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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
GOOD FORM

New paintings and old
drawings by the eighty-
five-year-old seraph of
abstraction, Ellsworth
Kelly, make for the finest
show in town, at three
spaces of the Matthew
Marks gallery. Kelly's
greatness has snuck up on
us, in plain sight, for more
than half a century. It's stark
now. The newest works pair
rectangular one-color
canvases, one mounted
diagonally across the
other. Others are arrays
of abutted vertical panels.
All reduce drawing to the
unframed edges of the
supports, dramatizing
colors that thrill like a
trumpet voluntary. Sailing
the walls, the paintings
impart a conviction of
strength in simplicity—or
"sweetness and might," as
Simon Schama once termed
Kelly's ruling qualities.
Drawings from the fifties
and sixties, done in New
York after Kelly's six eureka
years in Paris, abstract bits
of observed reality. They are
sheerly fresh. Most masters
of modern art look a mite
dated now. Not Kelly, who
has proven to be as up to
date as the Parthenon,
advancing a classical
balance, between eye and
mind, which alerts the body
and clarifies the soul.

—Peter Schjeldahl