

T H E   B O S T O N   P A N E L S

E L L S W O R T H   K E L L Y

J O H N   J O S E P H   M O A K L E Y

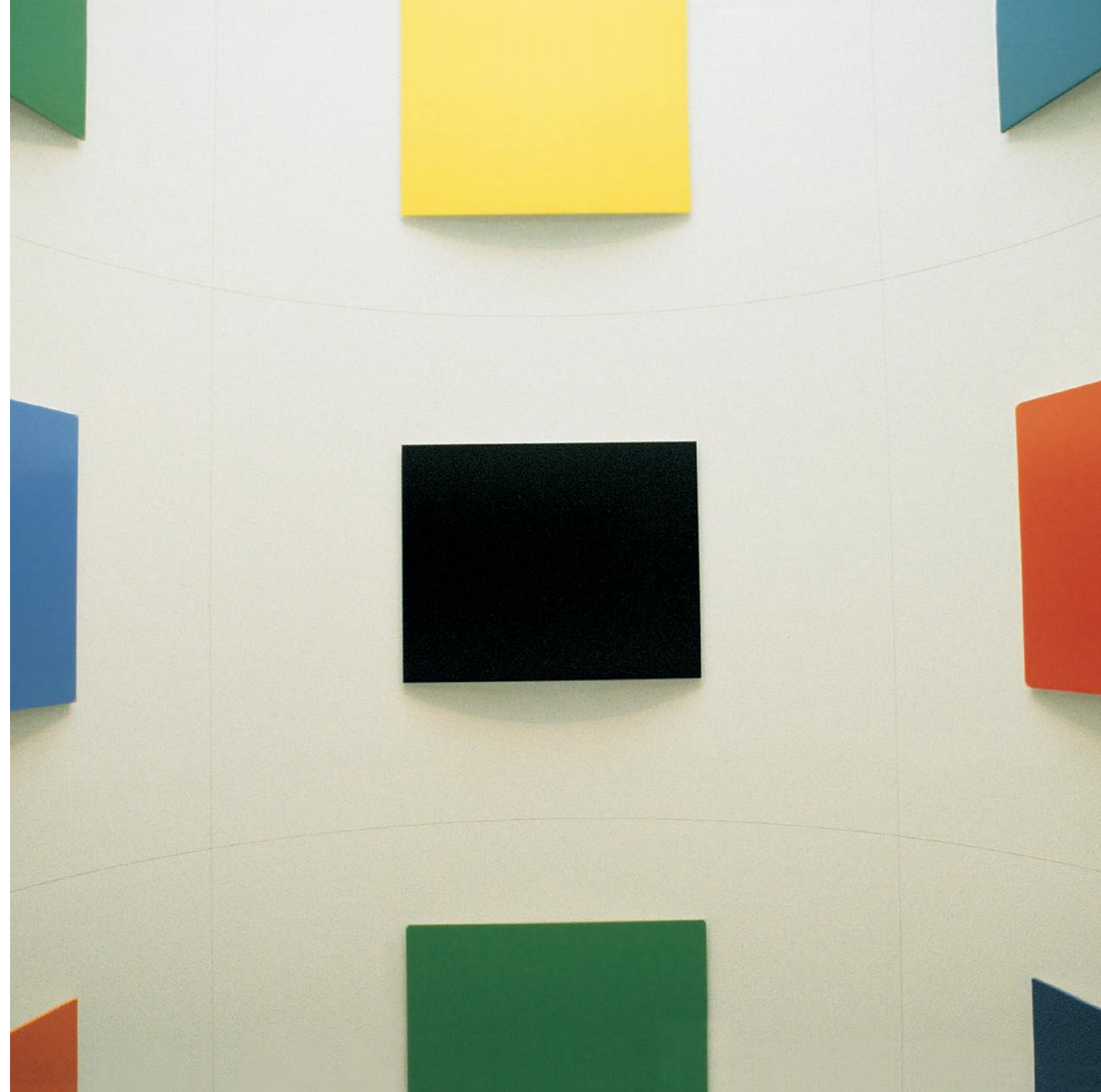
U N I T E D   S T A T E S   C O U R T H O U S E

LOCATED ON A MAGNIFICENT WATERFRONT SITE ON FAN PIER, THE JOHN JOSEPH MOAKLEY UNITED STATES COURTHOUSE, DESIGNED BY HENRY N. COBB OF PEI COBB FREED & PARTNERS, OVERLOOKS BOSTON'S HARBOR AND DOWNTOWN SKYLINE. THE COURTHOUSE SERVES AS HEADQUARTERS FOR THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE FIRST CIRCUIT AND THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF MASSACHUSETTS.

AS PART OF THE COURTHOUSE PROJECT, THE U.S. GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION'S ART IN ARCHITECTURE PROGRAM COMMISSIONED ELLSWORTH KELLY TO CREATE **THE BOSTON PANELS** (1998). CONCEIVED SPECIFICALLY TO ENGAGE WITH COBB'S ARCHITECTURE, KELLY'S VIBRANTLY COLORED PANELS ACT AS CHROMATIC BEACONS, WHICH DRAW VISITORS THROUGH A SERIES OF DRAMATIC ARCHITECTURAL VISTAS. THE ARTWORK'S SPARE AND ORDERED GEOMETRY SERVES AS A FOIL TO THE MORE COMPLICATED FORMS OF THE BOSTON SKYLINE, VISIBLE THROUGH THE COURTHOUSE'S SPECTACULAR GLASS CURTAIN WALL. ART HAS ALWAYS BEEN AN IMPORTANT FEATURE OF GREAT CIVIC ARCHITECTURE, AND KELLY'S COURTHOUSE INSTALLATION EXPANDS THIS TRADITION.

AFTER SEEING THE CONCEPT MODEL FOR **THE BOSTON PANELS** IN KELLY'S STUDIO, GARRY GARRELS, THEN CURATOR OF PAINTING AT THE SAN FRANCISCO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, WROTE TO THE ARTIST, "MY FAITH FELT AFFIRMED THAT GREAT ART CAN YET BE MADE FOR A PUBLIC BUILDING, AND ON OCCASION THE CONFLUENCE OF PERSONALITIES, FORESIGHT, AND SENSIBILITIES CAN YIELD IMPORTANT COMMISSIONS FOR OUR OWN CULTURE, OUR OWN TIMES."

SHOWN AT RIGHT:  
VIEW OF ROTUNDA  
PANELS



**ELLSWORTH KELLY** is one of America's most respected artists. His prodigious outpouring of work includes painting, drawing, sculpture, collage, and printmaking. He is best known for his skilled orchestration of color and form, and is celebrated for his large-scale, monochromatic, shaped canvases.

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

Today, Kelly's art is exhibited in the permanent collections of major museums around the world, and he has completed many important public commissions. These include a 1957 polychromed metal frieze for the now-demolished Philadelphia Transportation Building (given to New York's Museum of Modern Art in 1999), a mural for the Paris headquarters of UNESCO in 1969, *Totem* for the city of Barcelona in 1978, *Houston Triptych* in 1982 for the city's Museum of Fine Arts, *Memorial* in 1993 for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, and a 2000 installation for the new offices of the German parliament in Berlin. A major retrospective exhibition of Kelly's extraordinary body of work was mounted in 1996 by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York City, and traveled to the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, the Tate Gallery in London, and the

SHOWN AT RIGHT:  
THIRD FLOOR VIEW  
TOWARD ROTUNDA





Haus der Kunst in Munich. Amid a distinguished career spanning more than fifty years, *The Boston Panels* stands out as one of Kelly's most ambitious projects.

Highly refined and carefully balanced color, form, and scale are the constituents of Kelly's art. His esteem for the early twentieth-century Modernists is evident in his dedication to abstraction, geometric organization, and the incorporation of randomly determined compositions in his work. Kelly also draws from a broad range of pre-modern and non-Western artistic models. These include the unity of art and architecture he admired in Romanesque and Gothic cathedrals while in France, and his fascination with ancient Chinese and Native American ritual objects.

Like these sacred monuments and relics of the remote past, Kelly's panels create visual euphoria independent of association with the artist's identity. His use of multiple, monochromatic panels has been likened to the anonymous work of a mason, an especially meaningful comparison for this work in a building where the expert laying of countless, handcrafted bricks was so essential.

Kelly's brilliantly colored aluminum panels also suggest monumentalized *tesserae* (small pieces of colored glass and polished stone) that form the famous mosaics he saw during visits to Pompeii and Ravenna, Italy. But unlike those mosaics, which portray wondrous saints and emperors or flora and fauna, Kelly's work does not depict anything. Instead, his work isolates and distills fragments of visual experience. Although much of Kelly's painting and sculpture first derived from his sketches and collages of observed forms (like shadow patterns on a staircase, a row of shop awnings, or a sliver of hillside), these sources are purposefully obscured. The results are intense concentrations of color and form, which cultivate a heightened awareness of the visual environment. Of his work in general, Kelly has stated, "In a sense, what I've tried to capture is the reality of flux, to keep art an open, incomplete situation, to get at the rapture of seeing."<sup>1</sup> Thus,

Kelly's bold colors are not meant to be symbolic, but rather are intended to provoke an emotional, and even spiritual, response from viewers.

SHOWN AT LEFT:  
THIRD FLOOR WEST  
GALLERY PANELS

Architectural engagement is another critical aspect of *The Boston Panels*. With color and form united as a single element—the monochrome panel—Kelly uses the courthouse walls as inseparable elements of his composition. From the earliest years of his career, Kelly has pursued a fundamental inquiry into the relationship between painting and architecture. In a 1951 grant proposal, Kelly described his wish “to create a book which will be an alphabet of plastic elements, aiming to establish a new scale of painting, a closer contact between the artist and the wall, providing a way for painting to accompany modern architecture.”<sup>2</sup> The book project (initially titled *Line, Form and Color*) was not realized until decades later, but Kelly’s copious production of collages and drawings became his personal lexicon of forms to generate ideas for new paintings and sculptures.

Kelly’s ability to extract fresh ideas from these collages and drawings over the entire course of his career is testament to the remarkable fecundity of his earliest experiments with nonfigurative form and color. For example, *The Boston Panels* harkens back to such early collages as *Eight Color Pairs* (1951) and the series *Nine Colors on White* (1953 and 1954). These and other paper collages were conceived as studies for architecturally scaled projects, as suggested in the *Line, Form and Color* proposal and Kelly’s other writings. The courthouse project in Boston allowed Kelly to realize these aspirations on a grand scale.

Although Kelly’s twenty-one panels are installed in seven distinct areas of the courthouse, they function as a single work of art. Henry N. Cobb, the building’s architect, has observed that it would be impossible now to imagine these spaces without Kelly’s artwork. This close integration of art and architecture creates not only a superb cultural landmark for the city and people of Boston, but also an appropriately dignified arena for the ongoing judicial life of the United States Courts.

<sup>1</sup>Holland Cotter, “A Giant of the New Surveys His Rich Past,” *New York Times*, October 13, 1996, p. 43. For a comprehensive survey of Kelly’s career, see *Ellsworth Kelly: A Retrospective*, edited by Diane Waldman, New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum; distributed by H.N. Abrams, ©1999.

<sup>2</sup>As reprinted in *Ellsworth Kelly, Line Form Color*, Harvard University Art Museums, 1999.

SHOWN AT RIGHT:  
ATRIUM VIEW OF  
WEST GALLERY PANELS



## THE ART IN ARCHITECTURE PROGRAM

GSA's Art in Architecture Program commissions American artists, working in close consultation with project design teams, to create artwork that is appropriate to the diverse uses and architectural vocabularies of new federal buildings. These permanent installations of contemporary art within the nation's important civic buildings afford unique opportunities for exploring the integration of art and architecture, and facilitate a meaningful cultural dialogue between the American people and their government.

The incorporation of major artworks into federal buildings reflects our country's strongly held belief in the worth of the individual and the value of creative expression. Such public statements of American culture are enduring contributions to the vibrancy of our democracy.

GSA's review and selection process for commissioning artists follows guidelines developed over the past four decades. The agency allocates one-half of one percent of the estimated construction cost of new or substantially renovated federal buildings for funding works of art. For each project, GSA relies upon a panel of experts—composed of the design architect, local and national art professionals, federal client and community representatives, and GSA staff—to assist in the commissioning process. This panel suggests appropriate media, reviews artists' portfolios, and recommends a small pool of finalists. GSA evaluates this group, and awards the commission to the strongest candidate, who develops a design concept. The panel and GSA review the artist's concept and, once approved, the artwork is fabricated and installed.

### MEMBERS OF THE PANEL

**STEPHEN G. BREYER**  
JUSTICE, U.S. SUPREME COURT

**HENRY N. COBB**  
ARCHITECT,  
PEI COBB FREED & PARTNERS

**JOHN P. CONNELLY**  
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

**JONATHAN FAIRBANKS**  
MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON

**GRAHAM GUND**  
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ART CONSULTANT

**THEODORE LANDSMARK**  
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**BRUCE ROSSLEY**  
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**SUZANNA SCHELL**  
FORT POINT ARTS COMMUNITY, INC.

**LINDA BALDING SHEARER**  
WILLIAMS COLLEGE MUSEUM OF ART

**JOHN TAYLOR WILLIAMS**  
ATTORNEY

**DOUGLAS P. WOODLOCK**  
JUDGE, U.S. DISTRICT COURT

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JACK SHEAR  
PHOTOGRAPH, PAGE 9, BY STEVE ROSENTHAL  
ESSAY BY WILLIAM CAINE  
DESIGN BY COX & ASSOCIATES, INC

SHOWN AT RIGHT:  
ELLSWORTH KELLY  
WITH ROTUNDA PANEL





U.S. GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION

PUBLIC BUILDINGS SERVICE

ART IN ARCHITECTURE PROGRAM