

Lee Kelly

*Angkor, Bennington, Turkey, Kyoto, Sulawesi
Selections from Folios 1995- 2009*

In late 2015, I began an archiving project for my father's works on paper. They were preserved in 12 large-capacity drawers in his studio in Oregon City and although the works had been packaged, moved, photographed and handled, they hadn't really been sorted or counted.

The total turned out to be just under two thousand individual drawings, collages, paintings and prints on paper, board, and drafting paper. This does not include working drawings or sketch books, which I examined later.

I noticed two things right away. First of all, the number of individual pieces, though high, is fairly modest for an artist as prolific as Lee. Over the years, some weeding and curating had taken place. Some may have sold or been given away but it was immediately evident that what remained in the drawers wasn't detritus from the drafting table. It was finished work.

Secondly, the drawings told a story. I could see ideas come into being in the early years, disappear and come back in a later decade, fully formed. Often something new would come along, such as the Tibetan knot (1978), Corbeled arch (1981), or Celebes snake image (1993), which fired his imagination all over again. I could easily link these influences to his travels in Asia and Mexico.

What I came to love about the drawings is the breadth and progression of Lee's ideas. Later works have the lightest touch, sometimes only a shorthand sketch of larger concepts. Metallic leaf and collage build texture and depth in each drawing but the ideas themselves seem to pause only long enough to catch their breath before going on to the next image.

Other pieces from the last twenty years tackle sculptural issues of connection, often focusing on a single joint in a way that makes a complicated three dimensional problem easy to resolve.

Going through the drawers, I decided that Lee's works on paper needed to be seen again, that they add something important to our understanding of his art. If you are familiar with Lee's work, you may be surprised by some of the pieces here. It is like seeing everything again, but with all the blanks filled in. We know the answers that Lee Kelly's large sculptures have posed.

Here are the questions.

Kassandra Kelly

Noted Oregon artist Lee Kelly, born in McCall, Idaho in 1932, died on March 29, 2022. He lived and worked at Leland Iron Works, his home and studio in Oregon City, since 1963.

Lee Kelly was a major figure in Oregon art for more than five decades, known especially for the monumental sculptures in both Cor-ten and stainless steel with which he dominated the public art landscape in Oregon and Washington from the 1970s and 1980s and beyond. Especially visible are his *Tri-Met* (1977) in the downtown Portland transit mall, *Pavilion & Fountain* (1975) for the International Rose Test Garden, Washington Park, Portland, Oregon (1975), *Leland* (1975), a collaboration with his late wife Bonnie Bronson and *Lupine Fugue* (2001) for the Oregon Garden, Silverton, Oregon. 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). The Estate of Lee Kelly is represented by the Elizabeth Leach Gallery.

Lee Kelly

*Angkor, Bennington, Turkey, Kyoto, Sulawesi
Selections from Folios 1995- 2009*

[clockwise from door]

Anchor [Angkor] Studies (1995)
watercolor, ink & colored pencil on paper
16 by 10 inches, 3 in series
\$1,000

Bennington (1995)
watercolor & graphite on board
12 by 9 inches, 7 in series
\$3,000

Turkey (1995)
watercolor, ink, inkjet collage, metal leaf on paper
8 by 6, 8 by 8 & 6 by 8 inches, 6 in series
\$1,500

Ship of Renewal (1998)
paint & gold leaf on steel
22 by 46 inches
\$6,800

Kyoto (2009)
watercolor, inkjet collage & metal leaf on paper
10 by 10, 12 x 10 & 12 by 12 inches, 4 in series
\$1,800

Portable Votive Objects (2001)
watercolor & inkjet collage on paper
11 by 9 inches, 4 in series
\$1,000

Sulawesi (1996)
watercolor, inkjet collage and metal leaf on paper
12 by 12 inches, 2 in series
\$1,200

Song of the 60s (2006)
mixed media & metal leaf on paper
12 by 12 inches, 5 in series
\$2,400

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



**Leland Iron
Works**