

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

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## The New York Times

### Ellsworth Kelly's Studio, Just as He Left It



Jack Shear

Photographs by JACK SHEAR  
Interview by ALICIA DESANTIS MAY 5, 2017

*Jack Shear lived with Ellsworth Kelly for 32 years, in a house adjacent to the studio where Mr. Kelly worked, in Spencertown, N.Y. After Mr. Kelly's death in 2015, Mr. Shear preserved the studio intact, occasionally photographing the space, until Mr. Kelly's last canvases were removed [to be shown at the Matthew Marks Gallery](#) in New York. I spoke to Mr. Shear about the images he made and his time with the artist.*

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Mr. Shear left Mr. Kelly's studio untouched for more than a year. "I know there are stories written and movies about a room that someone never goes into, because someone has died and they want to leave it exactly the same way," he said. "I'm not sure whether it's a way of holding onto the person for as long as possible or a way to try to memorialize them in a particular way that they don't feel is possible any other way."

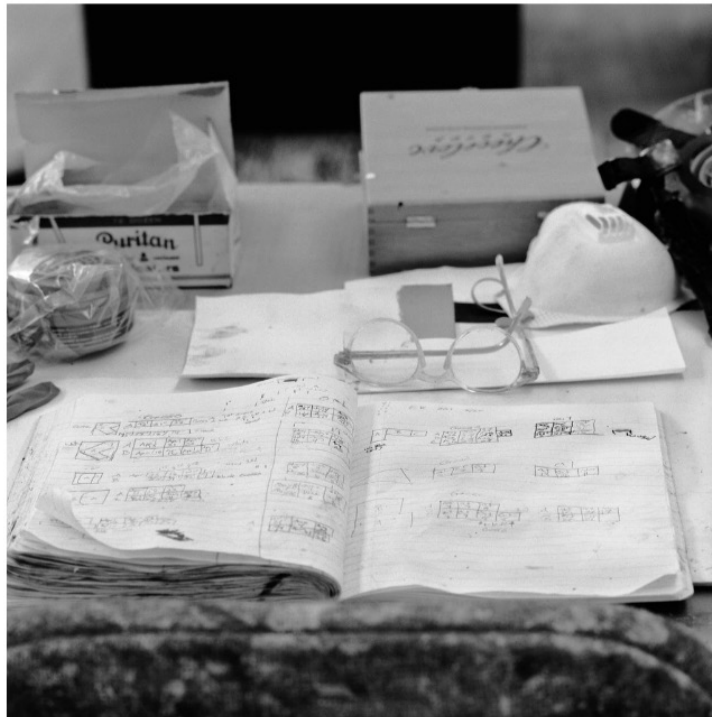
DeSantis, Alicia, and Jack Shear. "Ellsworth Kelly's Studio, Just as He Left It." *The New York Times*, May 5, 2017.



Jack Shear

“Somebody moved a pencil and I went by, and it was gone, and I yelled at everybody to find it and put it back,” Mr. Shear said.

Mr. Kelly took meticulous notes. He kept a book with thumbnail diagrams for each painting, marking the number of layers of gesso and paint that had been applied.



Jack Shear

“At the end, his studio became like where he was living,” Mr. Shear said. “He was not only painting, but he was actually living in the studio. I mean, Ellsworth considered Spencertown — and probably the studio in Spencertown — the center of the world, the center of the universe. This is where he finally, toward the end of his life, really wanted to be.”



Jack Shear

“Ellsworth would come to work in the morning, and if he was painting that particular day, he would actually change — literally strip down to his underwear,” Mr. Shear said. “This was basically his uniform. He would put on a paint shirt, he would put on old paint pants, and he had these Tyvek paper suits that he would wear.”



Jack Shear

Mr. Kelly also wore a hat in the studio. “I think that might be, since '84 — that might be the fourth hat,” Mr. Shear said. “His face would get splattered with paint, he was working really quickly.”

Mr. Kelly painted fast, working methodically from one side of the canvas to the other as the paint dried. “The thing you’ll notice, especially in the



Jack Shear

last probably five years, is that you see the brush strokes more. It's more difficult for him to be painting those large surfaces," Mr. Shear said. "But toward the end of his life he did embrace the texture — the brush stroke."



Jack Shear

I asked Mr. Shear why he chose to photograph the space in black and white.

"I think color belonged to Ellsworth," he said. "I mean, I can see the colors, I can feel the textures. And I think it's a remove from reality, in a way."



Jack Shear

In addition to skylights, Mr. Shear said, Mr. Kelly asked for a large, high window in the room: “Ellsworth said he wanted that big window there, that looks out onto pines.”



Jack Shear

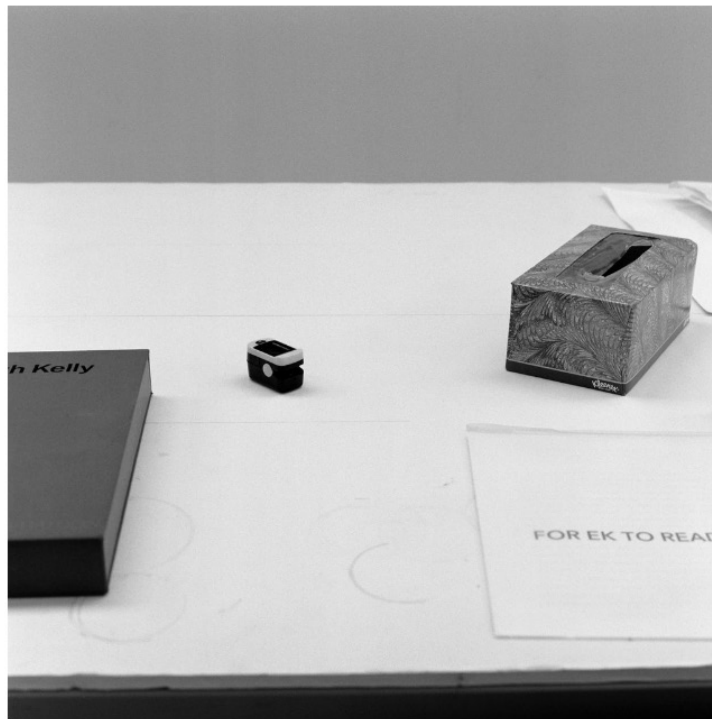
“I don’t ever think I ever remember him painting at night. He needed a lot of light,” Mr. Shear said. “The light would be raking, so he could see where the overlaps were. When you paint a yellow on top of a yellow on top of a yellow, your eyes get really saturated and so you really need to see where that glossy paint is versus the paint what you had painted before.”

He painted from filled pans. “Every yellow is different. Every red is different,” Mr. Shear said. “I think he even mostly put either white or a color into his blacks when he used them. He never just wanted anything out of a tube — he always mixed his color.”

“Sometimes he mixes for 15 minutes and sometimes he mixes for an hour,” Mr. Shear said. “He actually understands what a color will do when it’s wet. He understands it’ll either get darker or lighter. He knew, by painting for so long, he knew exactly how a paint would dry.”

Mr. Shear said, “I still talk about Ellsworth in the present, like we’re doing projects together.”

Mr. Kelly suffered from emphysema, the result of long exposure to turpentine and paint fumes. A small device was used to monitor his oxygen levels.



Jack Shear

“His nose sort of dripped, his eyes watered, he was always looking for Kleenex,” Mr. Shear said. “So there are Kleenex boxes in every room of the house.”

Mr. Kelly’s last, unfinished canvas had been gessoed, but not yet painted, when he died at the age of 92.