

ELLSWORTH KELLY  
**AUSTIN**  
BLANTON MUSEUM OF ART

### 3: About Ellsworth Kelly

Hello, this is Carter E. Foster, Deputy Director for Curatorial Affairs at the Blanton Museum of Art.

Ellsworth Kelly was born in Newburgh, New York in 1923 and grew up in Pittsburgh and suburban New Jersey. After serving in the army during World War II, he studied studio art in Boston and then Paris, spending seven formative years in France—supported by the GI Bill.

In France, Kelly began to develop his artistic reputation, and when he returned to America in 1954, he moved to downtown Manhattan—settling in a place called Coenties Slip with an important group of fellow artists. Soon after, he began exhibiting at galleries and museums.

Today, Kelly is best known for his large-scale abstract painting and sculpture typified by expansive geometric forms. His paintings often feature extraordinarily vibrant colors, either on their own or in striking combinations.

Although he is widely considered a pioneering abstract artist, Kelly's work is deeply rooted in nature and the observable world. Learning to birdwatch as a child helped him develop his keen sense of close looking.

An artistic breakthrough came to him as a young man in France, when he realized the fragments and details of things he noticed around him—even seemingly mundane ones—could become the subjects of his art. Thus, the shape of a window frame, the shadows cast on a wall, might inspire his composition for a painting or drawing.

Similarly, his building *Austin*—the only structure Kelly ever designed—is his distillation of his experiences visiting many chapels and churches in Europe, especially ones built in Romanesque and Gothic architectural styles.

Although Kelly was not religious, he did believe in the spiritual power of art. *Austin* embodies this interest in art and spirituality and is the culmination of his exploration of form and color over the course of his seven-decade-long career.

After collaborating with the Blanton for several years and finalizing the design for *Austin*, Ellsworth Kelly passed away in December 2015.