

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

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**Ellsworth Kelly: Diagonal  
Ellsworth Kelly: Drawings  
1954-1962**

*Matthew Marks Gallery, 526  
W. 22nd St. and 523 W. 24th St.  
Through April 11.*

The American abstractionist Ellsworth Kelly, who will turn 86 this May, is in top form and still going strong. These two shows—one of 24 small works on paper from the '50s and '60s; the other a two-venue installation of large, recent multiple-canvas, bas-relief paintings—reveal an artist who continues to create taut, crystalline compositions out of the most economical combinations of color and form.

The drawing show is a tour-de-force romp through Mr. Kelly's wide-ranging visual vocabulary. A master of proportion and scale, Mr. Kelly can get line to twist gracefully and muscularly. And his abstract geometric shapes, which suggest birds, trees, letter forms, clouds, figures and fluids, transform each of the gem-like rectangles into a unique universe.

In Mr. Kelly's recent two-panel relief paintings (all from 2007 and 2008), usually the top rectangle is mounted on the diagonal and extends beyond the edges of the bottom canvas, which is either black or white and mounted on the right angle. The reliefs can cause unease. Forms are forever off-balance, rocking or falling. They suggest the long, upended tilt of listing

ships, or the imminent threat of collapse. "White Diagonal" feels literally sliced in two. The Mediterranean-lit "Blue Diagonal" is classicism set adrift or teetering on the edge. "Red Diagonal" has the finality of a decapitation. Mr. Kelly's relief paintings build slowly. But his balancing acts are well worth their ultimate impact, which hits like a hammer blow to the chest.

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*Mr. Esplund writes about art for  
the Journal.*