

FAREWELL TO LEE KELLY

APRIL 01, 2022



“Oregon’s Sculptor,” Lee Kelly BFA ‘59, passed away on March 28, 2022, at age 89. Lee was well known for his monumental public sculptures throughout Oregon and the surrounding region – including the recently installed piece “Gateway” on the North Lawn of Willamette’s Salem campus.



Lee Kelly, Gateway

“Lee was one of the most recognized and revered artists in the Pacific Northwest and his sculptures have served as focal points at regional institutions for decades,” said Willamette University President Steve Thorsett. “Beyond his artistic and creative contributions, Lee will be remembered and missed for his investment in and education of the next generation of citizen artists.”

Born in 1932 in McCall, Idaho, Lee graduated from the Museum Art School at the Portland Art Museum (now known as PNCA) in 1959. His long and prolific career has resulted in a significant body of work which can be seen in public and private collections throughout the country, including the Portland Art Museum, Stanford University, New Orleans Art Museum, Seattle Art Museum, and the city of Sapporo, Japan.

Lee’s work was heavily influenced by his travels with Susan Hammer JD ‘76, a Willamette Law alumna and his partner of over 30 years who passed away in 2020 after a long battle with cancer. Susan and Lee traveled the world together, including five trips to Nepal and other trips to Asia, Indonesia, and South America.



Lee Kelly, Memory 99

In 2010, Lee was the subject of a major career retrospective at the Portland Art Museum, and in 2012 one of his most significant works – Memory 99 – was dedicated and installed outside PNCA's main campus in Portland's North Park Blocks. Lee also established a residency program in 2015 at his Leland Iron Works property in Oregon City to provide emerging artists an opportunity to experience a studio environment and a space to explore their practice.

Lee exhibited at the Portland Art Museum since the late 1950s and at Portland's Elizabeth Leach Gallery since the early 1980s. He was appointed as an artist member of the Portland Art Association's Board of Trustees and Collections/Exhibition Committee in 1979, and was awarded a fellowship from the Oregon Arts Commission in 1985 to research traditional bronze casting methods in Nepal. Lee was also the recipient of PNCA's Sally Lawrence President's Award in 2020, in recognition of his steadfast commitment to civic engagement and advancement of art and design education.

PACIFIC NORTHWEST

Lee Kelly, Oregon artist and adventurer whose work features prominently across state, dies at 89

Updated: Mar. 31, 2022, 6:31 a.m.|Published: Mar. 30, 2022, 1:53 p.m.



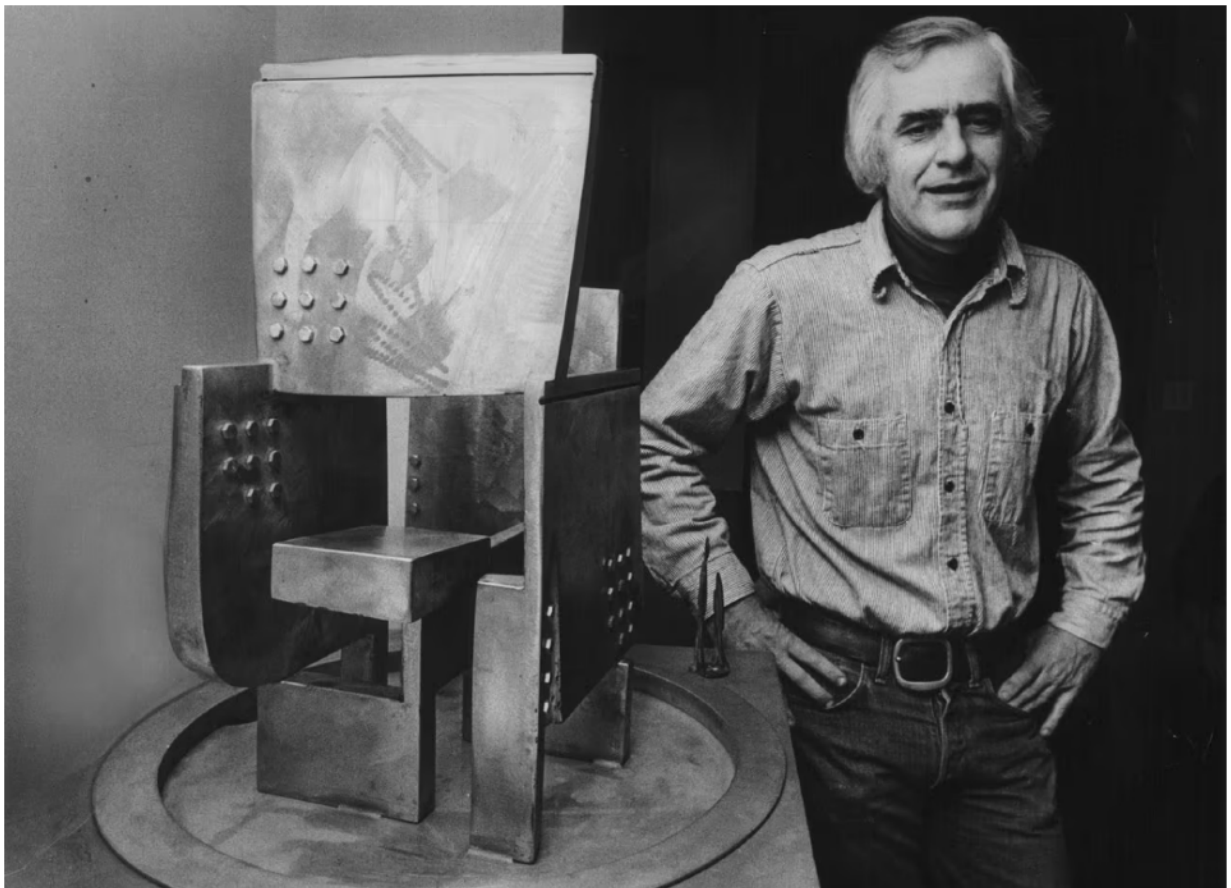
Lee Kelly in 2010 pressure-washes Memory 99, one of the pieces in his career retrospective at Portland Art Museum. (The Oregonian) LC- The Oregonian

By [Douglas Perry](#) | [The Oregonian/OregonLive](#)

Lee Kelly, a prolific sculptor whose public art helped define Oregon's modern view of itself, died Monday at his home near Oregon City. He was 89.

Kelly's work stands sentinel across the state -- perhaps most notably in Portland, where it can be found in Washington Park, the North Park Blocks, OHSU and Reed College.

"If there's a romantic ideal of an Oregon artist, it might be Kelly -- sculptor, climber, gentleman," former Oregonian art critic D.K. Row [posited in 2010](#), when a career-spanning exhibit of Kelly's work opened at the Portland Art Museum. "He's artist as rugged survivor, a man who's remained true to his path whatever the artistic changes of the day, and no matter what personal upheaval he's encountered."



Sculptor Lee Kelly in 1977. (The Oregonian) Oregonian

As his reputation gained steam in the 1960s, Kelly embraced mammoth Modernist public works made of stainless steel and Cor-Ten, work with an industrial hue that also sometimes evoked the mountains in the Pacific Northwest, South America and Asia that he loved to climb.

“For over six decades, Lee Kelly has defined the possibilities of sculpture -- at every scale both public and private -- for the Pacific Northwest and beyond,” former Portland Art Museum chief curator Bruce Guenther said in a statement released by Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Kelly’s longtime dealer. “His brilliant investigation of form and substance, life and love in the immediacy of sculpture leaves a legacy of powerful abstract works that will define our epoch for the future. We mourn his death and the loss of his generous spirit.”

Working -- by choice -- far from New York City’s glitzy, high-profile art scene, Kelly insisted he never expected acclaim, or even much recognition at all.



"Angkor I" by Lee Kelly (Abby Lynes/The Oregonian) LC-

“In the West, there’s a tendency to labor in benign neglect,” he said. “You don’t go into the art world thinking that anyone’s going to care.”

Born in Idaho in 1932, Kelly grew up on a cattle ranch in the Gem State before crossing the border to study architecture at Vanport Extension Center, the precursor to Portland State University.

“Ranching had a profound effect on the way I saw things,” he once said.

He also found inspiration in poetry, and late in his career he sometimes added words to the surface of his works: “night,” “breast,” “sleep.”

In his early art, Kelly took in the mood and aesthetic of the times -- the ideas fueling Abstract Expressionism splashed across his paintings, David Smith’s geometric works inspired his sculptures -- but the end result always was art created “on his own terms,” said George Johanson, an instructor at Pacific Northwest College of Art when Kelly studied at the school.



Lee Kelly outside on his Oregon City property in 1975. (The Oregonian) Oregonian

Those terms included personal tragedies -- the 1960 death of his first wife, Jeanette Bernhardt, of cancer; the 1978 leukemia death of 15-year-old Jason, his son with second wife, prominent Portland artist Bonnie Bronson.

In 1990, Bronson would die in a fall while climbing Mount Adams with Kelly.

“Those experiences have shaped Lee,” said gallery owner Elizabeth Leach in 2010. “But not in the way you think. They’ve allowed him to pursue artistic risk.”

Even after the accident that killed Bronson, Kelly continued to undertake climbing expeditions, needing it somehow, the exertion, the challenge, the risk.

His companion in his later years, the lawyer Susan Hammer, died in 2020.

Kelly’s works dominate the Oregon public-art space, looming memorably at Oregon State, the University of Oregon and the Catlin Gabel School, among many other places.

He received the Oregon Governor’s Award for the Arts in 1987.



"Lupine Fugue" by Lee Kelly (The Oregonian) LC- The Oregonian

Kelly was a Pacific Northwest artist to the core, but of course his work also can be found beyond the region, such “Waterfall, Stele, and River” at the University of Houston.

“Throughout our time working together Lee Kelly exemplified creative passion, clarity of vision and dedication to his artistic process and practice,” the Elizabeth Leach Gallery said, adding:

“He was an extraordinary thinker, poet and adventurous spirit.”

-- Douglas Perry

Lee Kelly, giant of NW art, dies at 89

A longtime shaper of the Oregon art scene, Kelly was known for his large-scale stainless steel and Cor-Ten sculptures, which combined abstract and geometric elements.

MARCH 29, 2022 | BOB HICKS

VISUAL ART

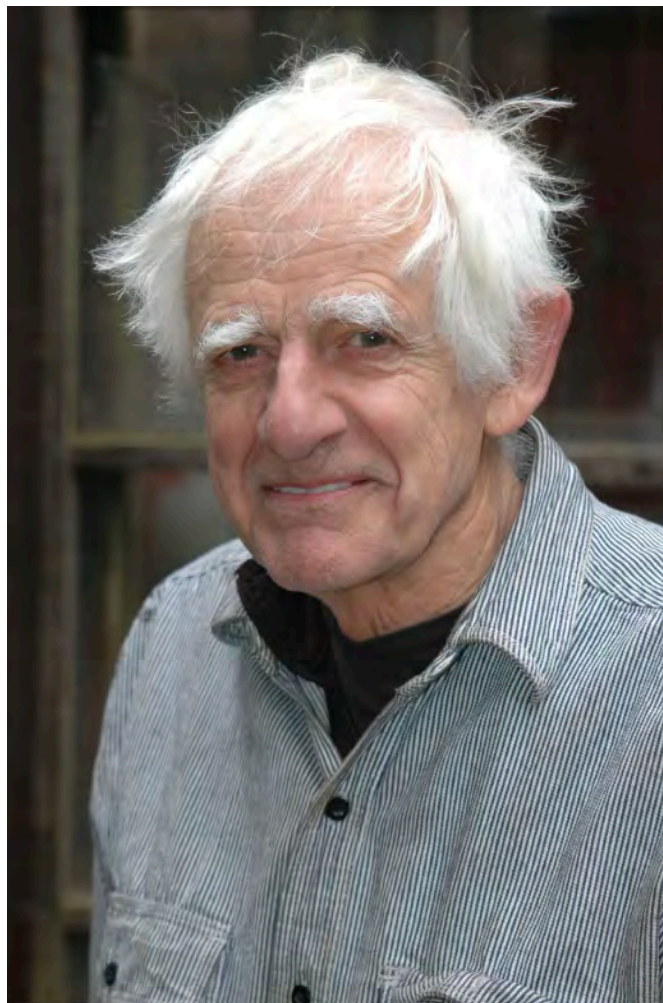


Lee Kelly, "Pavilion I and II," stainless steel, 2013. Photo courtesy Elizabeth Leach Gallery.

Lee Kelly, a longtime major figure in the Pacific Northwest art world, died on Monday, March 28, 2022 at Leland Iron Works, his four-acre studio, garden, and home south of Oregon City. He was 89.

“Another giant tree has fallen in our arts world; and a dear friend,” Bruce Guenther, independent curator and former chief curator of the Portland Art Museum, said Tuesday. Kelly died of natural causes, Guenther added.

Born in 1932 in McCall, Idaho, Kelly had lived and worked in the greater Portland area for decades, and was both shaped by and a significant shaper of the Oregon art scene. He attended Vanport College (now Portland State University) from 1949 to 1951, served in Korea with the Air Force 1951-55, and then attended the Portland Art Museum School (now Pacific Northwest College of Art), graduating in 1959.



Artist Lee Kelly. Photo: Michael Jones Photography, courtesy Elizabeth Leach Gallery.

Kelly painted and produced works on paper, but he was known and celebrated primarily for his large abstract metal sculptural works, which combined geometric shape with suggestions of natural formations, and could be found in private and public spaces throughout the Northwest, the West Coast, and beyond. There is something both industrial and unabashedly hand-made about these works, which can seem almost anthropomorphic but more naturally geological. They are the beguiling products of the human hand and mind applied to the material of the earth. Often they also reflect the influence of his travels over the years in Nepal, India, and Japan.

Kelly sometimes taught, at Reed College and Mt. Angel College and elsewhere, but in the main he made his art. He was represented for more than 35 years by Portland's Elizabeth Leach Gallery.

On Tuesday, the gallery released the following memorium:

“It is with great sadness we inform you of the passing of Lee Kelly, an extraordinary artist who graced us with his presence for 89 years. He has been represented by the Elizabeth Leach Gallery since 1986 and his significant influence spanning over six decades as a painter and sculptor is widely felt in the Pacific Northwest and beyond.

“Since his artistic beginnings in the 1950s, Kelly found inspiration through extensive travels around the globe. These are especially evident in his sculptures that synthesize modernist aesthetics with ancient architectural forms. He is perhaps most recognized for his large-scale works in stainless steel and Cor-Ten, which remain a central focus at regional institutions such as Reed College, Oregon State University, Catlin Gabel School, the Oregon Health and Sciences University, and the University of Oregon. In 2012, one of his most important works, *Memory 99*, was installed in Portland's North Park Blocks, at what is now the home of the Pacific Northwest College of Art. In 2010, he was the subject of a major career retrospective at the Portland Art Museum curated by Bruce Guenther, which was accompanied by a career-spanning monograph.

Lee Kelly with his sculpture, “Akbar’s Elephant,” in the lobby of the Fox Tower in downtown Portland. Photo by Susan Hammer, via Leland Iron Works.



“Bruce Guenther, the former Chief Curator of the Portland Art Museum, said of Kelly, ‘For over six decades, Lee Kelly has defined the possibilities of sculpture – at every scale both public and private – for the Pacific Northwest and beyond. His brilliant investigation of form and substance, life, and love in the immediacy of sculpture leaves a legacy of powerful abstract works that will define our epoch for the future. We mourn his death and the loss of his generous spirit.’

“Lee Kelly’s prestigious career and impactful body of work is highlighted in public and private collections throughout the country, including the Portland Art Museum, Oregon; Stanford University, Palo Alto, California; New Orleans Art Museum, Louisiana; Seattle Art Museum, Washington; Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond; and the City of Sapporo, Japan.

“In his memory we are honored to share a personal note from Elizabeth Leach Gallery:

“Throughout our time working together Lee Kelly exemplified creative passion, clarity of vision and dedication to his artistic process and practice. He was an extraordinary thinker, poet, and adventurous spirit who enjoyed spending time with others – especially at his unique home, studio, and sculpture garden where he welcomed friends and guests to share food, wine and stories together. Lee had an abiding love of poetry and had a practice of keeping notebooks full of sketches and poems that he would read aloud and share in special moments. His brilliance, generosity and sense of humor will be treasured by all who knew him. Our deepest sympathies are with his family and

friends. We remember his singular talent and incredible artistic contributions. We will all miss him dearly.“

Kelly is survived by his daughter Kassandra. He was predeceased by his first wife, Jeanette Bernhardt, from cancer, in 1960; his son Jason, from leukemia, in 1978; his second wife, artist Bonnie Bronson, from a mountain-climbing fall in 1990; and by his companion in his later years, Susan Hammer, in 2020.

Douglas Perry has written a good obituary of Kelly for The Oregonian/Oregon Live, [here](#).

MAC Artist Profile: Lee Kelly

Lee Kelly has been called “Oregon’s sculptor,” and a recent visit to his home and studio south of Oregon City is a powerful reminder of the scope of his work. OPB’s *Oregon Art Beat* referred to his 5-acre property and garden as the “field of steel dreams.” Once a rustic working dairy farm, Kelly purchased the site in 1963 and converted the original barn to his studio. Many of his sculptures are situated among the trees and gardens that he and his family have lovingly tended for the last 60 years. His studio and the property became known as Leland Iron Works. A busy place on many levels, and the morning of our visit was no exception. A flatbed truck was being loaded with one of his large steel sculptures bound for the Elizabeth Leach Gallery, where he has shown his work for almost 40 years.



BONNIE BRONSON

When we asked about his process, he began by explaining that he was a painter first, and then a sculptor. For Kelly, drawing is an integral part of the sculpting process. He starts with a drawing, carefully selecting from his sketches before making the maquette, and then finally creating the sculpture. The result is a combination of both the



Lee Kelly wall sculpture (left) installation in 1974; (above) with new lighting in 2021.

2D and 3D. He believes that sculpture is a process of making objects that explore our relationship with each other in the world.

The themes of love, loss, and the search for reconciliation are prevalent in his work. They reflect the artist as a poet and a writer, a thinker and a builder, an intellect and an emotional being. Kelly has said, “America is a great place to get things built, but a very poor place to develop ideas.” He and his wife, Bonnie Bronson, took numerous trips to Nepal and Tibet for spiritual and emotional well-being. It was on these trips that he found inspiration for his sculptures.

The artist’s daughter, Kassandra, was present at our interview and provided us with some background information for

the project. At the time the wall sculpture was commissioned in the 1970s, Kelly had several other local projects, notably Second Avenue Park, now called American Plaza. Lee and Bonnie were developing a new process: large scale porcelain enamel on steel. Using industrial facilities in Seattle, they were able to fuse porcelain enamel to Cor-Ten steel panels. They were among the first artists in the Northwest to use this industrial process in their art, and they helped establish it as the dominant material for monumental sculpture internationally. The MAC sculpture is an example of this process and contributed to the success of future projects. The sculpture was also important to the suite of ideas and designs that Lee was developing at that time, which included explorations of ancient stone sculptures such as Stonehenge.

We were curious about his thoughts on how people react to his work. “I don’t think you can prejudice the viewer,” he said. “Often enough, what you feel about something will connect with somebody else. They may not get the same thing you got out of it, but they may find something else that is meaningful.” This curiosity resulted in our soliciting some comments from MAC members of varying ages:

“The sculpture represents strength. I see blocks supporting each other and it reminds me of the way MAC members support each other and build community.”

A young member made note of the rectangular shapes and said it reminded him of a robot. His mother, an artist as well as a climber, commented that it made her think of the climbing columns at Smith Rock State Park.

At 89, Kelly still believes that the future comes one hour at a time, and he continues to play an important role with his contribution to the art of the Pacific Northwest. His work can be viewed at the Portland Art Museum and at the Elizabeth Leach Gallery, 417 NW 9th Avenue.

The Portland Art Museum has published a coffee table book, *Lee Kelly*, and also a brochure entitled *Lee Kelly: A Guide to Public Sculptures*, which can be accessed at lee-kelly.net/publications.

—Jeanne Neville and Nancy Smith

The recent Front Entry remodel kicked off the relocation of artwork throughout the club. The Art Committee’s goal is to display MAC’s most prominent art in the club’s most public spaces. In addition, the artwork is grouped to include pieces from several Northwest artists who were friends and shared ideas while creating their art. Many of the works complement each other because of similarities in era, medium, and scale.

VISUAL ART

VizArts Monthly: Experiments with space

Amidst foliage or in the air conditioning,
there are plenty of art viewing options in July.

JULY 1, 2021 // VISUAL ART // LINDSAY COSTELLO



Work by Lee Kelly, image courtesy Elizabeth Leach Gallery

Lee Kelly: Recent Work

June 3 – July 31, 2021

Elizabeth Leach Gallery

417 NW 9th Ave (Tue-Sat 10:30 AM – 5:30 PM)

Revered Pacific Northwest artist Lee Kelly, best known for his large-scale public art sculptures, presents a new series of steel sculptures, cast bronze forms, and figurative watercolors at Elizabeth Leach Gallery. Inspired by his past writings, musings and studies, Kelly locates middle ground between modernist forms and ancient aesthetics in his sculptural work. The artist's emphasis on texture, light, and patina celebrates the materiality of his forms.

Lee Kelly sculpture to grace Willamette University campus

by Tom Morlan, January 26, 2021



The untitled Lee Kelly sculpture, which will be installed northeast of the Art Building next month, was removed and put into storage in 2017.

The piece, which SAIF donated to the university in 2017, will be installed just northeast of the Art Building next month.

Thanks to a donation by SAIF Corporation and the vision of Willamette University arts supporters, a 15-foot-tall sculpture by renowned artist [Lee Kelly](http://www.lee-kelly.net) (<http://www.lee-kelly.net>) — often referred to as “Oregon’s sculptor” — is scheduled to be installed near the Art Building in late February.

“This brings a major piece of outdoor sculpture to campus by one of Oregon’s most important and distinguished sculptors,” said [John Olbrantz](https://willamette.edu/arts/hfma/about/staff/profiles/olbrantz/index.html) (<https://willamette.edu/arts/hfma/about/staff/profiles/olbrantz/index.html>), Maribeth Collins director of the [Hallie Ford Museum of Art](https://willamette.edu/arts/hfma/index.html) (<https://willamette.edu/arts/hfma/index.html>). “It’s among the first steps in creating an outdoor collection of Pacific Northwest sculpture on Willamette’s campus, an idea that we’ve been talking about for years.”

The untitled piece, which was fashioned from COR-TEN steel in 1974, occupied a prominent space on SAIF’s Salem campus for more than four decades. But as SAIF prepared for a campus renovation project in 2016, it didn’t include the sculpture in the new hardscape and landscape plan.

SAIF reached out to Jim Bauer — former vice president for planning, facilities and external affairs at Willamette — to see if the university would be interested in the sculpture. Bauer immediately contacted Olbrantz, who enthusiastically recommended the acquisition.

“I said we needed to jump on it,” Olbrantz recalled. “It’s an iconic example of Lee’s sculpture, and we both agreed that it would be an excellent addition to the campus sculpture collection.”

The Hallie Ford Museum of Art paid to have the sculpture removed from the SAIF campus in 2017. While it was in storage, a committee began exploring potential sites for the piece. The team included [Shelby Radcliffe](https://willamette.edu/about/leadership/vice-presidents/radcliffe/index.html) (<https://willamette.edu/about/leadership/vice-presidents/radcliffe/index.html>), vice president for advancement; [Roger Hull](https://willamette.edu/arts-) (<https://willamette.edu/arts->

[sciences/arth/faculty/hull/index.html](https://willamette.edu/offices/facilities/staff/mazurier/index.html)), professor of art history emeritus; and [Mark Mazurier \(https://willamette.edu/offices/facilities/staff/mazurier/index.html\)](https://willamette.edu/offices/facilities/staff/mazurier/index.html), assistant director of projects.

The group considered several locations before settling on a spot just northeast of the Art Building.

“Since the piece is of monumental scale with an opening at center, it occurred to us that it is a kind of gateway piece, a portal or doorway in abstract terms,” Hull said. “We wanted to place it near a walkway somewhere on the edge of campus. We decided that a large piece by a major Oregon sculptor would be appropriate near the Art Building, in a spot that also leads to and from the Hallie Ford Museum and can be seen by drivers traveling east on State Street.”

Kelly's sculptures are a fixture in cities throughout Oregon and Washington. One example stands in front of the [Pacific Northwest College of Art \(https://pnca.edu/\)](https://pnca.edu/), which will formally merge with Willamette University later this year.

“There will be a nice congruence between that sculpture and the one on the Willamette campus,” Hull said. “It will provide an aesthetic link, you might say, between the linked institutions.”

SHARE

RELATED STORY

College of Law announces Law School Bound admission program ➡

The program offers an innovative and transparent path to obtaining a legal education.

The Artists Series 3: Visual Artists

 orartswatch.org/the-artists-series-3-visual-artists

K.B. Dixon



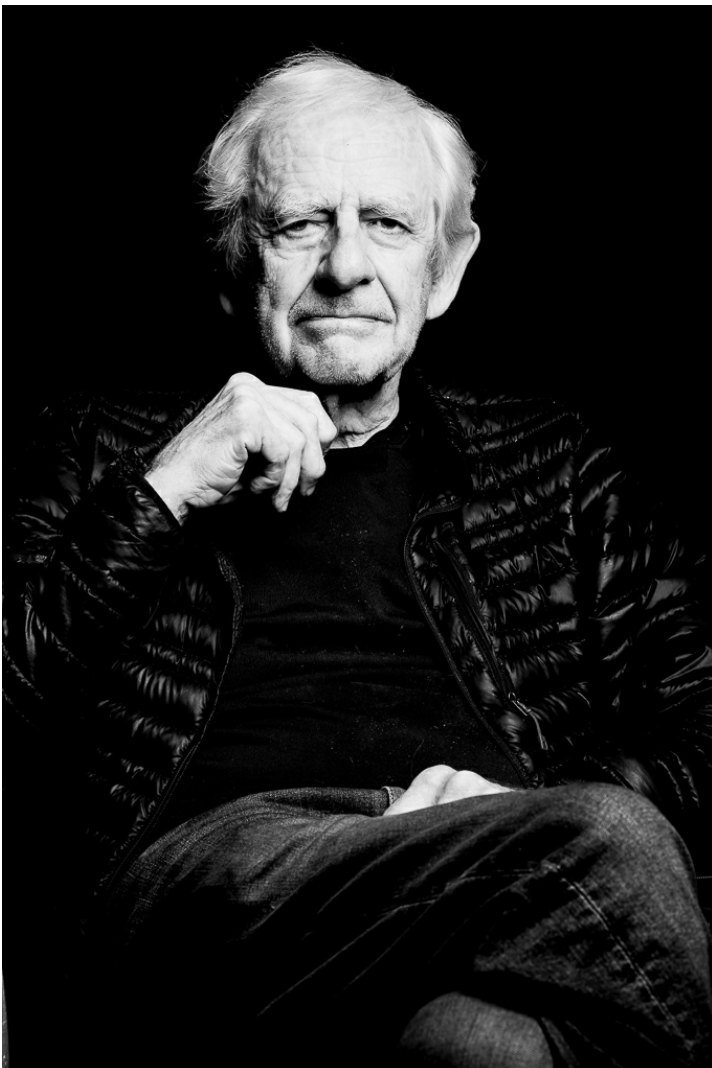
FEBRUARY 28, 2020

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY K.B. DIXON

This is the third installment of portraits in *The Artist Series*. The first two focused on Oregon writers. This one focuses on visual artists—the gifted painters and sculptors who have made invaluable contributions to the character and culture of this city and state, people whose legacies are destined to be part of our cultural history.

It would take pages to catalog the awards, commissions, and honors of these artists and color reproductions of their work to provide a full appreciation of their wizardry so I will simply refer you to their various perches in cyberspace—their virtual ateliers.

LEE KELLY: SCULPTOR



Kelly is one of the most revered artists in the Pacific Northwest. He is best known for his monumental public sculptures. These large pieces are “often animalistic, sometimes suggestive of calligraphy or Asian script, always poetic.” – Bob Hicks, *ArtScatter*.

Examples of Kelly's work can be found at the [Elizabeth Leach Gallery](#) and at lee-kelly.net.

11 Portland art exhibits to freshen up your fall

By Briana Miller | For The Oregonian/OregonLive

14 FRIDAY, AUGUST 30, 2019 THE OREGONIAN



Lee Kelly's stainless steel sculpture, "If Trees Could Walk They Need Not Fear the Ax I" (2019), pictured in front of his Oregon City studio. (Dan Kvitka/Courtesy of Elizabeth Leach Gallery)

Lee Kelly: "If Trees Could Walk"

The Elizabeth Leach Gallery uses the occasion of Portland playing host to the [29th International Sculpture Conference](#) to show new work by an established Portland artist. [Lee Kelly](#) has maintained a consistently forthright sculptural vocabulary throughout his 60-year career. His large-scale modernist metal sculptures often have a calligraphic bent and can be seen in public spaces across the city. (Notably, his stainless steel "Water Sculpture" from 1975 is a prominent feature of the International Rose Test Garden in Washington Park.) Kelly will show lithe works from a new series, "If Trees Could Walk They Need Not Fear the Ax," alongside more voluptuous, earthbound work from his 2018 "Yucatan Goddess" series.

Oct. 3-Nov. 2, Elizabeth Leach Gallery, 417 N.W. Ninth Ave., elizabethleach.com or 503-224-0521.

Sculptor Lee Kelly: Pointing toward Asia

 orartswatch.org/sculptor-lee-kelly-pointing-toward-asia

Paul Sutinen



OREGON ARTSWATCH

OREGON'S ARTS & CULTURE NEWS

Lee Kelly just turned 85. Through June into mid-July he is showing new work at [Elizabeth Leach Gallery](#). Over a career of almost 60 years Kelly has completed dozens of public and private sculpture commissions. He has major works on the Portland Transit Mall and the Rose Garden in Washington Park. He lives and works on what was a dairy farm in Oregon City; the barn is now a shop/studio. What was pastureland 50 years ago is now reforested and populated with [Kelly's sculpture](#).

You grew up in Idaho. Did you go to high school there?

No. I came out here.

Where did you go to high school?

Roosevelt, but I went back there and did ranch work in the summer.

Why? Because you couldn't find work in Portland?

I loved the idea of horses and doing all that.



Lee Kelly in his studio/shop. Winter Garden at Muktinath in process at left. Small maquette for the sculpture at right in the background.

So now you got a sculpture farm next to horses. When you were at Roosevelt High School did you do any art there?

I tried to, but I got crossways with the teachers.

In general or just the art teachers?

Just the art teachers. So then I found a guy who was teaching mechanical drawing and that's where I gravitated. He did a lot with geometry and how you can put stuff on a page to communicate to somebody else. Mr. McMillan.

What do you think he did that connected with you?

I think I enjoyed the rigmarole of drafting.

That's why you thought about architecture?

Probably. I didn't know what the hell to do at that point. There were no real career objectives. Going to architecture school was pretty much out of it. I went to Vanport college [Vanport Extension Center, now Portland State University] and the route from there down to the University of Oregon was pretty bad, if you didn't have a little bit of money.

You had the G.I. Bill when you got out of the Air Force?

When I was going to the Museum School [now Pacific Northwest College of Art].

You got drafted?

I was about to be drafted.

And you decided the Air Force was better?

It was the Air Force reserves unit at Portland Airbase. It was a whole Air Force wing. They had to keep all these planes going. They were all World War II guys who came home and wanted to have something to do on the weekends, so it seemed like a real good deal. There was an opening as a draftsman so I signed up. About a month after I signed up, they activated the whole damn unit. Then it took me almost 4 1/2 years to get untangled. That included the Korean tour.

But that was important for you.

Yeah, it was a real big deal.

Were you interested in Asian cultures before you went to Korea?

No, but I sure took the bait when I saw it. I had more access to Japan than Korea. We were sort of constrained in Korea as far as interacting with the population. Whenever you left the base you had to carry a gun.

How much time did you spend in Japan?

We had an R&R thing. You got about three of these in a year. I think it was four days and I always went to Tokyo. You got an airplane ride to Tokyo and back. I must've done that three times because the fourth one was when I hitchhiked up to the front.

So you had about 12 days in Japan, but it had an effect on you.

It was a huge thing. You were turned loose in the middle of Tokyo. In 1952 the old Imperial Hotel [by Frank Lloyd Wright] was still standing. It survived the firebombing. The Japanese really rebuilt in a hurry so you didn't see much effect in Tokyo.

When was the next time you went to Asia?

I started going all the time, mostly to south Asia and Nepal, in the 70's.

A somewhat different culture from Japan.

But still I got really comfortable with the art forms. Indian art is certainly different than Japanese art, but you get the idea.

Japan is a real post and lintel society—thinking about your work. When you get in the Southeast Asia you get a lot more curves.

They never developed a spring arch. They did what they call corbeled arch. Superficially in the Mughal period (1556-1857), they would use what looked like arches, but they weren't structural.

It's my impression that you're much more interested in Asian thinking than European thinking.

I don't care much about Europe. I'm a fan of some of the art because I went to a pretty much traditional art school so I can identify a lot of stuff.

But in terms of your day today attitude about things I would say you're much more East than West.

Look how much closer we are. To go to Europe you've got to get clear over a continent and another ocean.

How would you characterize your development of sinking into an Asian frame of mind?

In terms of thinking I probably never did. I think I just assimilated whatever it was and it became pretty much part of the way I operated. Travel was always a big deal for me—for getting ideas. I did a lot of looking in Central America too. It wasn't just Asia.

You went down there before the Nepal trips?

Yeah, particularly the Yucatán three or four times, and finally Central America and further on down to Chile and Argentina.

It seems that in those cultures the attitude seems to be a little more relaxed than going the other direction going to New York or Europe. Maybe that has something to do with the Portland area or Idaho?

Portland's becoming a really interesting town for me. I think it always has been.

You stayed here.

People say to my detriment.

You got this land and developed your sculpture garden.

And there's nice young people coming out here and doing stuff. PNCA does an artist-in-residence program out here now.

So far, Portland is a very welcoming community.

We have a viable art scene.



Lee Kelly in his studio/shop. "Winter Garden at Muktinath" in process at left.

It's been viable for you.

Well, yeah. I don't have to toe any kind of line as far as style and so forth.

I don't think that anybody here feels that they do. We're not really trying to impress anybody here.

Well, I guess we haven't. I think we've been successful.

What were your expectations when you got out of school in terms of being an artist?

Pretty much zero. That's just what you were doing and you supported yourself by doing something else. We're still around, which is sort of amazing.

So what are you working on now? You're painting again. You've gone from being in a painter who became a sculptor to now being a sculptor who also does painting.

Painting a little on the side. Painting is hard to do. Sculpture's kind of plodding and predictable.

When you decided to stop painting in '63 or '64 did you kind of miss painting?

When I got out of school, I was doing both. I remember I was in some show at Reed. The show was built around the idea of sculptors who paint. The argument came down that was I was more of a painter who did sculpture.

But you didn't miss the idea of putting paint on canvas?

It got so I couldn't. It wasn't that I decided not to. I couldn't do it anymore, for a long long time.

Do you approach painting differently from how you did it 50 years ago?

It's quite different. I damn near design them these days.

More of the attitude you take making a sculpture, figuring out a sculpture?

Occasionally there's even a preliminary drawings. I hate to confess that.

So much for that abstract expressionist idea.

That thing had a kinda good run though.

Talk a little about your process of making sculpture. You were saying earlier that it is s different from painting, which goes from brushstroke to brushstroke. Are you starting with sketches for sculpture?

They seem to have a pattern. I mean, I don't schedule it much. I'll plow through some old sketchbooks and one of the things I've gotten out of computers—I don't do any CAD kind of stuff at all—I'll scan a little sketch, a little tiny thing. Then I can blow it up and start messing with it—enlarge it and make tracings, collages, cut it out and reprint it, that kind of thing.

So the computer is just a way to begin, but as you develop it you do it by hand. So it stays 2-d for awhile?

Well, eventually it'll end up maybe being some kind of a maquette [a small preliminary model].

When does it make that kind of a leap?

I do a lot of little things like the ones on the fireplace [three small steel pieces]—flat cutouts that are laser cut.

Those are done over at BBC Steel in Canby. That's handy technology. How long would it take to cut these little intricate shapes by hand? That one is maybe ten inches tall—it would take hours?

And you'd never get it right. All I have to do for BBC is give them a line drawing. They scan it and it goes into their system—just tell him how many you need and how high and what thickness.

To do that by hand, to get the curves right, the straight lines, would be very difficult.

It would be awful.

You'd need the level of skill of a jeweler.

You just wouldn't do it that way. I mean I wouldn't do it if I had to go through that.

That's the important thing to say: now you'll do things that before you just wouldn't do.

And now it allows you to do things you shouldn't do because it's so easy.

You just send it over to BBC. What's the point of doing it yourself if somebody else can do it faster cheaper and better and you're sure it's going to be correct?

And if their machine breaks down it's their problem.

So if you're building a big piece are you making a small maquette first?

Pretty much.

What's the largest piece you would build without building a maquette first?

It would depend on the idea. If something was really clear in my head I might plow right into it, but if there's a lot of material involved and a lot of things I don't want to have to do twice, then I'll make a maquette. The other advantage to a maquette, if it's being cut at BBC, lots of times after I get the maquette I can just modify the original drawing and it's ready to go. If I'm right in the small one, you figure the big one won't be a problem. Then you always leave some openings, some things that are going to have to be juggled, so you don't have it totally mapped out.

There's something about a change in scale that can cause ideas to change.

It's all a relationship to how big people are against how big whatever you're making is. You can imagine these things pretty easy that size [gesturing to the small works sitting on the stove], but if something's about three feet high there's a blank spot—people can't relate to it very well. I don't trust that 3-to-5 foot range.



Lee Kelly's "Akbar's Elephant" installed at Fox Tower.

That idea that a sculpture relates to the physicality of the person seeing it—as abstract as it seems there's a connection with a human being.

And then if you move it into a different environment it becomes totally different. I was thinking of that piece we put in the Fox Tower. Out here it looked gigantic. When you get inside, it has to fit within a space. It takes on a whole different connotation about how you are in relation to it.

Out here it was marching through the grass—it had an animation in relation to the plants around it. The pieces really change when they go indoors.

And usually for the better. *Akbar's Elephant* was the name of that piece. For me that got a lot better when it was in that lobby even though I wasn't particularly in love with the architecture.

At some point you committed to building something that big—12 feet tall— without thinking that somebody's going to buy it immediately.

It took 20 years.

Is it really that old?

I kind of think so.

So late 90s. There's a commitment of thousands of dollars of steel in that piece.

Yeah.

So there's a point where you say, "I'm gonna build this thing." Of course you've cut up old pieces so if it doesn't work out you'll just make something else out of it.

I think I've come to accept that. I don't think I make things thinking they're going to sell. I probably deep down hope they will.



Lee Kelly's "Akbar's Elephant" installation in process at Fox Tower.

You managed to get that giant piece out of here. How did that happen?

It happened with the guys that moved the Sellwood Bridge. Jim Schmidt [who has worked with Kelly before] was in charge of all that [moving Akbar's Elephant] .

How did it happen that somebody decided to purchase them?

Elizabeth Leach somehow sold the Fox people. They borrowed pieces for a couple, three, years. Finally they decided they wanted this great big one. They bought it and nobody had any idea if they could get it in the building or not, but those guys were good. They really took care of business.

Did you tilt it sideways to get in through the door?

We had to cut it apart take it in and re-weld it.

You said that every 10 years you want to build a big piece. So the one that's installed by Pacific Northwest College of Art now and *Akbar's Elephant* are both those kinds of things? Are you due to build another big piece here soon?

If I make it. I've got to make it three more years. They have to be done in the last year of the decade. Maybe the thing that I have downstairs could fill in. It's a pretty good piece—the scale of it is great. I hope we can get it in the gallery. It's another boat in the basement, putting the boat back in the bottle kind of

thing.

Does it have any bolts in it?

No. Right now I'm not even sure how we're going to stand it up

A difference between being a sculptor and a painter is that for the painter you just need a room to put up an easel and you start painting. With sculpture you need tools and equipment and at some point if you're making really big stuff, you need to have a shop. How did your shop develop over the years? You began with soldering small pieces of brass.

When I was in still in school. I had this amazing series of breaks. For the Oregon Centennial [1959] I built these five fountains, and I didn't even know how to weld or anything—got an acetylene outfit and a bunch of steel and just started folding these things in and tack welding. They probably weren't very good because the fair people scrapped them out at the end.

You have a can-do spirit. What followed that?

There was a guy who ran this group call the Liturgical Arts Guild and I got to be the metal guy. We'd get a little chapel to put together and then I get the money to go buy some tools—and then learning how to run the tools. So I'd buy the tool and then have to learn how to use it. With welding stuff that was it.

By reading the instruction booklet.

No, just by turning it on and hoping for the best.

I took welding shop in high school so I at least had somebody show me how to turn it on and do basic stuff. You did it all by yourself. In the mid-'70s you built the hydraulic crane in your shop?

About that time, I was hung up on overhead equipment right from the start.

Before you just had chain hoists?

Chain hoists and those electric traveling hoists. Push a button and they'd go up and down. It became very important to have a way to get three of these lifting devices sort of in one location and then you could pick and roll.

And luckily you have a barn to do it in. You moved in here in the '60s?

Yeah, '63.

And then you got your dozen grinders.

At least a dozen. I'm grinding on a thing now. I only use four. I'm cutting back.

You have this big piece in process downstairs for your show at Elizabeth Leach.

Winter Garden at Muktinath—there's a sacred spot up in the Himalayas where there is natural gas flame and water coming out of one rock in this cave. This has become a very important pilgrimage site. I did a drawing in the '80s and Kassandra [Kelly, Lee's daughter, who is also an artist] found this drawing said, "Why did you never do anything with this?" Well maybe now's the time.

You'd been to that site?

I think I've been there five times. There's a number of shrines that have grown-up over the centuries around the site.

So do these forms have a specific relationship the things you saw there?

Well, a drawing I did either while I was there or shortly after. There's a little arch in the wall and then this thing, the tree.

You work with a sketchbook on regular basis or just on trips?

Mostly when I'm traveling. Then I'll go back through them here to see if there's anything I can use.

You must have like...

Thousands.

So it's no wonder that you don't go back through to find the one from the '80s, and say, "Why don't I work on that?"

No, I don't. But it's been good. Kassandra's been pushing me to do some more of that sort of mining.

It's your resource.

You come up with you come up with stuff that probably could've or should've been built if you looked at it.

NOTE

For [a 1983 interview](#) with Lee Kelly by Paul Sutinen, click the link.

VIGNETTES • April/May 2014

Oregon

ALLYN CANTOR

JORDAN RATHUS: FERNWEH (FARSICKNESS) *Upfor Contemporary Art, Portland May 1-31* New York artist Jordan Rathus uses wit and humour in her video-based works, which satirize narrative culture and popular forms of entertainment (like reality television). In this exhibit, she plays on the experience of tourism and exploitation. Using footage from recent travels to Panama and the Arctic Circle, she creates a pseudo-documentary travelogue that deconstructs the visits with parody. Her cunning videos and photographic works both critique and activate the genre through a lens of absurdity well balanced with realism.



Jordan Rathus

LEE KELLY: PAVILION *Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland Mar 13-Apr 26* Lee Kelly is known throughout the Pacific Northwest for his large-scale modernist public sculptures. His work has been highly influenced by his extensive world travels. For this exhibition, the Oregon artist interweaves forms and narratives from Nepal, showing evident inspiration drawn from architectural elements. He also revisits his early interest in the medium of painting, creating new works on canvas for the first time in 50 years.



Lee Kelly

HEIDI PREUSS GREW: INTO THE WILDERNESS *Hallie Ford Museum of Art, Salem Apr 12-May 11* In her figurative-based sculptures, Heidi Preuss Grew expresses the vulnerability of the human condition. Through the sensuous process of porcelain sculpture, she merges human and animal forms to convey a fundamental psychological state somewhere between reality and fiction. Grew reflects on the fleeting details of life's experiential side – a close conversation, the hand gestures of a friend, the detail of a painting. Her sympathetic ceramic sculptures capture the downtrodden or pathetic side of life while revealing the hopeful, beautiful and simply heroic.



Heidi Preuss Grew

CRAIG HICKMAN: OXIDE *Blue Sky Gallery, Portland Apr 3-27* In this exhibit, Craig Hickman, a founding member of Blue Sky, creates an imaginary town dubbed Oxide. It reflects our known world of accumulated ideas, successes and failures, yet conveys a fantastical version of reality. Forming his imagery as composites, Hickman uses both camera and Photoshop to generate fictional scenes that seem historically familiar. His innovative approach accentuates a time-laden archaeological perspective while touching on the fragility of modern life.



Craig Hickman

VANESSA RENWICK: LAYOVER *The Art Gym at Marylhurst University, Marylhurst Apr 14-May 17* Portland artist and filmmaker Vanessa Renwick is known for installations that combine video and sculpture. Her two new large-scale works in this exhibit are based on birds in flight. One is a mixed-media light installation, in which she depicts a different bird on each of the Art Gym's big windows. The other is a single-channel video piece of the Vaux's swifts that roost in the chimney of a local elementary school every fall.



Vanessa Renwick

CRITIC'S PICKS: PORTLAND

By Richard Speer



"BRIDGE," 2014, **Wes Mills**
GRAPHITE ON PAPER, 19¼" x 8½"
PHOTO: COURTESY PDX CONTEMPORARY

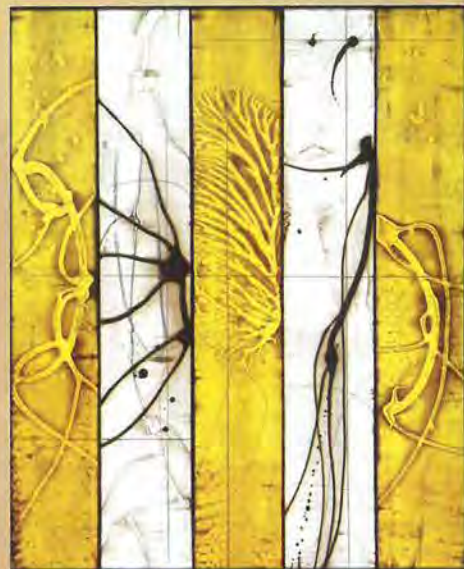
In keeping with gallery owner Jane Beebe's mission to showcase what she terms "quiet art," PDX Contemporary's March show is devoted to **Wes Mills'** elegant works on paper, which Beebe calls "breaths of drawings." These mixed-media painted, collaged, and graphite works are grounded in Mills' travels throughout Asia and ongoing study of Tantric thought. It was in Asia that the artist acquired the antique paper and bindings that comprise this body of work. On the paper, delicate gestural and geometric marks coalesce around a central vertical axis. Mills thinks of the white space between the marks as analogous to the distance between heart and mind. Many years ago, when he lived in Taos, New Mexico, Mills owned a small art space called Barber Shop Gallery, where he showed work by regionally and nationally known artists. One day a fellow Taos resident and artist walked into the space and struck up a conversation with him. She needed no introduction; it was Agnes Martin. The two became friends, had a weekly lunch date,

and went on drives together. Sometimes Mills watched her paint, an experience that seems to have influenced his already minimalist-leaning style even further in that direction. Many works in the PDX exhibition have extreme proportions, including an untitled piece 12 inches across and nearly 94 inches long. Wes Mills' new show, titled "Hamilton Drawings," can be seen at PDX Contemporary Art, from March 4-April 12.

For more than five decades, **Lee Kelly** has created sculptures that inhabit a charmed, charged middle ground between figuration and abstraction. Most often fashioned of welded stainless steel, sometimes with the addition of gold leaf, the works' components fit together with visible seams, like puzzle pieces. Some resemble abstracted animals: kangaroos, dogs, horses mid-leap... Others fit together so snugly, they appear to be embracing, à la Brancusi's *The Kiss* or the interlocking curvilinear foam in a Verner Panton installation. At 83, Kelly has been around long enough to see art movements come and go. The playful biomorphism of his forms recalls the insouciant shapes of Henri Matisse's late-career gouache cutouts, married with the graphic simplicity of Japanese calligraphy or the paintings of Franz Kline. Kelly has traveled widely, and his peripatetic life is evinced in his work. Past exhibitions have drawn from his exposure to Latin American culture, but the sculptures in "Pavilion" are responses to travels through Nepal and India and his interest in Eastern theological interpretations of goddess-worship. This body of work also includes paintings, which share his sculpture's architectonic sensibility. "Lee Kelly: Pavilion," can be seen at Elizabeth Leach Gallery, from March 13-April 26.



"PAVILION II," 2013, **Lee Kelly**
STAINLESS STEEL, 98" x 84" x 53"
PHOTO: COURTESY ELIZABETH LEACH GALLERY



"SUNBEAMS (3)," 2014, **Michael Kessler**
ACRYLIC ON PANEL, 46" x 35"
PHOTO: COURTESY BUTTERS GALLERY

While Santa Fe-based painter **Michael Kessler** creates his work in the high Southwestern desert, the paintings have a longstanding resonance with collectors in the Pacific Northwest. It is as if the rectilinear rigor and often blanched-out color palette of his work's geometric components evoke the austerity of the desert, even as the branching tendrils of the work's organic elements speak to the sylvan foothills of the Northwest's Cascade mountains. The tension between geometry and organicism has long been essential to Kessler's *oeuvre*, but of late, that tension increasingly resolves into integration. Recently the artist began concentrating on long, thin panels that can be installed vertically or horizontally, according to the dictates of a given space. According to their orientation, these panels, which can be as slim as seven inches tall by 70 inches across, recall either a broad horizontal vista or a totemic column. Frequently, the compositions are composited from many smaller elements. The decision of which components to attach to which others, is itself a crucial aesthetic choice, drawing together Kessler's gestural inspiration and meticulous planning. As the artist recently told art ltd., "I turn the panels around this way and that until certain relationships emerge. The process is always full of surprises. I discover juxtapositions that would never occur otherwise." Chromatically, the new works have a predominance of yellow tones: deep lemon yellows with lapidary depth, like citrine or amber pulled from the earth. "LIGHTNING," a show of works by Michael Kessler, goes on view at Butters Gallery, from March 6-29.

Originally published Friday, June 7, 2013 at 12:15 PM

With conifers keeping the spirit alive, Mercer Island property is born again

The landscape was so important to the couple that they hired designer Brooks Kolb even before SHKS Architects began to remodel the home.

By Valerie Easton

Special to The Seattle Times



THE MATURE trees are what drew Jeff and Lara Sanderson to the place they call home on Mercer Island. "We looked at view property, but this place is so magical," says Lara of their green acreage.

Their careful stewardship of the trees allowed them to keep the forest-remnant feel of the landscape, even as they had the house and garden made over, and a yoga studio built. Now the conifers set the scale for a cluster of Lee Kelly sculptures, and provide shelter and privacy for the home and swimming pool.

The landscape was so important to the couple that they hired designer Brooks Kolb even before SHKS Architects began work on remodeling the 1940s home. The home's multipatterned interiors, by designer-to-the-stars Kelly Wearstler, have been featured on the Huffington Post and in Elle Décor magazine. "I wanted the garden to be contemplative and restful in contrast to the intense interiors," says Lara.

Arborist Sue Nicol was called in early to help save declining and neglected trees, especially a huge Deodar cedar in front of the house. Now the needled titan spreads healthy-looking branches above winding stone pathways and swathes of epimedium, ferns and golden Japanese forest grass.

The garden didn't always look like this. "It wasn't at all inviting," says Lara of the narrow walkway, diseased cherry trees and boxwood hedge that used to be her front yard. Ivy was choking out trees, and huge rhodies shrouded the home's windows. Kolb moved the rhododendrons to the edges of the garden. Ivy was banished and lower tree limbs were cut to let light into the garden.

"My work was to enhance a naturally beautiful site," says Kolb, who changed the shape of the lawn, created a sense of entry and redesigned the driveway, replacing concrete with handset Euro-cobble.

Jeff Sanderson, formerly at Microsoft, now owns the Stopsky Delicatessen on Mercer Island, and he and Lara are involved with the Sanderson Family Foundation. Children and dogs play here, so Kolb kept the plantings simple, using natives and ornamental grasses. Under the taller trees he planted lilacs, Japanese maples, oakleaf hydrangeas and the dogwood 'Eddie's White Wonder.'

On a property this size — it's two acres — Kolb gave much attention to just covering all that ground beautifully. To rejuvenate the patchy front lawn, a thick bed of gravel was laid down on top of the grass, then over-seeded directly into the gravel. This improved the drainage and greened it up. He widened stone walkways and designed in a generous bluestone terrace to be more in scale with the large property.

Around back, wings of the house shelter an expansive pool deck. Invasive blackberries were rooted out of the ravine and replaced with a network of pathways and sturdy native plants.

Lara had her yoga studio built beneath the fir trees she's dubbed the "wise old women." Closer to the house, she chose brushed stainless-steel sculptures by Oregon artist Lee Kelly for the way they reflect the light. She hand-mixed the brown/gray paint for the home's exterior to get it dark enough to be the perfect backdrop to all the shades of green in the garden.

"I was always impressed with Lara's decisions," says Kolb about the working partnership that created such an idyllic setting. "Mostly, she kept reminding me to save the trees."

Valerie Easton is a Seattle freelance writer. Check out her blog at www.valeaston.com. Mike Siegel is a Seattle Times staff photographer.





PORTLAND ART MUSEUM

MEMBERS MAGAZINE

FALL 2010 / WINTER 2011



LEE KELLY

OCTOBER 2, 2010 – JANUARY 9, 2011

This exhibition traces the artistic development of one of the Pacific Northwest's most distinguished artists, the sculptor Lee Kelly. A world traveler with a passion for Asian art and culture, Kelly brings a global, multicultural, and historical perspective to the works he creates at his five-acre studio site near Oregon City. Beginning with his early public commissions in the 1960s, Kelly's work has become part of the fabric of the region. His public works can be seen in Portland's International Rose Test Garden and on the downtown transit mall, and in San Francisco's Candlestick Park. Though he is perhaps most widely known for his large-scale welded metal sculptures, Kelly is also an accomplished painter with roots in the Abstract Expressionist movement.

The exhibition traces Kelly's career from the 1950s when, as a student at the Museum Art School, he worked with and was influenced by Louis Bunce and Frederic Littman. Though his early paintings are aligned with Abstract Expressionism, they also presage his later sculptural works in their compositional strategy. In these early paintings, Kelly used line, color, and chromatic value to pull a complex abstract form out of the activated field, and the emergent forms developed in this process suggest

...continued on page 4



Patron Society Opening Party

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 1, 6-9 P.M.

Exhibition preview followed by a reception with wine, cocktails, and hors d'oeuvres in the Fields Ballroom. Reception generously provided by Art of Catering and wine partners Durant Vineyards and Garden Vineyards. Exclusive to Patron Society members and exhibition sponsors. To RSVP or to join the Patron Society, contact Karie Burch at karie.burch@pam.org or 503-276-4240.

Major support for the publication has been provided by the Ford Family Foundation and Oregon Arts Commission, funded by American Masterpieces, National Endowment for the Arts. **Exhibition sponsors** include Art of Catering • Elizabeth Leach Gallery • The Jackson Foundation • Peraim and Kartar Khalsa Kathleen Lewis • Mary Hoyt Stevenson Foundation • Rose E. Tucker Charitable Trust • John and Joan Shipley • Mr. Al Solheim • In Memory of Bob Gerding by Diana • Paul Hart and Jan Jacobsen • Jim and Rita Knox • Dorothy Lemelson • Arlene and Harold Schnitzer • Many and Howard Shapiro • Mr. Mark E. Stevenson Mr. and Mrs. James F. Crumpacker through the Elizabeth Pownall Swindells Family Fund of the Oregon Community Foundation.

Exhibition Series sponsors include The James F. and Marion L. Miller Foundation • PLANAR • Fred Meyer Stores • The Collins Foundation • Mary C. Becker The Paul G. Allen Foundation • PGE Foundation • Nancie S. McGraw • US Trust/Bank of America Private Wealth Management • Pat and Trudy Ritz Mary Clark Maribeth Collins Exhibition Endowment Fund • Arlene and Harold Schnitzer • Julie and Peter Stott • The Mark Family in honor of Mary Mark Linda and Scott Andrews • Ray Hickey Foundation • Kristin and Truman Collins • Richard Louis Brown • Larry and Jane Viehl • The Standard • KeyBank NW Natural. **Additional support** provided by The Acorn Fund of the Oregon Community Foundation • Carole F. Alexander • Linda and Scott Andrews Barry and Janet Edwards • Jill and John Freidenrich Alix and Tom Goodman • William Haden • Susan Hammer • Linda Hodges Gallery • Robert and Terri Hopkins Margaret Kirkpatrick and Earl Blumenauer • Charles S. Lund and Eileen S. Pilcher • Stephen R. McCarthy and Lucinda Parker McCarthy • Katherine B. McCoy Michael and Maryellen McCulloch • Roger S. and Laura S. Meier Flower Fund of the Oregon Community Foundation • Ms. Maria Pope and Mr. Peter Beatty Portland General Electric • Mr. Carlos Rivera and Dr. Lisa Andrus-Rivera • Royal Danish Consulate • Richard and Deanne Rubinstein.



Members Preview Day

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 1, 10 A.M. - 5 P.M.

The Lee Kelly exhibition will be open for viewing for members only. Be among the first in Portland to see this exciting exhibition by a noted Northwest artist.

See it First!

OPPOSITE: Lee Kelly, Leland I, 1975, Cor-Ten steel and enamel, Portland Center Park, Oregon. THIS PAGE TOP TO BOTTOM: Lee Kelly, Arch with Oaks, 1986, Stainless steel, Cornell Oaks Corporate Center, Beaverlton, Oregon; Lee Kelly, Untitled, 1961, Painted steel, Portland Art Museum, Gift of Susan Hammer.

Q&A

with Lee Kelly

...continued from page 2

a vocabulary of jagged shards and foliate shapes that would figure prominently in the first decade of his sculpture practice beginning in the 1960s.

As a sculptor, Kelly would go on to invent ever more complex sculptural forms with welded sheet metal, painting their surfaces to add chromatic richness and patterning. The late 1960s and 1970s found Kelly moving away from the spontaneous abstraction of his painted sculptures toward a more structural vocabulary that would ultimately be influenced by his travels and his exploration of ancient structures such as Stonehenge and Chichen Itza. His public works—monumental in scale—were often earthbound, with forms rising out of the ground, solid and defining the space architecturally. These works will be presented in the exhibition along with Kelly's more animated metal sculptures, which are alive in their implicit movement and balance, appearing to walk, dance, and teeter into space.

The exhibition is accompanied by a full-color 174-page publication available at the Museum Shop.

On view in the Schmitzer Sculpture Court and the Maribeth Wilson Collins Gallery. Organized by the Portland Art Museum and curated by Bruce Guenther, chief curator and curator of modern and contemporary art.

In July 2010, Lee Kelly took the time to speak about his work at Leland Iron Works, his studio outside of Oregon City.

Q. You have a long relationship with the Museum, dating back to your days as a student at the Museum Art School in the 1950s. What was the school like at that time?

A. It was very intimate. There were a very limited number of students and only two curriculums. You could do fine art or graphic design.

Q. One of the themes in the exhibition will be the shift in your work from painting to sculpture. How did that shift come about?

A. I started as a painter because the Museum Art School was stronger in painting at the time. Working directly with materials hadn't quite hit the scene. One would gravitate toward painting because of the immediacy of it. With sculpture I wanted to capture the energy of the painting in welded form. I wanted to take the energy of Abstract Expressionism and put that into three-dimensional form.

Q. How has your work changed from the early Abstract Expressionist-influenced works to the present large-scale sculptures?

A. It evolves, but I don't think it's a straight line. I go back and pick up stuff. I travel out on a little branch, and leave something for a while, and then I might go back to it.



Lee Kelly in his studio, 2010. Photograph courtesy of the artist.

Colors always remain a part of it. I still do a fair amount of color and gold leaf.

The Abstract Expressionist works are intensely personal. They revolve right out of the person who's doing it. But a piece that's outside needs to work with the elements in a much simpler, cleaner way.

Q. What is your approach to making a work of public art?

A. As much as possible, you consider how is this going to be used, without compromising the idea. It was a big learning curve to put works out in public. There's a kind of responsibility if you do work in a public space. Safety is a big consideration. It should be approachable and climbable but you have to make sure somebody doesn't hurt themselves. There was also a learning curve using industrial methods. Now everything is laser-cut using high tech equipment, so that really opens it up. But for years and years, we did everything here [at Leland Iron Works].

Lectures and Programs

Admission to the following programs is \$5 for members and \$12 for non-members unless otherwise noted. Seating is limited. Advance tickets available online and on-site.

OPENING LECTURE

Lee Kelly:

An Intersection of Matter

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 3, 2 P.M.

Whitsell Auditorium

Chief Curator and Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art Bruce Guenther will discuss Lee Kelly's artistic journey from painting to sculpture during a career that has spanned more than 50 years. Guenther will explore the importance of gestural abstraction, craft, and architecture in Kelly's monumental sculptures.

Artist-Led Tours: Lee Kelly

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 30, 2-3 P.M.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2-3 P.M.

Lee Kelly will take visitors on a personal tour through the exhibition, highlighting his influences, process, and evolution as an artist. Space is limited to 35 ticket holders. Advance tickets are recommended and available online and on-site.

Studio Visit and Wine Tasting with Lee Kelly

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 10, 2-5:30 P.M.



Lee Kelly in his studio, 2010, Photograph by Michael J. Burns.

Join us for a very special opportunity to enjoy a behind-the-scenes tour by Lee Kelly of his studio outside Oregon City. Kelly has created nearly all of his monumental sculptures on this five-acre site filled with his artwork, gardens, and mementos from years of travel. After the tour, enjoy a wine tasting by Winestock.

Advance online registration is required as space is limited. Transportation and wine tasting are included in the price. \$100 members, \$125 non-members; for adults age 21 and up. For further information call 503-276-4248.

Public Art Today: A Panel Discussion

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 2 P.M.

Whitsell Auditorium

To celebrate Lee Kelly's extraordinary contribution to public art, this panel will explore public art beginning with its history in the Northwest and considering today's changing definitions of "public" space, connections between art and politics, and new artistic and curatorial practices in engaging with spaces and the public.

Panel participants include Tad Savinar, an artist, playwright, and urban planner who has developed public art master plans for light rail systems and open spaces; Harrell Fletcher, art professor in the Art and Social Practice program at Portland State University, who creates socially engaged artwork; and Sandra Percival, previously the executive director of New Langton Arts in San Francisco and the director of Public Art Development Trust in London. Moderated by Tim DuRoche, director of programs, World Affairs Council of Oregon.



LEFT | This is an untitled painting by Lee Kelly from 1959. Kelly, better known as a sculptor, began as a painter rooted in Abstract Expressionism.

BELOW | The twisty yet elegant sculpture "Bird Series I" from 2003 shows how Kelly's art has evolved from his earliest years yet retained some signature characteristics.

Images courtesy of ELIZABETH LEACH GALLERY and LEE KELLY

Grace and greatness

Portland artist Lee Kelly has been experimenting with color, form and ideas for 50 years — proving that a distinct kind of brilliance can develop away from the salons of New York

By D.K. ROW
THE OREGONIAN

Portland may be thousands of miles away from the world's art capitals — not to mention more financially humble — but the Rose City is, and has been, well-situated to witness the evolution of the contemporary artist. And that evolution doesn't simply present the artist as a Modernist or Postmodernist provocateur, but as a humanist.

One of the Northwest's richest examples of the artist as humanist is Lee Kelly, whose new show at Elizabeth Leach Gallery deepens our appreciation of a man who imbues his work with art's most trenchant arguments of the past half-century, along with something timeless: grace.

The show, "Doubtful Sound," is a

modest gathering of mostly early work from the artist's 50-year career — about a dozen sculptures and paintings from the late '50s and early '60s in addition to a few sculptures made more recently. It's a Whitman's sampler of sorts, but composed of rare gems that intensify, for longtime followers, the roots of Kelly's art.

For old and new audiences alike, the show declares the 76-year-old's gravity and appeal: This is an artist whose career exceeds categories of Modernism and Postmodernism, a career that also argues that you can be an ambitious artist while working and living removed from the larger art-world capitals.

Kelly is primarily known as a sculptor trained in architecture. But he began his career as a painter, and a casual look at this exhibit's painted abstract

blooms of red, orange, blue, white and other colors show that some 40 years ago, Kelly was struggling with the one movement every artist confronted at that time: Abstract Expressionism. The major voices of that movement, residing in New York, are heard in these paintings — an intense bloke named Willem de Kooning, for example. But you also hear the conversation that was taking place here, in Portland, amongst a fraternity of artists just as intensely curious, if lesser known: Milton Wilson, George Johanson, Louis Bunce and others.

Kelly's paintings from this period may not have led the revolution, but they are thrilling. In this show featuring such early paintings as "Fall & Winter" and "Mouth of Night," Kelly evokes gently mauled shapes that burst with

Please see **KELLY**, Page C3

Review

"Doubtful Sound" by Lee Kelly

Where: Elizabeth Leach Gallery, 417 N.W. Ninth Ave.

Hours: 10:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday

Closes: Aug. 30





Made in 1959, Lee Kelly's "Fall and Winter" captures the Expressionist influences on the young artist at that time.

Kelly: Not shaped by politics, artistic norms

Continued from Page C1

rapture, as if from an eruption: caulky textured protrusions, jolts and abrasions that transmit melody, not dissonance. Like other Abstract Expressionists, Kelly was channeling jazz, on one level, while experimenting with form and color, struggling to refine a new language of visual expression.

Eventually, Kelly turned to sculpting, and in many ways his sculptures are a perfect complement to his paintings. An untitled 1961 sculpture in the exhibit could be a three-dimensional representation of part of a separate painting hung next to it, made also that year. It's a rust-colored, taffy-twisted geometric shape that seems to be a descendent of Cubism's sinewy, hard-angled jaggedness. That jutting shape is duplicated in numerous parts of the painting.

Kelly's architectural training became more prominent in the many studio works and public

art commissions he made during the '60s and '70s. Most of these works embody the fine thoughts of a considered artist hunting for a new three-dimensional world, much like David Smith, the great Abstract Expressionist sculptor. The worst of these seem just tasteful, benign exercises.

But Kelly's art career has been an adventure that escapes tidy portrayal. Arising from his travels to Nepal, Cambodia, Central America and the South Pacific, and his interests in the architecture of Frank Gehry, among others, Kelly has created an erudite, cursive vocabulary. His work is a distinct, graphic blending of twisting, torqued shapes that seem rooted in ancient Asian culture and something more contemporary, say cutting-edge computer technology.

The show, for instance, has a series of welded steel works from 2008 that are variations of Kelly's familiar spirals and hook forms. An earlier series of sculptures from 2003, called "Bird Series," looks indeed like sculpted birds — or like a surrealist's trippy take of well-known Kelly figures.

The exhibit has too few works to fill out the specifics of Kelly's career evolution and the continental scope of his art making. But there's enough here to intimate his intense, always unfolding inquiry of idea, form and color.

That's partly what I mean when I characterize Kelly as an artist humanist. What began as a Modernist's journey into the symphonic maelstrom of Abstract Expressionism has become something less spectacular but more profound. Kelly has followed a path dictated solely by an inner, life-embracing design, not by the politics or norms of the art world. That's allowed him to plow ahead in remote Oregon for most of his career, even though his talent and curiosity could have found an audience in the salons of New York.

Perhaps that path has been inspired by the personal. Kelly has suffered through many tragedies — including the deaths of his son and his second wife, artist Bonnie Bronson. But he's always moved beyond the past with a characteristic that's not strictly Modern or Postmodern: an Emersonian appetite for life.

D.K. Row: 503-294-7654 or dkrow@news.oregonian.com. Also: <http://blog.oregonlive.com/visualarts>

WEEK = WW Pick. Highly recommended.

By RICHARD SPEER. TO BE CONSIDERED FOR LISTINGS, submit show information—including opening and closing dates, gallery address and phone number—at least two weeks in advance to: Visual Arts, WW, 2220 NW Quimby St., Portland, OR 97210. Email: rspeer@week.com.



David Geiser: Lightning

There's a preternatural polish to David Geiser's immaculately composed integrations of geometric and organic forms. Tendril-like forms branch out within square and rectangular structures, often in conglomerations of long, thin wooden panels. The surfaces resemble the results of some exotic film-processing technique, resplendent with deeply saturated colors, primarily red, yellow and sage green. In the painting *Red Hedge*, the color is so intense, it looks as if it were rubbed on with pure powdered pigment. Through March 29. Butters Gallery, 520 NW Davis St., second floor, 248-9378.

Ellen Lesperance: Do You Know That One Day You Lost Your Way, Man?

As part of Disjecta's Portland2014 biennial, artist Ellen Lesperance has created talismanic figurative sculptures from gouache, graphite and paper. They're installed in an environment of hand-dyed silk panels, which hang in luxuriant bolts around the perimeter of the gallery. The show feels like an optical version of surround sound: an enveloping hypnotic fantasia that's part harem dream, part tie-dyed Oregon Country Fair hootenanny. Through March 30. Upfor Gallery, 929 NW Flanders St., 227-5111.

Group Show

Among these works by artists Joshua Burd, Mackenzie Kuntz, Mr. Say and Roxanne Patruznick, Burd's imagery of animals stands out as the most playful, if not always technically flawless. But come on, you have to give some props to an artist who explains his artistic rationale like Burd does. "Animals, especially cats," he deadpans, "hold all the same qualities as humans, but without all the schmuck." Through March 25. The Goodfoot, 2845 SE Stark St., 239-9292.

Jeffrey Sarmiento: Constructions

Jeffrey Sarmiento's intricate kiln-formed glass pieces are not just literally "constructions," they're also deconstructions of cultural identity. A Filipino-American born in Chicago and now living in the U.K., Sarmiento knows a thing or two about the ways in which context shapes our

attitudes. In works like *Muse* and *Muscles*, he mimics the Ben-Day dots of black-and-white newsprint with side-by-side portraits of a traditionally dressed woman and a preening bodybuilder, both archetypes of a certain kind of beauty across cultures. Implicitly, Sarmiento asks the viewer whether we ourselves, despite our pretenses of authenticity, are always striking some sort of pose. Through May 3. Bullseye Gallery, 300 NW 13th Ave., 227-0222.

Jennifer Mercedes: Complete Freedom

If you walk around Portland and pay attention, you'll encounter Jennifer Mercedes's paintings. Like fellow artists Chris Haberman and Tom Cramer, she is a ubiquitous presence on murals and storefronts and inside gallery windows. But now, in her first show at what she calls "the infamous Mark Woolley Gallery," she brings such a highly individual approach to each painting, it feels like you're seeing her work for the first time. This is why she titled the show *Complete Freedom*. "I decided I didn't want to have any limits or worries about making this a 'cohesive body of work,'" she says. "I trusted what came out of me." The strategy worked. The paintings are the opposite of formulaic; in fact, some of them are nearly unrecognizable as Mercedes's work. For an artist who's still growing, that's a really good thing. Through April 12. Mark Woolley Gallery, 700 SW 5th Ave., Suite 4110, 998-4152.

Lee Kelly: Pavilion

Octogenarian sculptor, painter and Northwest institution Lee Kelly debuts a new body of work in *Pavilion*. The show is inspired by his travels to Nepal and his fascination with the pan-cultural ideal and iconography of "the goddess." In his paintings and steel sculptures, he deploys a mixture of gently curving shapes with hard-edged forms, such that each work becomes a kind of visual sonata, exquisitely balanced. This show proves—if there were ever any doubt—why Kelly has become such a regional treasure. Through April 26. Elizabeth Leach Gallery, 417 NW 9th Ave., 224-0521.

Lucy Capehart: Remnants

After Lucy Capehart's parents died in a plane crash, she and her family discovered a cache of garments stored in their attic: sundresses, robes, sports coats and dress shirts. Perhaps they had fallen out of fashion with the passage of time. Or maybe they were simply misplaced on some forgotten, long-ago afternoon. Regardless, rather than throw them away or donate them to Goodwill, Capehart decided to document the clothes via an antiquarian photographic technique called cyanotype. The resulting images look like X-rays: eerily blanched out, as if seared onto the photographic plates as they are seared into the artist's childhood memories. There is a poignancy to these works: images of clothes worn long ago by people who will never wear them again. Through March 30. Blue Sky Gallery, 122 NW 8th Ave., 225-0210.

Ryan Reggiani: Sculpture

New York City artist Ryan Reggiani presents one of the most materially and conceptually sophisticated exhibitions seen in the Northwest in at least four months. His sculpture, *Untitled (Hanging)*, is made of steel bent into the contours of a curtain, for an inexplicable optical melding of hard and soft. Meanwhile, his metal-framed light-bulb sculptures have structural rigor, lowbrow curb appeal and wry humor. And that's just the beginning. To see the breadth of Reggiani's practice, you have to see the show in person. Through March 29. Hap Gallery, 916 NW Flanders St., 444-7101.

Sue Friesz: Transformation

Inside the small, discreet box that makes up the PDX Window Project, Sue Friesz deploys plywood, acrylic paint and "abrasion-resistant polycarbonate material" (fancy lingo for plastic) in biomorphic forms. It lives up to its title, *Transformation*. The beauty of this piece lies in its evocation of multifarious shapes: a dove taking off in flight, a butterfly's wings, a stylized palm tree. Which one does it "really" depict? Um, yes. Through March 29. PDX Window Project, 925 NW Flanders St., 222-0063.

Tamara English: The Worlds Are Glorious

Over the past decade, painter Tamara English has charted a course from sumptuous landscapes, rife with tangled vines and flowers, to mystical semi-abstract iconography to an inspired commingling of the two. In her first showing with Nisus Gallery, she displays her gift for naturalistic color and intuitive composition. Works such as *Fortitude* feature a mysterious symmetrical motif rising like a fountain above a forest floor. In *Shimmering*, English exploits the rhythm of vertical drips that pour down like streaking rain. These elements—the symbolic and the painterly—combine in the vibrant work titled *Praising*, which manages somehow to seem playful and profound at the same time. Through April 27. Nisus Gallery, 8371 N Interstate Ave., No. 1, 806-1427.

Wes Mills: Hamilton Drawings

Montana-based artist Wes Mills fills PDX Contemporary with a suite of ravishingly elegant mixed-media works on paper, which he calls *Hamilton Drawings*. They're intricately folded, fastidiously complex groupings of circles in a wide array of compositions. In some, the circles float free atop a light-colored background; in others, they coalesce around a central vertical axis, evoking blueprints for Frank Lloyd Wright's decorative designs. The papers have a delicate, marbled surface, imparting an archival feel that befits the timeless shapes. Through April 12. PDX Contemporary Art, 925 NW Flanders St., 222-0063.

For more Visual Arts listings, visit week.com

For PAM, fewer blockbusters, more local shows

The art museum's special-exhibits schedule through 2012 emphasizes conserving resources

By D.K. ROW
THE OREGONIAN

The Portland Art Museum has released a tentative schedule of special exhibits through 2013, and the choices affirm executive director Brian Ferriso's prudent, cautious strategy honed during these recessionary times.

The special exhibits during the next few years will include the occasional traveling show headlined by a major historical figure or idea and many exhibits drawn from the museum's permanent collection. As a whole, these shows continue the museum's efforts to present a more reflective institution with deeper relationships to the local community, but one also operating with a lean curatorial staff.

The diverse shows cover time periods ranging from the ancient to the contemporary and cultures that span the globe: Greece, India, Japan, Europe and, of course, the Northwest. Only one project might possess "blockbuster" appeal, though substantively, it's far from a soulless trunk show of merely expensive artifacts. The exhibit, "The Body Beautiful," examines the nude in ancient Greece and arrives from The British Museum.

The emphasis on exhibits drawn from local collections and the museum's vaults reveals an approach of necessity and consideration, qualities that many museums share these days.

"We can still afford the big show occasionally," Ferriso says. "But no longer back-to-back or close together."



CHRIS PIZZELLO/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Cartoonist R. Crumb's version of the Book of Genesis will visit the Portland Art Museum in June. Crumb is pictured earlier this year during an interview with Françoise Mouly, the New Yorker art editor.

But drawing mostly from the museum's own collection has its own peculiar challenges, depending on the institution. The Portland museum's curatorial staff has been operating without three key figures for various reasons, including the recession. Those positions are the curators of European art, Northwest art and photography. Some of these jobs have been vacant for more than a year, leaving the collections in those depart-

ments and communities represented by them untended. How much longer can the sparse staff continue at this pace and with this workload?

Ferriso says some brightness lies ahead, and there's a sense the recession of the past 15 to 18 months has bottomed. Admissions and revenue for the fiscal year are up 20 and 27 percent, respectively. The museum board has also raised more than one-third of a \$1 million campaign, with several

significant donations still pending.

Aside from pursuing more thoughtful programming and increased educational initiatives, Ferriso says his major goal for 2010 is likely the same for every nonprofit and business: to avoid further staff layoffs and furloughs.

Here's a list of special shows at the Portland Art Museum through 2012. Some titles are tentative and will change. Also, keep in mind the list does not include the museum's continuing series of regular exhibits. The museum says details concerning a few other special shows scheduled through 2013 have yet to be finalized. It will announce those specifics once negotiations are completed.

February 2010: "Disquieted." An exploration of the psychological ennui that has defined this decade through the work of some of the most well-known contemporary artists of roughly the past 30 years, including Bill Viola, Andreas Gursky, Tracey Emin and Takashi Murakami.

June 2010: "A Pioneering Collection: Master Drawings From the Crocker Art Museum." A sampling of works on paper from one of the best drawing collections in America. Expect the show to favor 19th century European works.

"The Bible Illuminated: R. Crumb's Book of Genesis." An interpretation of the first book of the Hebrew Bible by the legendarily profane artist. The show comes from the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles.

Please see **MUSEUM**, Page C3

Museum: Show of local collectors' art long awaited

Continued from Page C1

October 2010: "The Riches of the City: Masterpieces From Portland Collections." A much-anticipated roundup of the local scene's major collectors and their art.

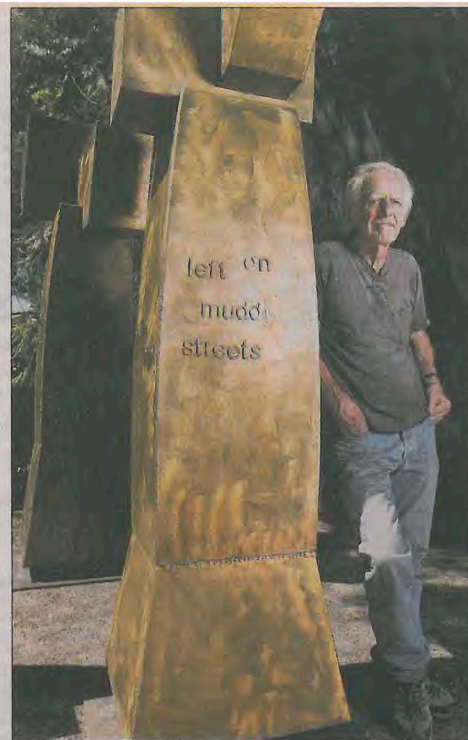
Untitled Lee Kelly retrospective. A long-brewing look at the career of this Modernist-inspired Northwest sculptor.

February 2011: Untitled show on Japanese prints. The history of Japanese prints as told through the museum's own trove of works on paper. Asian art curator Maribeth Graybill will collaborate with retired Asian art curator Donald Jenkins on this extraordinary undertaking.

June 2011: "Contemporary Northwest Art Awards." The museum's version of a regional biennial survey will resume once the museum hires a Northwest art curator, which is expected to be soon.

October 2011: "India: 500 Years of Masterworks." This exhibition explores the many legends of Vishnu, the Hindu God who assumes many avatars. Organized by the Frist Center for the Visual Arts in Tennessee.

February 2012: "Inspiring Impressionism: The Art of Corot." A studious examination of the career of Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot, the French painter who



THE OREGONIAN/2006

The great Northwest sculptor Lee Kelly will be featured in one of Portland Art Museum's special exhibits for the fall of 2010. The museum is organizing a retrospective of Kelly's long, distinguished career.

influenced the Impressionists. Brian Ferriso and Impressionist scholar Richard Brettell will assemble this show.

October 2012: "The Body Beautiful." A marquee exhibit from The British Museum

that looks at the human body through the art and culture of ancient Greece.

D.K. Row: 503-294-7654;
dkrow@news.oregonian.com;
oregonlive.com/art

LEE KELLY

In the where-do-we-go-from-here moment experienced by many second generation, Left Coast Abstract Expressionists, Lee Kelly took to the streets. Or, more specifically, he took to the sidewalks, plazas, courtyards, and fields of the West as the most prolific maker of public artworks in what may prove to have been public art's heyday. Kelly's works grace sites from Seattle to Los Angeles to Houston, including the magnificent Cor-Ten steel *Gate F* (1972) at Candlestick Park in San Francisco and the massive slabs of the temple-like *Leland I* (1975), anchoring the series of Portland plazas designed by Lawrence Halprin. There was a time in the early '70s, chief curator of the Portland Art Museum Bruce Guenther recalls, that Kelly was the only artist winning public art commissions on the West Coast.

A current retrospective at the museum traces the Oregon artist's career while an accompanying book, "Lee Kelly," includes lush photos of many of Kelly's public art works as well as those in private collections like the bold, square knot of the Cor-Ten *Tahoe* (2006), *Stainless Garden* (1972), on the Stanford University campus, and those installed at Leland Iron Works, Kelly's studio and home on a converted dairy farm not far from Portland. One of these is the monumental *Memory 99* (1999), which manages to suggest both gargantuan calligraphy and archeological ruin in its grouping of forms in Cor-Ten steel.

"ARLIE," 1978, STEEL
HELEN THURSTON AYER FUND, © LEE KELLY

INSTALLATION VIEW, LEE KELLY EXHIBITION, PORTLAND ART MUSEUM



A key moment in Kelly's path from canvas to Cor-Ten and beyond that the exhibition captures is his leap from abstract expressionist painting to early sculptures that take gestural abstraction into three dimensions with bent and direct-welded sheet metal. The curved planes evoke the rounded shapes in his paintings, the rough welds, strokes of paint. The painted sculpture, *Untitled* (1961), is a meeting of these two directions. Kelly returns to consider surface in stainless works like *Angkor I* (1994), whose reflective surfaces, ground in sweeping gestures, are as important as its form. As well, the exhibition includes later wall-based sculptures and painted sculptures incorporating text fragments applied to the surfaces.

The exhibition is a fitting culmination for Kelly, who studied at the Museum Art School (now the Pacific Northwest College of Art or PNCA) in the late '50s when it was still housed in the Portland Art Museum. The precocious Kelly caused a stir while still a student, when he began receiving large public commissions like that of creating four fountains for the Oregon Centennial Exposition thus presaging his 60+ year run as the Northwest's most commissioned public artist. Just a few years out of school, Kelly had his first solo museum show at the museum in 1960, and his work was regularly curated into regional exhibitions there.

Kelly's contributions to the cultural landscape have gone beyond great public sculptures. He was among the first board members of the seminal alternative arts space, the Portland Center for the Visual Arts, that from 1972 to 1987 brought important contemporary artists to Portland for exhibitions, installations, performances, and lectures. In the late '70s he was appointed to the Portland Art Association's Board of Trustees and Collections/Exhibition Committee. But perhaps his most poignant community-building effort is the Bonnie Bronson Fund he established in 1991 in memory of his second wife (with whom he collaborated for over 30 years) to provide support to artists committed to staying in the Pacific Northwest.

With Bronson, Kelly trekked and climbed throughout the Northwest and in the late '70s went to Nepal and India for the first time. The trip was so inspiring to Kelly that he has become an inveterate traveler, visiting sites of temples and ruins in throughout Asia and the Americas. A 1985 Oregon Arts Commission fellowship supported his research into the traditional bronze casting methods of the Newari of Nepal.

Over the years, Kelly has garnered nearly every award offered to visual artists in the Northwest including the 1987 Governor's Award for the Arts and the Master's Fellowship in Sculpture from the State of Oregon in 1992. His work has been supported and honored by the NEA, the Ford Foundation, the Washington State Arts Commission, and many others.

When the current retrospective ends, Portland Art Museum visitors will continue to be greeted by Kelly's *Arlie* (1978), permanently installed in the outdoor sculpture court. This most creature-like of his sculptures is a rounded body on three angular legs with a single circular "eye." And the title? It's Kelly's given name. Standing before this outsized *Arlie*, one gets the feeling, as with many of Kelly's Cor-Ten works, that somehow *Arlie* has always been there... and always will be.

—LISA RADON

"Lee Kelly," at the Portland Art Museum, runs October 2, 1010 – January 9, 2011

www.portlandartmuseum.org

"Lee Kelly: Chrome, Sculpture 1967-2010," at Elizabeth Leach Gallery, in Portland, was on view November 4 – December 31, 2010

www.leekellysculpture.net

visual arts

Lee Kelly and Bonnie Bronson

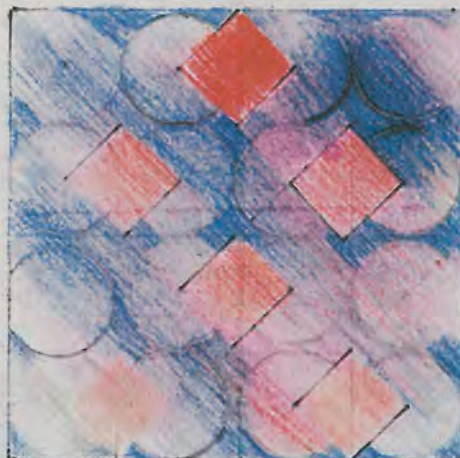
It's been Lee Kelly time all autumn, mostly because of the veteran Oregon sculptor and painter's first-rate retrospective at the Portland Art Museum (it ends Jan. 9) but also because of "Chrome," his smaller and more focused show at Elizabeth Leach Gallery that continues through this month.

The pieces in "Chrome" are brawny and funky and musical in that abstract Lee Kelly way, with maybe a few more biological and even anthropomorphic twists than his later, more geometrically rigorous pieces. These sculptures are from the 1960s, and they all got their beginnings from old auto bumpers (he preferred Buicks and Cadillacs) rescued from scrap yards. These days they might be hailed as recycled art; at the time, they were something to play with. They underscore

Please turn to **Page 34**



LEFT | *Untitled (Bumper II)*, by Lee Kelly, 1966/67, part of "Chrome" at Elizabeth Leach Gallery



BONNIE BRONSON ESTATE

Grid V (untitled) by Bonnie Bronson. Mixed media on paper, 6x6 inches.

Continued from Page 32

the quirkiness often lurking in his work and help give a more complete sense of his prominent place in Northwest art.

Meanwhile, far from gallery central, a small show called "Grids" has gone up at Winestock, a wine shop and gallery in downtown Oregon City. The show consists of 10 small drawings from the estate of Bonnie Bronson, who is chiefly known these days for the annual artist award in her name but who was an artist to be reckoned with before her death in 1990, at age 50, in a climbing accident on Mount Adams. Bronson was married to Lee Kelly.

The drawings at Winestock — strict geometric forms in graphite and ink on paper, overlaid with sensuous streaks of colored pencil, and probably made around 1985 or '86 — seem in one sense like simple practice pieces and in another like little puzzles: how much

variation and beauty can you squeeze into a restrictive form like a rhymed couplet or a geometric grid?

There is much more than this to Bronson's legacy, but these drawings — the first gallery showing of her work in 18 years — are a modest start. What they do mainly is to whet the appetite for a larger and broader look at her art, which is being cataloged. Elizabeth Leach will install such an exhibit next fall, around the time of the next Bronson Award announcement, and an intriguing slice of Oregon art history will be revived.

Elizabeth Leach Gallery, 417 N.W. Ninth Ave.; 503-224-0521, elizabethleach.com. "Chrome" ends Dec. 31.

Winestock, 820 Main St., Oregon City; 503-656-9463, winestockoc.com. "Grids" ends Dec. 31.

•
Bob Hicks:
 bobhicks5@gmail.com,
 artscatter.com

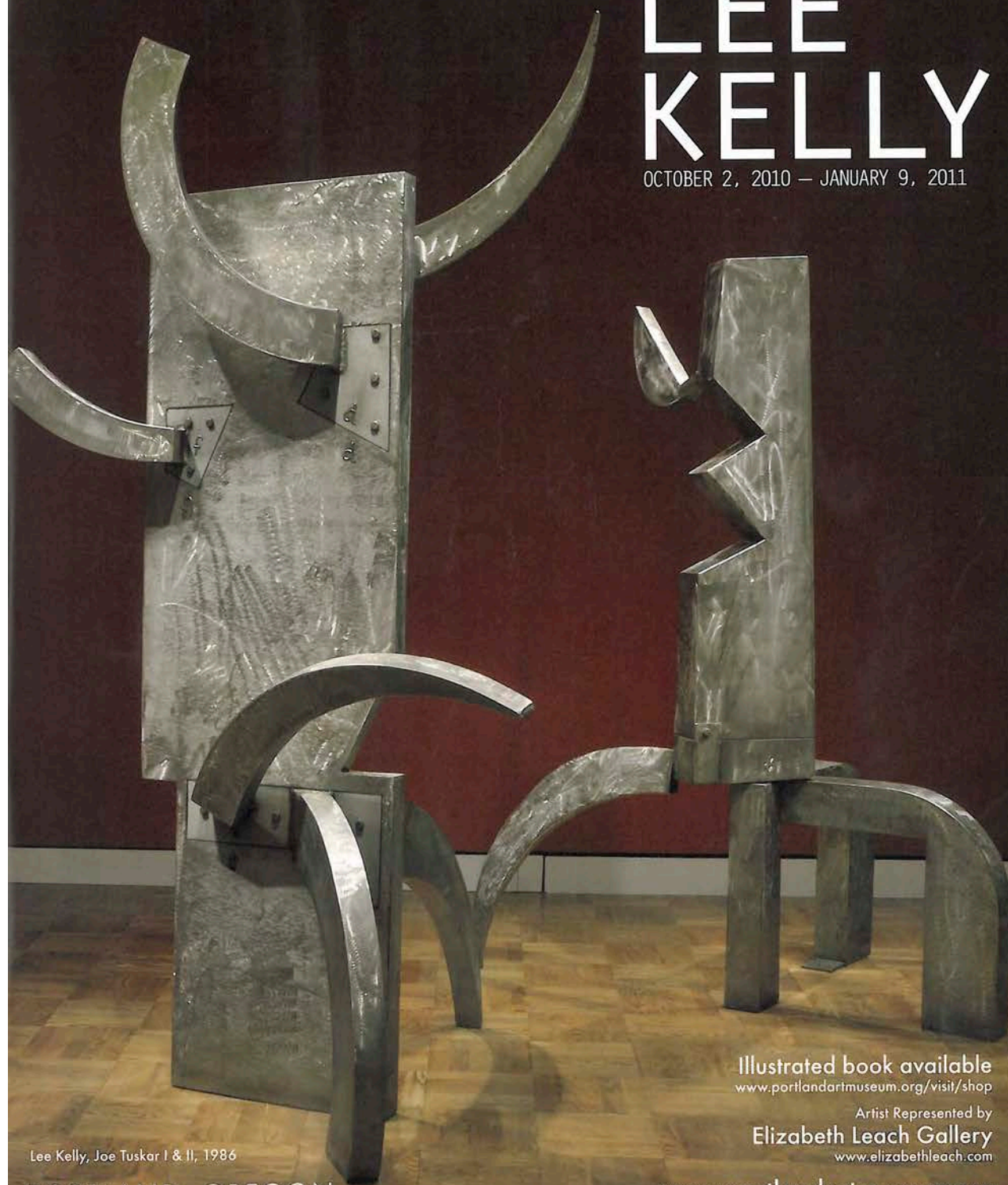
sculpture

December 2010

PORTLAND ART MUSEUM

LEE KELLY

OCTOBER 2, 2010 — JANUARY 9, 2011



Lee Kelly, Joe Tuskar I & II, 1986

PORTLAND, OREGON

Illustrated book available
www.portlandartmuseum.org/visit/shop

Artist Represented by
Elizabeth Leach Gallery
www.elizabethleach.com

www.portlandartmuseum.org

The Oregonian



Sept. 24-30
2010

D.K.'s hot sheet

Next Saturday, the Portland Art Museum opens the much anticipated retrospective on local sculptor Lee Kelly (pictured).

Kelly has been an instrumental figure in the Northwest art scene for more than 40 years, both as a teacher and artist. Part of that mid-century era generation that helped create the Portland art scene, Kelly graduated from the Pacific Northwest College of Art after serving in the military during the Korean War.

Kelly has had a substantial career as both studio artist and public artist. And the museum exhibit, assembled by the museum's chief curator, Bruce Guenther, attempts to give a comprehensive look at Kelly's career, including works on paper, small sculptures and larger works, including the Corten steel work, "Memory '99," which has resided on Kelly's personal sanctuary in Oregon City since it was made 11 years ago.

For a figure of Kelly's significance – and charm – the show is long overdue, and it's also the first major look at a regional artist by the museum since 2006, when it presented a retrospective of the late sculptor Hilda Morris.

Opens Saturday, Oct. 2. Portland Art Museum, 1219 S.W. Park Ave., www.portlandartmuseum.org

— D.K. Row



MOTOYA NAKAMURA/THE OREGONIAN



VISUAL ARTS

By D.K. ROW
THE OREGONIAN

The recession still lingers, and somehow, the local art world has survived, though not without substantial losses — some major galleries and the pared-down budgets and endowments of most institutions.

Still, the shows must — and do — go on. The fall season highlights big shows at local museums and at the city's academic-based galleries. Here are a few shows to keep in mind:

Portland Art Museum: Lee Kelly Retrospective. Kelly is one of the Northwest's iconic figures, and this retrospective by the museum has been long in the making. Steeped in architecture and the modernist sculptors of the mid-20th century, such as David Smith, Kelly has crafted an ex-

traordinary career full of amazing highs and touching lows, a career that essentially tracks the birth of the modern and contemporary art scene in Portland. Assembled by the museum's chief curator, Bruce Guenther, the museum show arrives with a book on Kelly's life and career.

*Oct. 2-Jan. 9, Portland Art Museum, 1219 S.W. Park Ave.
portlandartmuseum.org*



MICHAEL LLOYD/THE OREGONIAN

Portland Art Museum will offer a retrospective on Northwest icon Lee Kelly beginning in October.

FALL ARTS PREVIEW

CRESTING THE HORIZON

LEE KELLY

SCULPTOR

For four decades artist Lee Kelly has filled Portland's public spaces and private gardens with huge, totemic works of welded steel. But his work has never enjoyed the respect of a retrospective. On October 2 at the Portland Art Museum (and November 4 at Elizabeth Leach Gallery), Kelly will finally arrive, not just in style but in scale. Anchoring a 50-year look at his paintings and sculptures will be *Memory 99*, his never-before-shown, 10-by-20-foot, COR-TEN-steel Goliath set to dominate the museum's sculpture court. Like recent mammoth works on display by the late minimalist Sol LeWitt and Spaniard Jaume Plensa, chief curator Bruce Guenther says that *Memory* will redefine the museum's space.

"Lee is rare among Northwest sculptors for always working beyond his arm's length," says Guenther. "He's pushed the limits of materials, space, and technique to build Big Things that become part of the world."

Kelly shrugs at others' notions of his grandness; he's still figuring out how to install the several-ton *Memory* without marring the museum's marble floors. "I'm 78," he laughs. "As an artist you get used to your life being an open book."

Make that an open local art history book. Kelly says he learned a "reverence for sculpture" during his '60s-era studies with Portland State University's classically inclined Frederic Littman and "how to handle women and drink" from the decidedly modernist Pacific Northwest College of Art teacher Louis Bunce. ("He taught in a wonderful way," he quickly qualifies. "It's just that a lot of it was in bars.")

Ever-grinning Kelly and his outlook seem ageless. "The times have never been a problem," Kelly chuckles. "I've never made much money. Bad times are no different than when times are good." —RG

SHOWS TO KNOW

THE ART GYM AT

MARYLHURST UNIVERSITY

Sept 14–Oct 27 *Album* In this group exhibition, a cadre of renowned Oregon painters, sculptors, and photographers cast their collective gaze—at each other. Former PNCA teacher George Johanson, conceptual photographer Marne Lucas, still-life painter Sherrie Wolfe, and multimedia artist Melody Owen are among those depicting their fellow artists. Tue–Sun noon–4, B.P. John Administration Building, Third Floor, 17600 Pacific Hwy, Marylhurst University, 503-636-8141

DISJECTA

Sept 11–Oct 16 *Henk Pander: Mary Alice Paintings* At age 72, this Dutch-born and classically trained painter continues to add to a powerful artistic legacy. Having often reveled in the dramatic

and, frequently, the dour, here Pander reveals a lighter, brighter touch in a series of paintings of his granddaughter Mary Alice as both subject and inspiration. Fri–Sun noon–6, 8371 N Interstate Ave, 503-913-6884

ELIZABETH LEACH GALLERY

Sept 2–Oct 2 *Justine Kurland: This Train Is Bound for Glory* Yale-educated photographer Kurland explores the idea of freedom through icons of Western expansion—trains, hobos, hippies, and assorted unbridled spirits that once populated the landscape. Portrayed with a mythic edge in her trademark gritty romanticism, Kurland's work seems to pose the question: Is freedom still an option or merely folklore? Tue–Sat 10:30–5:30 & by appt, 417 NW Ninth Ave, 503-224-0521 —JC



1st
Thursday



MOTOYA NAKAMURA/THE OREGONIAN

To celebrate the centennial of the Pacific Northwest College of Art, many of the city's galleries are having shows featuring college-affiliated artists, including Lee Kelly (above), standing next to one of his sculptures on his estate. Kelly graduated from PNCA in 1959 and will give the college's Homecoming Lecture on Friday.

pays tribute to PNCA

Local galleries
honor the
college's
centennial
with works by
affiliated
artists

By D.K. ROW | THE OREGONIAN

You'll notice something distinctive about the artists exhibiting work during tonight's First Thursday art walk. Many of them attended the Pacific Northwest College of Art.

Given that PNCA is the state's flagship art college, that dominance isn't unusual. But this month, the number of PNCA graduates or affiliates of the college exhibiting work will be greater than usual because the local commercial galleries are honoring PNCA's centennial.

It's hard to say exactly how many galleries are participating, but it's safe to say that it's an impressive number that includes most of Portland's top-tier galleries. Here's a tipsheet of just a few shows to catch while touring the art walk, which once again starts roughly at 6 p.m. and

ends at 9 p.m. Admission, of course, is free.

Lee Kelly lecture: Lee Kelly, one of the finest Northwest sculptors and a 1959 graduate of PNCA, will deliver the college's 2009 Homecoming Lecture at 6 p.m. Friday at the college's Swigert Commons. Bruce Guenther, the Portland Art Museum's chief curator, will be interviewing Kelly at the free event. (1241 N.W. Johnson St.)

► summer guide

VISUAL ARTS

By D.K. Row
THE OREGONIAN

One of the joys of the art world is that it eludes seasons — shows and events are always ongoing, year-round.

However, the summer does coincide with the onset of some fabulous shows and events that will take us through the early fall, experiences that range from the history of the state's flagship art school to the fringes of the international avant-garde.

Lee Kelly
June 4-27

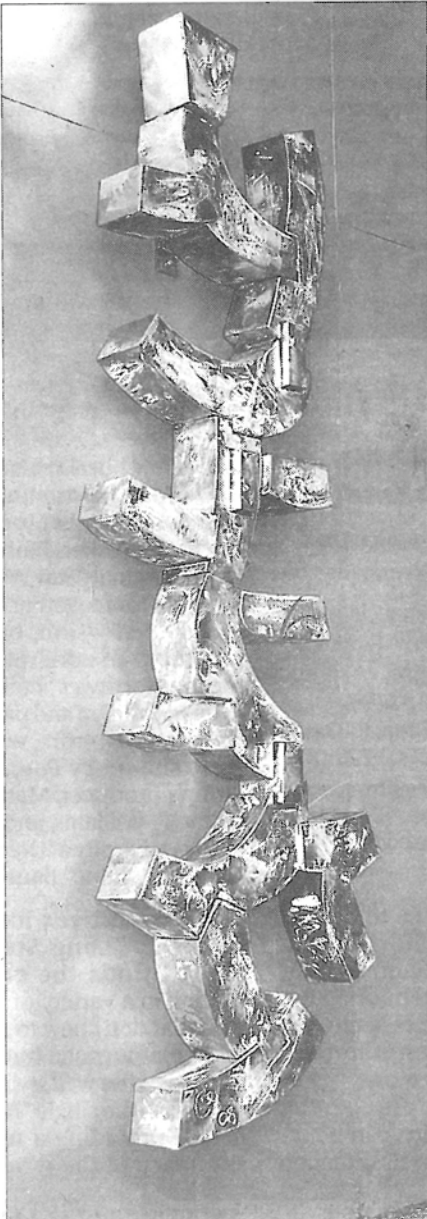
One of the Northwest's greatest sculptors, Kelly emerged during the 1950s and '60s as a classic modernist. But like all enduring figures, he's continued to expand and change and experiment. This is a restless figure. Kelly continues his extraordinary career with his latest show at his longtime dealer, Elizabeth Leach Gallery. Hopefully, Bruce Guenther, the Portland Art Museum's chief

Please see **PAGE 15**

Continued from Page 14

curator, will one day complete his longtime project of a book on Kelly's life and career.

Elizabeth Leach Gallery, 417 N.W. Ninth Ave.; 503-224-0521, www.elizabethleach.com



Lee Kelly
sculpture

The Oregonian

THURSDAY, JUNE 4, 2009

EDITOR: JOAN CARLIN • 503-294-7612
HOWWELIVE@NEWS.OREGONIAN.COM

Let First Thursday summer lunacy start

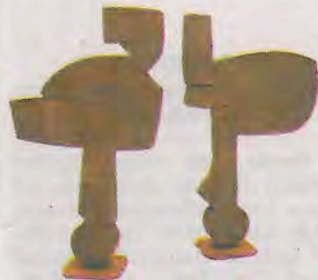
Yes, warmer weather will bring out the hordes, but good shows await those who press on

By D.K. ROW
THE OREGONIAN

Summer doesn't officially start until late June, but the intense glow of the past week or so suggests that it's arrived early.

Maybe it's an anomaly, but let's assume the days of rays are here, which means First Thursday will get maddeningly crowded as throngs of people emerge from months of darkness to descend on galleries downtown and in the Pearl District. If the glorious weather continues through tonight, expect nutty swarms of beautiful people.

Here's a tip sheet of several not-to-miss shows. Most galleries should be open from 6 to 9 p.m.



ELIZABETH LEACH GALLERY

Lee Kelly's "Horseman II and Horseman I" will be on display at the Elizabeth Leach Gallery.

Elizabeth Leach Gallery: Two fantastic solo shows debut at this Portland cornerstone. Bay Area abstractionist Gustavo Ramos Rivera presents new paintings and works on paper. Meanwhile, the great modernist Lee Kelly continues his prolific and inquisitive ways in the winter of his career. The Portland artist shows steel sculptures and works on paper influenced by his many tours of India. (417 N.W. Ninth Ave.)

Seattle Sculptor Praises Lee Kelly's Work Involving Use Of Bumpers, Guards

Jack C. Fletcher of Bellevue, Wash., is a well-known sculptor and has been president the past three years of the Washington chapter of the Northwest Institute of Sculptors. He was in the Portland area last weekend in connection with a Northwest invitational sculpture show to be held at the Seattle Art Museum Pavilion. Kelly is among 10 Oregon sculptors who will be invited to participate in the show. Kelly's one-man Portland show opens this Sunday in the new downtown Image Gallery, 816 S.W. 10th, with a 5 to 10:30 p.m. preview.

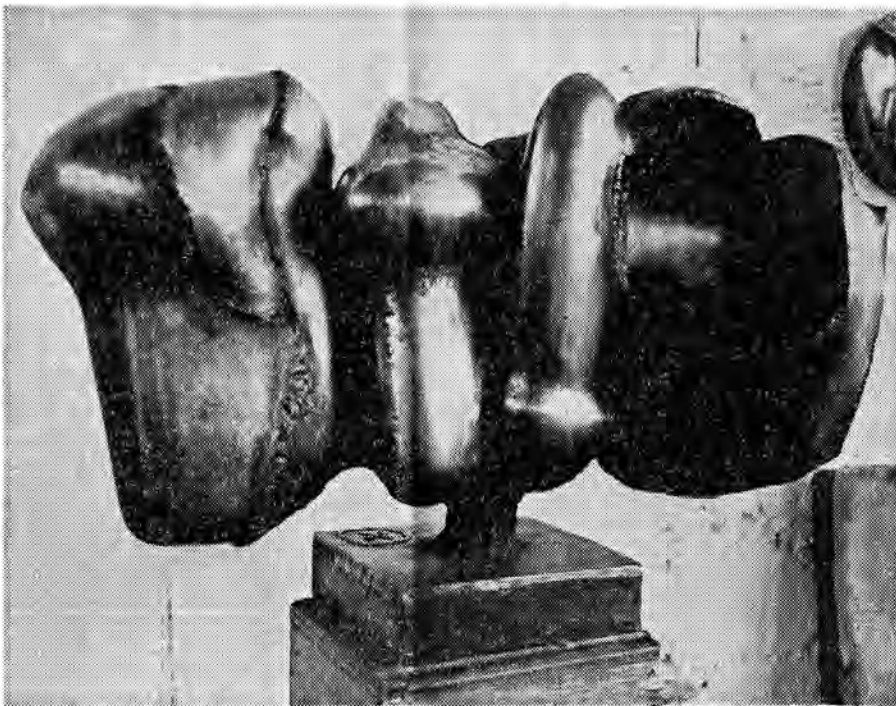
By JACK FLETCHER

A one-man show in sculpture represents so much more than a casual gallery visit allows that the responsibility of appraisal is truly not an experience I would seek.

However upon my first visit to Lee Kelly's home on Sunday last I was asked by The Oregonian's art editor, Beth Fagan—or trapped, which I shall never know, into contributing a sculptor's view of a fellow sculptor's work. Specifically the new work that Lee Kelly has been developing since his show at the Contemporary Crafts Gallery several years ago.

Two years to those outside of sculpture might seem generous in time for staging a show, but please believe me very few of you would appreciate the experience.

The act of mental concep-



LEE KELLY sculpture of steel worked with bumper and bumper guard chromed steel, to be included in his one-man show

opening this Sunday with a 5 to 10:30 p.m. preview at the new downtown location of the Image Gallery, 816 S. W. 10th Ave.

tion is beautiful and joyous, but to be presented, many, many hours of hard work must follow as one works the material selected to represent the mental image.

Here then I sit in Kelly's magnificent huge barn — his studio situated on a gradual slope running from their home down to a melodic brook at the back of the property.

The building is in the open. The light is fabulous. The view in all directions is pastoral and serene, I can even hear the water sounds. Pleasant? Believe me it is.

As if that weren't stimulating enough there are assembled in several groups throughout the studio the many pieces ready for Lee's one man show which opens

the fine new downtown Portland Image Gallery of Jack and Barbara McLarty.

If Kelly is fortunate to have this opportunity, the gallery is even more fortunate to have Kelly, for this promises to be a great show, and a fine fifth anniversary for the gallery.

In the exhibit perhaps eight of the pieces are advanced assemblages where

auto bumpers and bumper guards have been used. Material that we are all somewhat familiar with, but Kelly takes Detroit's chromed steel and with sympathy but resolution elevates it to the highest level I have yet experienced its use in sculpture.

It would be difficult at just one visit to recommend a favorite. These are strong mature designs with surfaces of strong expressive form moved beautifully by exciting juxtaposed shapes, and deftly at times embracing space or probing it.

'Poetry Offered

These are perhaps more solid in volume of mass than that which we remember of his past work. Work that has always been lyrically moving up and out, at times boldly, at times gently, at times both.

If poetry is the stuff of life then Kelly is offering the stuff of poetry.

In addition to the great pieces of mild steel and bumpers he also has a number of pieces in ceramics, another new direction of search, and again there are some fine strong pieces perhaps based on a primary exploration of color, continuing that vital life search that good art reflects.

However here I had better leave something for Beth to cover so will close by asking you all to see this truly important exhibition by one of the most exciting of West Coast sculptors.



Art for the masses: Habitues of the First Thursday gallery crawl jam the Elizabeth Leach Gallery in downtown Portland.

ART &



Business and art come together every month with the First Thursday gallery walk. What the buyers and browsers don't see is the tension and anticipation that goes into each show.



Written by Peter Korn

Photographed by Ross Hamilton

In the downstairs bedroom of Elizabeth Leach's West Hills home, a scrapbook of water color paintings lies hidden from view. Even Leach, the amateur artist, rarely steals a peek at her work. Leach is a gallery director, and this is a part of her that stays out of sight.

On a sprawling dairy farm outside Oregon City, Lee Kelly similarly surveys the part of his life that remains unseen. Kelly is an artist, a sculptor, and he realizes, as does Leach, that appearances are fundamental to the selling of art. Customers buy not only what they see, but what they feel, and what they feel can be affected by the image they connect to the artist or gallery director. So Kelly conceals the torches and winches and indelicate hammerings that are part of his process, and Leach keeps her own artistic renderings private. And when Kelly's new work is unveiled Thursday night at the Elizabeth Leach Gallery in downtown Portland, the image, thanks to a little touch of illusion, will survive intact.

The First Thursday of every month Portland art galleries put on their best faces. Together, these galleries coordinate an evening-long open house, ostensibly to advance the idea of art. But even for an established artist such as Kelly, and an established gallery owner such as Leach, the evening is framed by financial concerns and expectations.

SUNDAY

On a false spring afternoon in late January, Bonnie Bronson is digging out a garden, "winter planting" she calls it, though the crop in time will contain as much steel sculpture as plant life.

ANXIETY

"I suppose deep down I would like to be accepted and loved and have a national reputation. . . . I would like to peddle one of these damn things. This is my sole source of income."



Meanwhile, Lee Kelly, about 50 yards away, wrestles with the physics of moving eight unwieldy metal objects from the sculpture garden he has created in back of the couple's farmhouse. The freestanding pieces weigh up to 150 pounds and reach 10 feet high. Tomorrow they will stand on their own, away from the sanctuary of the farmhouse, exposed to new elements — bright gallery lights and the gaze of the public. Like a father holding on to his growing children, Kelly has forestalled the day his progeny strike out on their own. And like a good father, he will feel their fates as his own. Today he must help them move away, and Lee Kelly hates it. Bronson, his wife and an artist as well, keeps her distance in the garden.

After an hour Kelly calls Bronson over. Their yellow boom truck, with "Leland Iron Works" painted on the driver's side door, is in place. Bronson takes her familiar position beside the truck, operating controls that send the 200-foot boom to where Lee stands atop a ladder, ready to attach the overhead hook to the artworks he has wrapped in blankets. Slowly the two-ton hydraulic crane lifts the masses of metal onto the flatbed. A bit of red paint is scraped off one of the sculptures, but Kelly registers no concern. Today his sensibilities are those of an engineer; the artist has taken a day off.

Kelly abhors the moving process. Installing a work becomes a much more painful process than creating it. He speaks of the danger involved in transporting large sculpture, recalling another artist's piece that killed a man and maimed another during a move in Wisconsin. He is forced to carry a \$1 million liability insurance policy. Yet Kelly knows his fear of injury, and his abhorrence of the moving process, is only a superficial mask for a deeper anxiety. Kelly sculpts because he must, not because he is motivated by applause or a need to make a living. He says he would sculpt even if nobody

viewed or paid for his work, and that is true. But also true is the vulnerability beginning to bubble up through that facade, like ugly chemicals boiling through a freshwater spring.

So Kelly spends this afternoon focusing his energies on the task at hand, moving steel objects the size of small logs with the delicacy of fine china. And he tries to convince himself that his distaste for the task involves a myriad of concerns and not simply the growing apprehension that something more than his work is moving away from this tranquil garden today.

At 15, Elizabeth Leach's life was turned around by a high school humanities teacher who showed her how to combine her two consuming interests — history and aesthetics. At the same time, Leach's mother lay dying of cancer. Fueled by a need to escape the despair of home life, Leach channeled her energy into the beckoning world of art collection. She would forever be a few years ahead of schedule.

At 20, Lee Kelly found himself in Korea, drawing individualized maps of the Korean countryside to help guide downed pilots back to friendly lines. Three years later he was wondering if such a map might exist for a struggling artist, with a route leading to a safe haven where he could paint and sculpt without having to work as a draftsman or teacher. It took 25 years before Kelly could make a living from selling his art. Today, he is one of an estimated 25 to 50 local artists who can do so.

But even he scrapes by. Now 56, Kelly's income is much more fragile than his metal artworks. In 1986 he received substantial publicity for winning a competitive commission for a mammoth sculpture at the Cornell Oaks Corporate Center entrance on Sunset Highway. Kelly bid the project at \$100,000. After subtracting his gallery's take, materials and transportation costs, Kelly was left with \$10,000 for his and Bronson's labor. Together they had spent over three months on the work. Later,

Kelly learned the developers had budgeted \$140,000 for the project. In his anxiety to gain the commission, Kelly had underbid.

Today Kelly downplays the stakes surrounding the opening. He is most concerned with the results of his collaboration with Michael Stirling, his son-in-law. Stirling has composed sounds to accompany many of the sculptures. Each sculpture will act as a speaker for one element of Stirling's taped score. Kelly hopes Michael's idea is well-received and claims not to care if his work is sold. "I'm more interested in just having people see it," he says.

"I suppose deep down I would like to be accepted and loved and have a national reputation and all these things, but I don't think it's possible living here."

Then, with a sly grin, he admits, "I would like to peddle one of these damn things. This is my sole source of income."

For Kelly, a new show, an opening, bears resemblance to the mountain treks in Nepal that are his source of inspiration. The opening represents a challenge, often a painful one for a man who keeps himself so hidden from the world. In Nepal Kelly can feel hidden on a cliffside far removed from the world. But when he begins to climb, he recognizes that he is offering himself to the mountain, completely exposed and vulnerable halfway up a wall. In Oregon it is no different. Hidden away on his Oregon City farm, impishly concealing his motivations behind reluctant conversation, the real Lee Kelly is about to be put on display.

MONDAY

At 9 a.m. Elisabeth Longo, the gallery's installer, is working alone. Which is just as well. Lee Kelly is scheduled to arrive in an hour. Longo intends to have Kelly greeted by bare walls, which means taking down the work from last month's show.

Longo removes two Stephen Yates paintings and carries one in each hand to storage racks in

the rear of the gallery. John White is next, unsold. These works were displayed for four weeks and now it is somebody else's turn.

Longo delicately clutches against her own chest a Phyllis Yes life-size ceramic of a woman's upper torso and carries the work to the rear, a dying lover being sent to her resting place. Last to come down is a group of gray mat board letters announcing, "Figurative Group Show."

Longo explains that by emptying the gallery space before Kelly arrives, she will allow the artist to better visualize his work here. It will seem his space this way. Kelly also will be spared having to view the ignominious fate of work that didn't sell: Only one piece from last month's "Figurative Group Show" sold.

As Kelly pulls his truck in front of the gallery, Longo finishes spackling the old nail holes and spot paints over the pencil markings she had used to align the works just removed. No trace remains of the old show.

Kelly arrives with Ron Theod, a rock climbing friend who often provides muscle and mechanical help. Elizabeth Leach has arrived, and she and Kelly confer on placement of the sculptures. The pieces, intended to be displayed in a natural environment, take on a different look inside the gallery. Their colors are meant to play off the green of the outdoors, but here they are set against stark white walls. "But what are you going to do about it?" Kelly asks.

Elizabeth Leach doesn't have to wear her hair in a bun any longer. And it has been years since she wore her mother-in-law's clothes to openings in an attempt to look older and more established. Her wide eyes and blunt manner rarely draw frowns from the art crowd anymore. But it wasn't always so.

Coming to Portland 10 years ago from Los Angeles, Leach opened the gallery on a shoestring and a mother-in-law's subsidy. She was 23 then, full of ideas and brashness and shock at

the passivity of the Portland gallery scene. Only one or two local galleries actively pushed and "sold art," as opposed to the traditional and more stately concept of "placing art."

At first, Leach found greatest acceptance among local artists hungering for another outlet for their work and a gallery owner who would twist an arm to sell it, if that's what was needed. The city's provincialism kept many doors closed to her.

Leach worked 18-hour days then, doing everything from bookkeeping to heavy physical work around the gallery. She put what she believed to be great art on the wall, art new to Portland. And now she wonders if it all cost her a first marriage. "You come out of this opening," Leach recalls, "and everybody is going on and on and saying, 'Yeah, yeah, yeah.' And nobody buys, and you need \$100 to pay your bills the next day, and you've forked out all this money for this lovely party. You cry, you kick this building and say you're going to stop. Then you go a little further, keep going, you're going to make it."

Leach has achieved success, by gallery standards here. The world of art maintains its own financial frame of reference. Leach knows she needs \$15,000 to \$20,000 of sales each month to pay off the list of 34 expenses. The gallery splits all sales with artists on a standard 50/50 basis. Kelly, like many artists, begrudges the commission, but also knows he is not one of those artists who possess the business sense and energy to market their own work. Moreover, he has only himself to rely upon. Leach, on the other hand, has to promote the 25 artists she represents. And at the end of each year, after the bills have been paid, she has only \$20,000 to \$40,000 to call profit or salary. "The art is a good investment, not the business," she concedes.

When Leach opened, there were fewer than 10 galleries in town; now there are more than 30. None do substantially better than Leach, many won't stay in



business. William Jamison, owner of Jamison-Thomas in downtown Portland, admits his financial situation would improve if he gave up the gallery and took a salaried position as a museum curator. Kelly knows the feeling: While he scrambles to earn an inconsistent living, he's paying \$15 an hour to an assistant who helps him construct his works.

But Leach and Jamison aren't running galleries as investments. Their motivations may be as varied as their backgrounds, but within each gallery owner is a desire to contribute to and be a part of art. Selling art is a difficult way of achieving that, but it's an essential activity.

Northwest art purchasers reflect the area's overall values — conservative. Landscapes still make up a huge percentage of sales. Elizabeth Leach and colleagues seek to bridge the gap between clients who want landscapes and the work of artists such as Lee Kelly, who, while not as "approachable," are more innovative. Leach believes the

sophistication of local art purchasers is increasing. It's all part of an ongoing gallery-patron game.

The buyers in the game may know what they like. But the art of selling art means going a step farther: It means giving the buyers what they don't know they want. It also means understanding that art is a process of evolution. Kelly could no better feed the public what they've seen from him before than he could market reproductions of the landscape oils he so admired as a youth growing up in Idaho. Kelly is forever on a creative journey, following a course that remains a mystery even to him, until he can look back at a finished work and see the path he has traveled. The uncertainty of where it leads next is what drives Kelly to continue.

For this First Thursday show, Kelly will unveil a new series. This is a movement away from the shining stainless steel curves and bends for which he has become known, using instead more varied shapes and colors

and Michael Stirling's sound installation. The opening is three days away, but already Leach wonders if her optimistic evaluation of the Portland scene will prove accurate. "His sculpture is always ahead of his audience," she says. "That's a problem in selling, that they're more challenging. People finally get used to the old idea, and they're ready to see it and all of a sudden here is something new and different and completely exciting. And I think the level of collection has finally reached the point where people are going to move on these pieces."

TUESDAY

There can be no mistaking that this space belongs to Lee Kelly. Near the front door two huge sentinels — "Two Columns," as Kelly calls them — form a 10-foot-high archway of imposing size and girth. The weathered burnt-orange corten steel against the stark white walls confronts every viewer stepping into the gallery.

Inside and to the right four smaller columns, all of a piece, show off varied shapes and painted designs on their metal trunks. Atop these columns rest four different semi-abstract heads, four different personalities.

The eye is led to "House Of The Count," inspired by a Mayan ruin, radically different than the rest of the work here — squatter, with complex projections and space broken up with splashes of red, blue, yellow and green. Colors this vivid have not been seen in Kelly's work for decades.

By 10 a.m. Kelly and his assistant arrive. The two men spend the morning bolting down the work, drilling holes in the gallery's wood floor.

Kelly brings in four, small wooden maquettes, miniatures of some of the larger works on display, and sets them on pedestals around the gallery. Increasingly pessimistic as the opening nears, he remarks that the maquettes, priced at \$2,200, are the only works here with a chance of selling. "House Of the Count" has an

The chemistry between Elizabeth Leach and Lee Kelly clicks, smoothing the difficult art-to-commerce connection.

\$8,000 tag. "Two Columns" goes for two thousand less.

Kelly notices The Count, as he calls it, has been altered in the moving process. Two elements that used to touch are now separated by a slight gap. Looking hard at the piece he pronounces, "I like it."

Somewhere between his farm and the gallery Kelly lost his nonchalant attitude. "Maybe I was trying to protect myself, saying it doesn't really matter," he says.

At moments during the morning Kelly appears tired, almost haggard. His shoulders hunch,

the dance in his eyes, so evident when he laughs, is absent. During the drive to the gallery Kelly heard a radio report of possible snow Thursday. He considers the opening and all the hands he will shake and conversations in which he will be forced to participate. He says that after 15 minutes the faces and his responses will all seem the same.

WEDNESDAY

Kelly arrives early. He plugs in a power grinder and begins scraping paint away near the base of The Count. The opening is one day away, and still he has not let go of his sculptures.

"This thing has been bugging me because it's kind of dull," he says, creating shiny silver splashes where the color is removed. "Of course, there's no going back. I didn't bring any paint."

Kelly has kept a cap on his nervous energy, and now that energy is being released the only way Kelly knows how — by using his hands. Finishing his work, he says with a smile, "I probably shouldn't have done that."

As long as Kelly owns a piece, it is never in a finished state. The concept of art as a static, perfected statement is foreign to a man who sees life as a continual journey. He reveals that parts of "Four Columns" came from a large sculpture he completed and never sold. Even after a piece is sold, Kelly cannot completely divorce himself from it. Once, Kelly observed a sculpture he had finished and sold long ago displayed at somebody's home, and in the reunion discovered that he disliked the work. "For a painter or sculptor it's possible to buy it back and destroy it," Kelly says. Ironically, the cost of his own work made that impossible, so Kelly traded a new work for the old and completed the cycle of life and death.

Kelly relaxes. He has found some sort of peace with the process today. While he and Elizabeth Longo fiddle with the gallery's track lighting, Elizabeth Leach picks up the mantle of intensity. The weather has worsened.

But work proceeds. Marjorie Hirsch, Leach's assistant director, continues her relentless pace of sales calls and contacts with clients who have shown interest in Kelly's work before. Hirsch estimates only about 25 people in Portland will spend \$8,000 for a piece of artwork. Gallery staffs know those 25. Thursday night Hirsch will be primed. "I need to make sure I don't miss people," she says. "I need to be on. I need to be aware who's coming through the door."

12 Northwest Magazine



In the afternoon Michael Stirling begins installing the sound tracks that will emanate from inside the sculptures. Kelly's smile transforms into a joyful grin as the first sounds begin punctuating the gallery space. A constant drone, which Stirling produced using an Indian instrument called a tambura, fills the gallery, and what Kelly refers to as the "punch" sound moans deep from within the sculpture titled "Shakuhachi." The punch, produced by a Japanese bamboo flute, sounds like the anguished wail of a wounded animal. Occasional visitors arrive at the gallery through the afternoon and join Kelly in his mirth. The synergy between sculpture and sound, between his son-in-law's work and his own, represents a new challenge, the stuff for which Lee Kelly lives.

THURSDAY

Wednesday night it snowed. Then the temperature dropped. Elizabeth Leach begins calling the other gallery directors even before she leaves for work. A decision is made to move all openings back a week; First Thursday will be held the second Thursday of the month.

THE OPENING

Elizabeth Leach is battling a sense of anticlimax, finding it hard to "get stoked," her usual state on the day of an opening. Leach is tired, having unofficially opened last week and dealt with customers over the weekend. But there is reward for exhaustion. Saturday, the man who bought the maquette called

back to say "Two Columns" is too large for the space he envisioned. Instead, he has agreed to commission Kelly to produce a one-column sculpture. The price will be worked out between the buyer and Kelly as they plan the work, but will range between \$6,000 and \$10,000. The commission represents a major sale for Kelly and the gallery.

The lack of tension in the gallery today is due to a skewed sequence of events. The gallery normally works on a tight schedule, which was followed last week. The frenzied act of installing does more than prepare the gallery for First Thursday, it prepares the staff as well. Today, there is little to do but go about normal gallery tasks and wait to see how many people learned of the week's delay.

Occasional visitors punctuate the quiet afternoon — a few strolling couples, a college art class. No serious buyers. A painter from Longview, Wash., walks in to deliver a packet of slides, hoping for a connection. She drops off her envelope and departs immediately. She will probably deliver an identical packet to each gallery this afternoon. The Leach gallery receives such a query nearly every day from artists hoping for the gallery affiliation, to attain a status even approaching that of Lee Kelly. At the end of the month Elizabeth Leach will set aside an afternoon to look through the slides. The odds of acceptance are slight. Maybe two blind applicants will end up with art on display in the gallery this year.

Leach leaves late in the afternoon for a swim she hopes will revitalize her. By 6 p.m. everybody is back in place. Ken Cipparoni, the bartender, has set up

Behind the glitz of opening night: fragile egos, financial concerns and artistic integrity.

his cases of ale and wine behind the front desk. Leach and Marjorie Hirsch have discussed who might be coming and how they should be approached, who to prod, who to leave alone. First Thursday, intended to bring newcomers in to view art, presents an inherent conflict. Art must be sold, but nobody should feel uncomfortable just browsing.

At 6:30 p.m. Kelly walks in like a wary animal avoiding a trap, slipping in a semicircle toward the rear. His face reveals an emotion somewhere between dread and discomfort. It might as well be Kelly on one of the display pedestals rather than a maquette.

By 7 p.m. Kelly has followed the more sociable lead of Bronson and is enjoying himself. A great percentage of people who have come are his friends, for which he is grateful. There can be no mistaking the effect the art is having on visitors. Michael Stirling's music has turned this from an opening to an event. The resonance from "Two Columns" hits people the moment they walk in the door, destroying preformed expectations completely. Even Cipparoni, the bartender, notices how different this crowd is acting compared to the other openings he has worked. Normally, he says, First Thursday guests move from piece to piece before making their way out the

door to the next gallery. Tonight, people are standing around, absorbing the unfamiliar atmosphere of Far Eastern sounds working with imposing pieces of art. Some have practically moved in for the night.

The growing crowd serves to disperse the music, making it harder to find the sources of sound. People can be seen putting their ears between "Two Columns," which vibrate with synthesized tones. A child is sprawled out on the floor beneath "Shakuhachi," reading a book, while nearby a mother meditates in lotus position with an infant in her arms. The piercing "Shakuhachi" howl occurs only every 30 minutes, part of the overall sequence of sounds. Early in the evening, when "Shakuhachi" gives off its first blast, the room nearly falls silent as people turn their heads in wonder. A childlike sense of new discovery washes over many of the faces.

At 9 p.m. Kelly's grandchild rushes into the pedestal supporting a maquette, knocking "Palenque" to the floor. Gasps emanate from the nearby crowd as Kelly walks up and puts the artwork back in place, unable to hide the fact that it has a new tilt to it. Kelly says he will be able to glue the work back together.

By 9:30 p.m. the gallery has begun to empty. Still, the last groups appear reluctant to finally leave. They hover near the front door as if waiting for someone to force them out. One last wail from "Shakuhachi" and Stirling turns off the sound system. The last guests exit.

Elizabeth Leach remains behind to lock up. Her features are waging a battle between joy and exhaustion. Pausing, her eyes scan the empty gallery, her gallery. Satisfied and composed, she sets the burglar alarm and then rushes out the door to join a small group next door at Crepe Faire, in gear once again. She sits to Kelly's left, Bronson to Kelly's right. The group laughs and drinks wine, and people finally allow themselves to relax, gossip, celebrate a success. Leach, Hirsch and Kelly take time to make an unofficial tally. No hard sales were made tonight, but four people have asked for appointments with Kelly at his home, to view some of the statues in his garden and talk about possible purchases. Somebody gets up to play the piano in a corner of the room. A toast is made. A gleam returns to Kelly's eyes; an almost devilish smile crosses his lips for the journey just completed. **NW**

PETER KORN is a Portland freelance writer. ROSS HAMILTON is Northwest Magazine's staff photographer.

mt. angel college
mt. angel, oregon
proudly presents

NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
MT. ANGEL, ORE.
Permit No. 29

RECENT WORK

LEE KELLY

NOV. 24 to DEC. 29

1963

