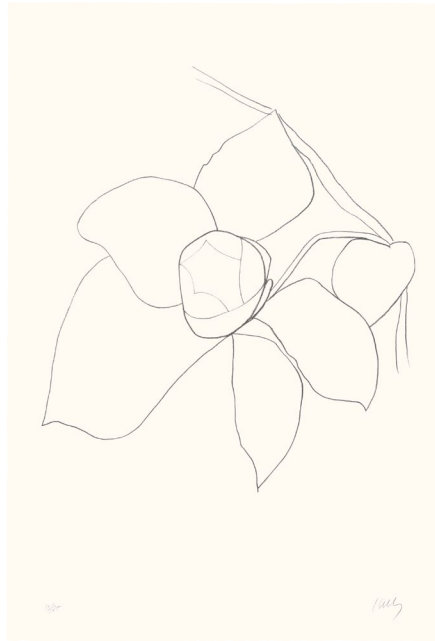
Four Panels, 1970–71
Screenprint, 36¾ × 62 inches (93.3 × 157.5 cm)
Collection of Jordan D. Schnitzer



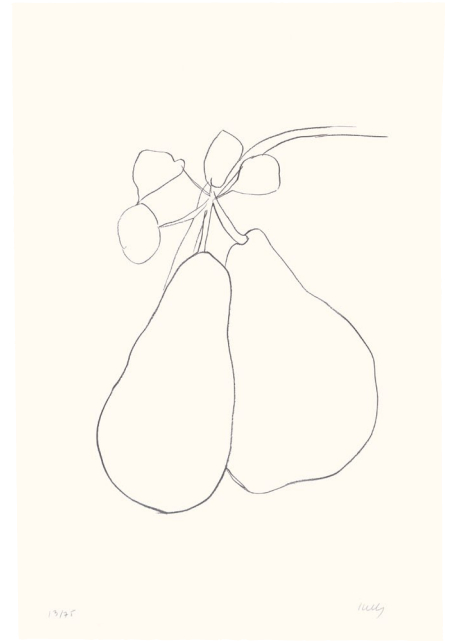
Orange over Blue (Orange sur Bleu), from Suite of
Twenty-Seven Color Lithographs, 1964–65
Lithograph, 35¼ × 23¾ inches (89.5 × 60.3 cm)
Collection of the Jordan Schnitzer Family Foundation



Lemon (Citron), from Suite of Plant Lithographs, 1964–65
Transfer lithograph, 35³/₈ × 24¹/₄ inches
(89.9 × 61.6 cm)
Collection of Jordan D. Schnitzer



Camellia II, from Suite of Plant Lithographs, 1964–65
Transfer lithograph, 35³/₈ × 24¹/₄ inches
(90.5 × 62.5 cm)
Collection of Jordan D. Schnitzer



Pear II (Poire II), from Suite of Plant Lithographs, 1965–66
Transfer lithograph, 34³/₈ × 23³/₈ inches
(87.9 × 59.4 cm)
Collection of Jordan D. Schnitzer

Acknowledgments

Coinciding with the release of Richard H. Axsom’s revised and updated catalogue of Kelly’s prints (first published in 1987), *Ellsworth Kelly: Prints and Paintings* (January 22–April 22, 2012) is organized thematically in order to explore Kelly’s mastery of key formal motifs: curves, contrast, and grids. A final room of paintings illuminates the dynamic relationships among different media.

Our first debt of gratitude goes to the artist, who graciously shared archival materials for this exhibition and whose work is an ongoing source of inspiration. We would also like to thank Jordan D. Schnitzer and the Jordan Schnitzer Family Foundation for generously lending to the exhibition. We greatly appreciate the commitment of Richard H. Axsom, Sidney Felsen and Stanley Grinstein of Gemini G.E.L., Matthew Marks, and Ed Marquand to the project. Grateful acknowledgment is also due to Jack Shear, Sandi Knakel, Eva Walters, Catherine Malone, Jacqueline Tran, and Lauren Bergman. For the loan of paintings, we thank the Norton Simon Museum of Art and a Los Angeles private collection.

STEPHANIE BARRON, Senior Curator, Modern Art
BRITT SALVESEN, Curator, Prints and Drawings

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This exhibition is organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Education programs at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art are supported in part by the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs, the William Randolph Hearst Endowment Fund for Arts Education, and Rx for Reading.



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ON COVER:
Red, 2005
Lithograph, 33¹/₄ × 29⁷/₈ inches (84.5 × 75.9 cm)
Collection of Jordan D. Schnitzer