

## Bonnie Bronson & Lee Kelly

### *The spaces between*

Lee Kelly (1932-2022) and Bonnie Bronson (1940-1990) met and married in 1961 and remained so until Bronson's untimely death in a mountaineering accident. Kelly had begun showing, not without some controversies, in the Portland area in 1958; Bronson had achieved considerable local recognition by the early 1960s. Their earliest work was rooted in the AbEx terroir, but it became quickly apparent that both were looking for something else.

Highly proficient painters within that idiom, Bronson in particular, both largely abandoned it in favor of what became their well-known styles. In Kelly's case, of course, that was monumental Corten and stainless steel sculptures, for Bronson low-relief metal and cardboard wall sculptures, often in subtly shaded monochromes. In both cases, their formal vocabularies were largely established by the early to middle 1970s.

They were in fact frequent collaborators in the 1960s to 1970s, itself a question worth its own study, but there was, perhaps unsurprisingly, a rich though often indirect dialog between their works. The eclectic selection of works here, drawn from throughout their respective careers, show some of those points of contact and reference. [N.B. – additional examples of some of their works are also on view in The Barn.] In particular, we are looking here at how one can see in their works continuing references to the articulation of space, both positive and negative. And so we see them confronting similar problems, arriving at solutions sometimes similar, sometimes quite distinct. Consistent throughout, however, are constant reminders of the far-reaching implications originally found in the Cubist *papier colle*.

Lee Kelly was born in McCall, Idaho in 1932, and died on March 29, 2022 living and working at Leland Iron Works, his home and studio in Oregon City since 1963, where he moved with his then-wife Bonnie Bronson, beginning the transformation of a former dairy farm into a complex of studio and living spaces.

Lee Kelly was a major figure in Oregon art for more than five decades, dominating the public art landscape in Oregon and Washington from the 1970s and 1980s and beyond. His work was the subject of major survey and retrospective exhibitions at The Art Gym, Marylhurst College (1983 & 1995), Reed College (1976-77) and, most recently, the Portland Art Museum (2010).

Oregon artist Bonnie Bronson was born in 1940 in Portland. After several years at the University of Kansas and the University of Oregon, she returned to Portland. She met Lee Kelly in 1961; they married that same year and moved from Portland to Oregon City in 1963. Her career lasted from 1964 to 1990, ended by her death in a mountaineering accident on Mt. Adams.

Her work was shown in Portland and throughout the Pacific Northwest at, among others, Blackfish Gallery, the Fountain Gallery, the Art Gym at Marylhurst College and the Elizabeth Leach Gallery. Her work was the subject of solo exhibition at the Portland Art Museum in 1979 and a posthumous retrospective there in 1993. In the fall of 2011, her work was the subject of a major retrospective exhibition, *Bonnie Bronson: Works 1960–1990* at the Pacific Northwest College of Art.

The Estates of Lee Kelly & Bonnie Bronson are represented by the Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland.

## Works in the exhibition

*[clockwise from door]*

Lee Kelly *Untitled* c. 1963  
oil on canvas  
36 by 33.5 inches \$20,000

Bonnie Bronson *Untitled [study]* 1963  
charcoal on paper  
12 x 7.5 inches \$800

Lee Kelly *Doubtful Sound Study* 2008  
mixed media collage  
11 by 9 inches \$1,200

Lee Kelly *Study #2* 2007  
mixed media on paper  
12 by 12 inches \$1,200

Lee Kelly *Untitled Collage I & II* 1990  
mixed steel, acrylic urethane paint on board  
18 by 16 by 2 inches \$2,500 ea

Lee Kelly *Study for Bronze I & II* 1990  
collage on paper  
16 by 11 inches \$1,200 each

Lee Kelly *Bones Boxes II* 2010  
welded steel mounted in wooden box  
24 by 24 by 10 inches \$6,000

Lee Kelly *Bones Boxes VI* 2010  
welded steel mounted in wooden box  
24 by 24 by 10 inches \$6,000

Lee Kelly *Untitled [b]* 2013  
mixed media collage  
10 by 8 inches \$1,200

Bonnie Bronson *Untitled [small black]* 1963  
oil on board  
12 by 8 inches NFS

Bonnie Bronson *Untitled [gray collage]* 1965  
oil, mixed media, canvas scraps on paper  
48 by 36 inches POR

Lee Kelly *Drawing #3* 1972  
watercolor on paper  
9 by 7 inches \$800

Bonnie Bronson *Untitled [wall study]* 1986  
colored pencil on paper  
8 by 10 inches \$800

Lee Kelly *Untitled collage* 1996  
mixed media  
10 by 8 inches NFS

Bonnie Bronson  
*Untitled [black construction]* 1965  
painted metal construction  
37 by 37 by 10 inches \$12,000

Bonnie Bronson  
*Untitled [orange construction]* 1965  
painted metal construction  
27 by 32 by 20 inches \$12,000

*[on white table]*

Lee Kelly *Screen (early)* c. 1964  
welded steel  
9.5 by 10.5 by 4.5 inches \$1,800

Lee Kelly *Screen I (oxidized silver)* 2001  
welded steel with silver leaf surface  
12.5 by 9.5 by 6 inches \$2,500

Lee Kelly *Two Windows (green)* 1975  
Steel, porcelain enamel  
7 by 10 by 3.75 inches \$1,800

Lee Kelly *Blue Frames I-IV* 1984  
stainless steel, porcelain enamel  
6.5 by 8 by 7 inches \$1,500 ea (set for \$4,500)

Lee Kelly *Kumar's House IV* 1985  
Welded steel  
13 by 7.5 by 7.5 inches NFS

*[on brown table]*

Lee Kelly *Untitled Bronze* c. 1964  
welded bronze  
27 by 20 by 10 inches \$4,500

Lee Kelly *Goddess Glyph IV, III & VIII* 2009  
steel, urethane paint, metallic leaf on board  
9 by 9 by 1 inch \$1,800 each

A portion of sales from this exhibition will benefit The Lee Kelly Fund. The Lee Kelly Fund, a donor-advised fund held by the Oregon Community Foundation, was established to support academic research and exhibition opportunities concerning the work of Lee Kelly and Bonnie Bronson. For more information, contact [leekellyfund@gmail.com](mailto:leekellyfund@gmail.com).



**Leland Iron  
Works**