

ELLSWORTH KELLY
AUSTIN
BLANTON MUSEUM OF ART

4: Ellsworth Kelly in Paris

Hello, I'm Christian Wurst, Curatorial Assistant to the Deputy Director for Curatorial Affairs at the Blanton Museum of Art.

I'd like to tell you about Ellsworth Kelly's time in France, which influenced the creation of *Austin*.

In 1944, while serving in the U.S. Army, Ellsworth Kelly was deployed to Europe and visited Paris for the first time. Before the onset of World War II, the celebrated and historic capitol city had been home to a thriving array of innovative artists, and to many—including Kelly—it remained a cultural center and magnet when the war ended.

As a former soldier, the young artist was eligible for the financial support of the GI Bill, and he used this funding to return to Paris in 1948. He ended up staying in France nearly six years, enrolling in art school, but, more significantly, immersing himself in the rich culture the country offered, and educating himself about art and architectural history.

Kelly made lists of sites and monuments that interested him and especially sought out Romanesque architecture. He frequently visited libraries and museums and met prominent living artists such as Alexander Calder and Constantin Brâncuși.

In November 1949, Kelly noticed the shape of a window in its frame at a museum. He realized he could turn the shape into a work of art. It was a revelation he described like this—quote: *"From then on, painting as I had known, it was finished for me. The new works were to be painting slash objects—unsigned, anonymous. Everywhere I looked, everything I saw became something to be made... It was a new freedom; there was no longer the need to compose."* End quote.

Kelly found his own artistic voice in France, and his experiences there, in which modern art crossed paths with history, stayed with him the rest of his life—culminating in the creation of *Austin*.