

ELLSWORTH KELLY
AUSTIN
BLANTON MUSEUM OF ART

5: Planning and Constructing *Austin*

Hello, this is Kimberly Theel, Deputy Director of Operations at the Blanton Museum of Art.

Austin is unique in Ellsworth Kelly's body of work: it's his only building, and the only time in his career that he played the role of architect. His original designs for the structure—now in the collection of the Blanton—are meticulous pencil drawings with detailed notes about proportions and dimensions. These had been translated into blueprints by architects back in the 1980s when the project was originally conceived. However, interpreting the artist's vision on a public university campus more than thirty years later required problem-solving and adjustments using current technology.

The Blanton hired Overland Partners, an architectural firm in San Antonio, to work with Kelly so that his ideas could be translated into a functional structure without compromising his art. In his original concept, he envisioned relatively thin walls of poured concrete and possibly a whitewashed, stucco exterior. However, in order to follow building code and accommodate for central Texas weather, the building needed systems for climate control, lighting, and security as well as a more durable exterior.

The solution was to create thicker walls and a light raft on the ceiling to both contain and conceal these systems. This meant that the height of the building changed from 25 feet to just over 28, a change that pleased the artist because it gave the front windows more space. He also decided to increase the structure's length from 25 to 33 feet, because he wanted a longer central aisle. In consultation with Overland, Kelly also decided he wanted a stone exterior, taking inspiration from the Romanesque buildings in France that he had visited in his youth.

In October 2015, the Blanton broke ground for *Austin*, which was built by the Texas-based Linbeck Group. The building opened to the public on February 18, 2018. Kelly had literally signed off on every detail and material, and though he did not live to see *Austin* completed, he knew exactly what it would look like.