

Norton Simon Museum For Immediate Release

411 West Colorado Boulevard, Pasadena, California 91105 www.nortonsimon.org
External Affairs Department 626.844.6900 media@nortonsimon.org

February 2018

Media Contacts:

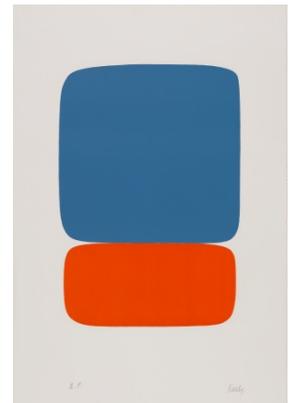
Leslie C. Denk | ldenk@nortonsimon.org | (626) 844-6941

Emma Jacobson-Sive | emma@ejs-media.com | (323) 842-2064

Line & Color: The Nature of Ellsworth Kelly

June 1–Oct. 29, 2018

Pasadena, CA—The Norton Simon Museum presents *Line & Color: The Nature of Ellsworth Kelly*, an exhibition featuring the exquisite lithographic work of American artist Ellsworth Kelly (1923–2015). On view are *Suite of Twenty-Seven Color Lithographs* and *Suite of Plant Lithographs*—two bodies of work made by the artist in the mid-1960s, just as he was beginning to experiment with the medium. Seemingly different in subject and style—one brightly colored and abstract, the other simple figurative forms of plants and fruit—the two suites were in fact created simultaneously and in connection with one another. Seen together, and alongside two monumental paintings by the artist from the Museum’s collection, Kelly’s works demonstrate the way he absorbed the world around him and experimented with both line and color.



Blue Over Orange, 1964
Ellsworth Kelly (American, 1923–2015)
Lithograph on Rives BFK paper
35-3/8 x 23-5/8 in. (89.9 x 60 cm)
Norton Simon Museum, Gift of the Artist,
P.1969.024
© Ellsworth Kelly Foundation

In 1948, Kelly moved to Paris to immerse himself in the rich cultural life of the city, something he was unable to do while stationed there during the war. He stayed for nearly a decade, traveling to cities throughout the continent to visit museums, to make sketches of frescoes and stone sculptures and to absorb modern art. He befriended fellow American artists living abroad, as well as renowned European artists such as Jean Arp, Matisse and Brancusi. In the mid-1950s, he returned to New York, just as the city was becoming a vital cultural hub. By this point, however, Kelly’s creative vocabulary had been established. His vision of abstraction reflected the world around him, in contrast to the emotional and process-based abstraction of New York artists such as Pollock, Rothko and de Kooning.

At the end of 1964, when he was a successful, mid-career artist, Kelly returned to Paris for a solo exhibition of his paintings at the Galerie Maeght. While there, he took advantage of the fact that the owners of the gallery were also publishers of artist books and fine art prints. He made his first significant foray into the medium of prints and multiples with two series—*Suite of Twenty-Seven Color Lithographs* and *Suite of Plant Lithographs*.

The fact that these two suites were created simultaneously is significant. Kelly wanted these subjects of his art to be seen as correlative. The plant drawings informed the abstracted shapes, just as much as he saw abstract shapes in plants. “I did not want to ‘invent’ pictures, so my sources were in nature, which to me includes everything seen,” the artist once said. In the same way that he drew from plant material for the *Suite of Plant Lithographs*, he also lifted shapes from his everyday life to create the abstracted forms that became fodder for the *Twenty-Seven Color Lithographs*. The planar forms of a staircase and the grid of a window frame held as much potency as the plant forms he found in the garden. His artwork continued along these intertwined paths for the entirety of his career.

Suite of Twenty-Seven Color Lithographs was begun in late 1964 and exhibited in June of the following year. The flat surfaces and even planes of abstracted color proved to be a challenge for master printer Marcel Durassier, who was more accustomed to the linear nature of lithography. The precise output that Kelly exactingly demanded became the litmus test for all of his future printers. It has been said, “If you can print a Kelly, you can print anything.”

Suite of Plant Lithographs is a delicate study of natural forms. Kelly’s approach to the flowers, fruit and fauna is sparing. He does not focus on fine details, but offers just the right amount of information to convey the general idea of a specific plant. He said of his work, “Leaves, grass, cracks in the wall, all the randomness of a million pieces and variations. This way of composing was endless and didn’t need ‘me’—they made themselves—it seemed nature worked for me using the laws of chance.”

Complementing this collection of lithographic prints in the exhibition are two large-scale paintings. *White over Blue* was commissioned for Montreal’s Expo 67 and originally hung inside the geodesic dome created by Buckminster Fuller for the fair. At nearly 30 feet long, the work blurs the line between painting and sculpture, as the white plane literally floats off the wall and over the surface of its blue counterpart. To show the artist’s working method for *White over Blue*, three preliminary sketches are on loan from the Ellsworth Kelly Foundation. The earliest of these, a relief collage, dates to a decade prior to the painting’s creation. It illustrates how the artist was already envisioning an object that was not quite painting, not quite sculpture. Scale is established in the second of the three

sketches, while the third reiterates the fact that Kelly never deviated from his original color scheme of “white over blue.”

The second painting in the exhibition, *Red Orange White Green Blue* (1968), is an example of Kelly’s “spectrum” paintings. These five colors create a large swath across the gallery wall, as the artist once again presents an artwork that demands to be seen as both painting and object. Five separate panels, abutting one another, resemble a continuous surface; to continue the illusion, all five have been framed together as if they were one canvas.

Bringing these two lithographic suites and two paintings together, *Line & Color: The Nature of Ellsworth Kelly* demonstrates the way in which the artist flattens the world around him. Whether featuring plants or colorful shapes, Kelly’s oeuvre cements him as one of the progenitors of modernism.

Line & Color: The Nature of Ellsworth Kelly is organized by Curatorial Associate Tom Norris. It is on view in the Museum’s lower-level exhibition hall from June 1 through Oct. 29, 2018.

About the Norton Simon Museum

The Norton Simon Museum is known around the world as one of the most remarkable private art collections ever assembled. Over a 30-year period, industrialist Norton Simon (1907–1993) amassed an astonishing collection of European art from the Renaissance to the 20th century, and a stellar collection of South and Southeast Asian art spanning 2,000 years. Modern and Contemporary Art from Europe and the United States, acquired by the former Pasadena Art Museum, also occupies an important place in the Museum’s collections. The Museum houses more than 12,000 objects, roughly 1,000 of which are on view in the galleries and gardens. Two temporary exhibition spaces feature rotating installations of artworks not on permanent display.

Location: The Norton Simon Museum is located at 411 W. Colorado Blvd. at Orange Grove Boulevard in Pasadena, Calif., at the intersection of the Foothill (210) and Ventura (134) freeways. For general Museum information, please call (626) 449-6840 or visit www.nortonsimon.org. **Hours:** The Museum is open Monday, Wednesday and Thursday from noon to 5 p.m., Friday and Saturday from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. It is closed on Tuesday. **Admission:** General admission is \$15 for adults and \$12 for seniors. Members, students with I.D., and patrons age 18 and under are admitted free of charge. Admission is free for everyone on the first Friday of every month from 5 to 8 p.m. All public programs, unless stated otherwise, are free with admission. The Museum is wheelchair accessible. **Parking:** Parking is free, and no reservations are necessary. **Public Transportation:** Pasadena Transit stops directly in front of the Museum. Please visit <http://pasadenatransit.net> for schedules. The MTA bus line #180/181 stops in front of the Museum. The Memorial Park Station on the MTA Gold Line, the closest Metro Rail station to the Museum, is located at 125 E. Holly St. at Arroyo Parkway. Please visit www.metro.net for schedules.

####