

mima media release: 05 October 2009



Ellsworth Kelly

Drawings 1954-1962

11 December 2009 – 21 February 2010

PRESS VIEW: Thursday 10 December 2009 (or by arrangement)

PREVIEW: Thursday 10 December 2009, 6-8pm

mima is delighted to present a new exhibition of drawings by Ellsworth Kelly all executed between 1954 and 1962. This key eight-year period for Kelly was when he pioneered his much-admired abstract style that has been vital to the evolution of modern art. For many his distinct approach to colour and form has made him one of the most singular and influential American artists of the 20th century.

Now in his 86th year Ellsworth Kelly's career began in Paris, where he lived and worked from 1948-54. There he was influenced by European modernism, particularly the work of artists Jean Arp, Constantin Brancusi, Alexander Calder, Henri Matisse, Francis Picabia and Pablo Picasso. On moving back to New York City in 1954 he endeavoured to create a new abstraction, one that celebrated pure colour and shape while remaining rooted in the natural world.

For the exhibition the artist has selected over 20 drawings that use a variety of techniques including ink, graphite, oil paint and collage. Coming directly from the artist's studio they will be shown together for the first time at mima. With their heart stopping elegance the drawings in the exhibition will lay bare the visual language that makes Kelly one of the most important artists of our era.

Two of the works on show *Untitled*, 1957 and *Untitled*, 1959, have been purchased with funding from the Art Fund International scheme. In 2007 independent charity The Art Fund under its new initiative, Art Fund International, agreed to support the expansion of mima's drawing collection with a special focus on the Americas. They were selected after extensive conversations between mima and the artist himself.

Kelly described the works as 'two of the most revealing and important drawings made at that time'. The exhibition will see all of the works on display in Europe for the first time.

mima Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art is fast developing a national and international reputation as a place of excellence for modern and contemporary

drawing. mima's collection, exhibitions, learning programmes and events have already featured drawings by important artists such as Carl Andre, Monika Grzymala, Sol LeWitt, Richard Long, Gerhard Richter, Ed Ruscha, Sandra Vasquez de la Horra, and Lawrence Weiner among many others.

Ends

Notes to Editors

Ellsworth Kelly

Kelly's career began in Paris, where he lived and worked from 1948-54. There he was influenced by European modernism, particularly the work of artists Jean Arp, Constantin Brancusi, Alexander Calder, Henri Matisse, Francis Picabia and Pablo Picasso. It was in Paris he began to create his rigorously spare and elegant approach to abstraction, inventing a vocabulary of line, form and colour that would become the core of his practice.

Ellsworth Kelly was born in Newburgh, New York in 1923 and came to international prominence in the 1950s with his unmistakable form of minimal abstraction. For sixty years his work has been exhibited in the world's most prestigious museums and galleries with over 150 one-person exhibitions including: The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (1963); The Museum of Modern Art, New York (1973); The Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, the Pompidou Centre, Paris (1979); The Saint Louis Art Museum (1982), the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (1987), and the Tate Gallery, London (1997). Notable recent exhibitions include "Ellsworth Kelly" at the Serpentine Gallery, London in 2006, the 52nd International Art Exhibition of the Venice Biennale and premiere of Checkerboard Film Foundation's documentary *Ellsworth Kelly: Fragments* in 2007, and *Ellsworth Kelly Paris – New York 1949 – 1959* at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. He currently lives and works in New York.

Art Fund International

Institutions awarded £1million each through the Art Fund International scheme were:

- Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery
- GOMA, Glasgow
- mima, Middlesbrough
- Bristol Museum and Art Gallery
- The New Art Gallery, Walsall
- Towner, Eastbourne

At the outset of the scheme, each institution identified a partner organization which could offer them creative and curatorial support and guidance, usually

an agency or gallery specializing in international contemporary art. The partnerships are as follows:

- The West Midlands Partnership (Ikon Gallery, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, and The New Art Gallery Walsall)
- GOMA and The Common Guild, Glasgow
- mima, Middlesbrough and The Drawing Center, New York
- Towner and Photoworks
- Bristol Museum and Art Gallery and Arnolfini

The Art Fund is the UK's leading independent art charity. It offers grants to help UK museums and galleries enrich their collections; campaigns on behalf of museums and their visitors; and promotes the enjoyment of art. It is entirely funded from public donations and has 80,000 members. Since 1903 the charity has helped museums and galleries all over the UK secure 860,000 works of art for their collections. Recent achievements include: helping secure Titian's *Diana and Actaeon* for the National Galleries of Scotland and the National Gallery, London in February 2009 with a grant of £1 million; helping secure Anthony d'Offay's collection, ARTIST ROOMS, for Tate and National Galleries of Scotland in February 2008 with a grant of £1 million; and running the 'Buy a Brushstroke' public appeal which raised over £550,000 to keep Turner's *Blue Rigi* watercolour in the UK. For more information contact the Press Office on 020 7225 4888 or visit www.artfund.org.

The Art Fund is a Registered Charity No. 209174

mima Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art

mima is one of the UK's leading galleries for modern and contemporary art and craft. The landmark building designed by Erick van Egeraat Architects is situated in the heart of Middlesbrough. mima opened to international critical acclaim in January 2007.

Hosting temporary exhibitions of fine art and craft from 1900 to the present, mima showcases work by internationally acclaimed artists. The quarterly programme includes painting, drawing, ceramics, jewellery, sound, film, mixed media, photography and sculpture. Exhibitions change every quarter and admission is free.

mima is part of Middlesbrough Council and is funded by Middlesbrough Council and Arts Council England. The building was realised with support from: One NorthEast – SRB and Single Programme, Government Office North East, Northern Rock Foundation and The Foyle Foundation.

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