



ARTWORK **THE BOSTON PANELS**

ARTIST **ELLSWORTH KELLY**

INSTALLED 1998
JOHN JOSEPH MOAKLEY U.S. COURTHOUSE
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Ellsworth Kelly's art relies on carefully balanced color, form, and scale. His vibrant panels for the courthouse in Boston act as chromatic beacons that draw visitors through a series of dramatic architectural vistas. Although the twenty-one aluminum panels are installed in several distinct areas of the courthouse, they function as a single artwork. Their spare and ordered geometry serves as a foil to the more complicated forms of the Boston skyline, visible through the courthouse's spectacular glass curtain wall. Henry N. Cobb, the building's architect, observed that it would be impossible now to imagine these spaces without Kelly's artwork.

Architectural engagement is an important aspect of *The Boston Panels*. From the earliest years of his career, Kelly has pursued a fundamental inquiry into the relationship between painting and architecture. For example, *The Boston Panels* harkens back to Kelly's early collages *Eight Color Pairs* (1951) and the series *Nine Colors on White* (1953 and 1954). These and other paper collages were conceived as studies for architecturally scaled projects. The courthouse in Boston provided Kelly with an opportunity to realize these ideas on a grand scale.

Kelly's use of multiple, monochromatic panels has been likened to the anonymous work of a mason—an especially meaningful comparison for this artwork in a building where the expert laying of countless, handcrafted bricks was so essential. Likewise, his brilliantly colored panels are not narrative or symbolic. Instead, they isolate and distill fragments of visual experience. Although much of Kelly's early painting and sculpture was first derived from his sketches and collages of observed forms (like shadow patterns on a staircase, a row of shop awnings, or a sliver of hillside), these sources are purposefully obscured. The results are intense concentrations of color and form that cultivate a heightened awareness of the visual environment. Of his work in general, Kelly has stated, "In a sense, what I've tried to capture is the reality of flux, to keep art an open, incomplete situation, to get at the rapture of seeing." WC







Ellsworth Kelly was born in Newburgh, New York, in 1923. Following two years of study at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, Kelly served in the U.S. Army during World War II from 1943 to 1945, and then resumed his schooling at the Boston Museum School (now the School of the Museum of Fine Arts). He graduated in 1948, and then headed to Paris under the G.I. Bill. While in France, Kelly's encounters with leading artists of the day proved more profoundly instructive than his formal classes at the École des Beaux-Arts. Exposure to the urban fabric of Paris was a powerful influence for Kelly, as well. The first solo exhibition of his work was shown at Galerie Arnaud in Paris in 1951. In 1954, Kelly moved to New York, where his first American solo show was held at the Betty Parsons Gallery in 1956. Soon after, Kelly was included in two important exhibitions: *Young America 1957* at the Whitney Museum of American Art (the first museum to purchase Kelly's work) and *Sixteen Americans* (with Jasper Johns, Louise Nevelson, Robert Rauschenberg, Frank Stella, and others) at the Museum of Modern Art in 1959.

Today, Kelly's art is exhibited in the permanent collections of major museums around the world, and he has completed many important public commissions. These include *Sculpture for a Large Wall* (1957) for the now-demolished Philadelphia Transportation Building (the sculpture was given to the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1999) and *Berlin Panels* (2000) for the Paul-Löbe-Haus, the offices of the German parliament in Berlin. A major retrospective exhibition of Kelly's work was shown in 1996 at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, and traveled to the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, the Tate Gallery in London, and the Haus der Kunst in Munich. Amid a distinguished career spanning more than fifty years, *The Boston Panels* stands out as one of Kelly's most ambitious projects.

MEDIUM PAINTED ALUMINUM

DIMENSIONS NINE PANELS, EACH 11 FT X 13 FT 6 IN
TWELVE PANELS, EACH 11 FT X 7 FT 4 IN

