

Lee Kelly Annotated Chronology

- 1932 Born, May 24th, McCall, Idaho to Lucille Howard and Arlie Twillegar. Lee's name at birth: Arlie Twillegar.
- 1934 Lucille and Arlie divorce.
- 1935 Lucille marries James Kelly. Lee is formally adopted by James; his name is changed to Lee Rowe Kelly.
- Two more sons are born, James Jr. (Jimmy) in 1936 and John in 1945.
- 1935-44 Family moves around the west, following Jim Kelly's work: Idaho, Utah, Wyoming, sometimes moving two or three times per year. Lee only feels comfortable at home near Riggins, Idaho on the Salmon River (called The Ranch). At age 10, makes a memorable journey back to Riggins alone, by train, bus and car, living there until the family joined him. Lee continues to spend all his summers at The Ranch through high school.
- 1945 The family moves to Portland where Jim had found work in the ship yards.
- 1946 Jimmy, Lee's younger brother, dies of tetanus while the family is living in Portland.
- 1948 Memorable events of the summer at The Ranch:
- ♣ Lee drives truck for a wheat farmer, and later drives the farmer, dangerously intoxicated, from bar to bar while he searches for an Indian who allegedly attacked a white girl. The Indian was never found, nor was there any proof the attack ever took place.
 - ♣ Works on a fire crew during one of the largest wildfires in Salmon River.
 - ♣ Maternal grandmother Mattie Howard dies after long illness.
- 1949 Lee graduates from Roosevelt High School in Portland, age seventeen. Fellow students include: Duane Zaloudek, Dennis Schiller, Don Berry, and his future wife, Jeanette Bernhardt.
- 1949-51 Attends Vanport College, the precursor of Portland State University, Portland OR. Also attends some early classes at the Museum Art School, Portland OR.
- 1952 Marries Jeanette Louise Bernhardt (b. May 21, 1932), Portland.



Leland Iron Works

- 1952-53 Enlists in the Air Force. Stationed at the K-13 Air Base in Suwon, South Korea. Lee works as a cartographer, and attains the rank of staff sergeant. Memorable events:
- Retains vivid memories of hitchhiking to the front lines during a firefight.
 - Scheduled to fly out of Korea on a C-124 transport, Lee gives his spot to another soldier. The transport later crashed near Tokyo on June 18, 1953, killing 129 (largest air disaster at the time). This event was the subject of a long letter to his parents, and he remains haunted by this extraordinary event.
- 1954-59 Following discharge from the Air Force, Lee resumed classes at the Museum Art School, studying with sculptor Frederic Littman, also working as his studio assistant. Also studied with painter Louis Bunce, forming a strong lasting friendship. Awards earned:
- White Stag Fabric Design competition (scholarship) 1956, 1957.
 - Carey Prize for Drawing 1957, 1958.
 - Award from Northwest Printmakers Association, Henry Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington.
- 1958 First one-man shows: Mt. Angel College, Mt. Angel, Oregon and Artist Gallery, Seattle, Washington. Also represented in the Oregon Annual at the Portland Art Museum.
- 1959 First public art commissions:
- Oregon Centennial, four fountains. Teaches himself to weld in order to complete this work.
 - Commission from Sheraton Hotel, Portland for chandeliers.
- Left Museum Art School before graduation due to controversy among faculty about whether Lee, as a current student, should be accepting commissions. He was later persuaded to return for the graduation ceremony.
- First trip to Mexico.
- 1960 Daughter Cassandra born on May 20th.
- Wife Jeanette Kelly dies on December 21 after short illness.
- 1961 Lee travels to New York City in early January, seeing work by David Smith and Mark Rothko for the first time at MoMA. He lives with theatre critic and scholar Erika Munk, but ultimately decides to return to Oregon, a decision that will influence every aspect of his life and career.
- Marries Bonnie Bronson (b. March 9, 1940), then a Museum School student, on June 10, 1961.

- 1962 Son Jason Howard Kelly born August 19th.
- Family is living on N. Detroit Street in Portland, where Lee has a studio in the basement but builds his new large sculptures in the back yard. The attic of the house is converted into a painting studio for Bonnie's use. Unfortunately, the The Columbus Day Storm of 1962 wreaks havoc with the works exposed in the back yard; Lee and Bonnie decide to move somewhere offering better studio space.
- 1963 Lee and Bonnie purchase five acres south of Oregon City, a former dairy farm. The barn, built in 1923, is a perfect studio space.
- An exhibition of Lee's painted sculptures at Mt. Angel College has an incendiary effect on Portland's small art community. Notable is a scathing review of the show in *The Oregonian* by the owner of Lee's then-current Portland gallery.
- 1965 After a painting exhibition at Mt. Angel College, Lee decides to to abandon painting and concentrate on sculpture.
- 1966-70 Instructor of Art, Mt. Angel College ; these years are one of only two periods of his work as college faculty. In his last year, Lee gifts his entire salary back to the college to hire artist John Haugse for a teaching position.
- 1967 Orville "Jack" Howard, known as "Super", Lee's maternal grandfather, dies while fishing near The Ranch in Idaho.
- 1968 Interview and profile for Oregon Public Broadcasting television series, *Eight Lively Arts*.
- 1969-71 Lee and Bonnie open Leland Iron Works, as the property in Oregon City has become known, up to friends and students as a communal living experiment.
- Lee purchases first wire drive welder, greatly increasing the efficiency and flexibility of fabrication techniques.
- 1972 Large public art commissions for Candlestick Park, San Francisco, and the University of Houston in Texas. He is commissioned as one of the first sculptors on the west coast to undertake large public art projects, and this remains an essential aspect of his work.
- The installation of a major sculpture for the Washington State Department of Transportation requires Lee to build a temporary road through the neighbor's pasture to move the sculpture out of the studio. After the truck gets stuck in the mud, Lee decides to buy his own crane truck.
- 1973 Jason diagnosed with leukemia. Family began backpacking in Salmon River, Idaho, returning to the area of Lee's family ranch. Family continues these visits annually through 1991.
- 1974 Judge for the Montana Institute of the Arts Spring Juried Exhibition, C.M.

- Russell Museum, Montana.
- 1976-1979 Visiting Professor of Art, Reed College, Portland, Oregon. A major outdoor exhibition of his large sculptures causes some student controversy.
- 1978 Son Jason dies May 10, 1978.
- Large city-wide outdoor exhibition in Boise, Idaho in May. Lee, Bonnie and Cassandra install the work, attend events, including day-long symposium by the Art In Public Places group. He is also the subject of an interview and profile on *Take Four!*, a television series produced by Boise State University's KAID-TV.
- Lee, Bonnie and Cassandra meet Lee's birth father Arlie.
- 1979 First visit to Nepal and India with Bob Pierce. This is a life-changing event for Lee, and he continues to return to the area, most recently in 2009.
- 1982 Second visit to Nepal, first bronzes cast with Kaji Shakya, Patan, Nepal.
- 1983 *Lee Kelly: Outdoor Sculpture*, a year-long retrospective at The Art Gym, Marylhurst College, Marylhurst, Oregon.
- Lee meets Susan Hammer on trek to Langtang, Nepal. They form an important friendship.
- Lee and Bonnie began climbing in the North Cascades. They learn ice climbing and rope handling techniques in order to climb in Nepal.
- 1985 Travel to Yucatan and Mexico City with Mark & Melody Teppola, Bonnie and Cassandra. Visit archaeological sites at Chichen Itza and Uxmal.
- Oregon Arts Commission Fellowship to research the traditional bronze casting methods of the Newari of Nepal.
- Trekking in Nepal, Bonnie and Cassandra go to Mera Peak; Lee remains in Patan creating the bronze series *Songs from a Room*.
- 1986 During a commission for the Cornell Oaks Corporate Center, Lee and Bonnie meet gallery owner Elizabeth Leach, initiating a friendship and professional relationship which continues to the present.
- Lee summits Pasang Peak, Nepal, during high winds.
- 1987 Receives State of Oregon Governor's Award for the Arts.
- Mother Lucille Howard Kelly dies in Oregon City.
- Grandchild Carter Stirling born September 21st.
- 1989 Grandchild Lucy Stirling born March 16th.

- 1990 Bonnie dies in a climbing accident on Mt. Adams, August 4th.
Partnership with Susan Hammer begins, which Lee credits with his survival.
- 1991 Founding board member of the Bonnie Bronson Fund, the activities of which include the award of an annual fellowship. One consideration of the award is the artist's commitment to living and working in the Pacific Northwest.
- 1992 Receives Masters Fellowship in Sculpture, State of Oregon.
- 1994 Travels in Cambodia and Thailand.
- 1995 Visiting artist to Sapporo, Japan, part of Portland-Sapporo Sister City Program.

Lee Kelly: 35 Years of Painting and Sculpture, a year-long retrospective at The Art Gym, Marylhurst College, Marylhurst, Oregon.
- 1998 Lee accompanies Susan Hammer on her residency at Bennington College in Vermont, where he also has studio space. This becomes an important reflective time for him.
- 2000 Travel to Burma and Nepal.
- 2001 A fall from scaffolding shatters Lee's ankle, requiring a long and difficult recuperation. This accident brings to an end many of his climbing activities.
- 2003 Travel to Anasazi sites, American Southwest.
- 2003 Travel to India & Sri Lanka. On the India leg of the trip, Lee & Susan Hammer are accompanied by Lee's granddaughter, Lucy Stirling. This visit has far reaching implications – see *Observatory at Jaipur* (2015)
- 2005 Travel to Patagonia, Argentina & Chile.

Interview and profile for Oregon Public Broadcasting's television series *Oregon Arts Beat*.
- 2006 Travel to Haida sites, Queen Charlotte Islands.
- 2006 Travel to Japan: Kyoto, Naoshima, Tokyo.
- 2008 Travel to New Zealand.

Lee meets art student D'Nita Carbone, who becomes an important part of Lee's life. D'Nita and granddaughter Lucy both work as Lee's studio assistants.

The exhibition *Doubtful Sound* at Elizabeth Leach Gallery, includes both

a series of new wall sculptures and a small retrospective of paintings from the late 1950's and early 1960's. The exhibition occasions a great renewal of interest in these early works.

2009 Return to Nepal for trekking and bronze-casting. His ankle is much improved after many years of hard work but hiking remains difficult.

Lee receives a commission for a major steel sculpture, *Bennington II* (2009). It and *Blue Benn* (1998) are purchased by the Washington State Arts Commission and installed at Evergreen High School, Vancouver.

2010 His work is the subject of a major retrospective at the Portland Art Museum, *Lee Kelly: A Retrospective*, curated by Bruce Guenther at the Portland Art Museum, Portland, Oregon. A catalog accompanying the exhibition is published by the University of Washington Press in cooperation with PAM.

Concurrent with the retrospective is *Chrome Sculpture: 1967/2010*, which reworks early pieces at Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland, Oregon.

Purchase of *Sound Garden*, Art in Public Places, Bend, Oregon.

2011 Lee receives a commission from the Rotary Club of Oregon City for *Moontrap*, a major wall sculpture installed in downtown Oregon City. Interestingly, this is his first piece publicly installed in Oregon City.

2012 Vestas Corporation commissions *Celebes*, an immense wall sculpture for their headquarters, in the former Meier & Frank warehouse, in Portland, Oregon.

Memory 99 is purchased by the Pacific Northwest College of Art & the Ford Family Foundation and is installed at the PNCA campus, Portland, Oregon.

2014 The exhibition *Pavilion: New Paintings & Sculpture* at Elizabeth Leach Gallery marks Lee's return as an active painter with a major series of large works, *One Through Nine* and related studies. Leland Iron Works Press subsequently documents *One Through Nine* in a monograph.

2015 Lee's trip to India in 2003 continues to resonate; he had made, more or less immediately on returning, a series of small mixed media collages. He now reworked this imagery into several large paintings and wall sculptures, as well as a new series of collages. These works are assembled for exhibition at Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland, Oregon as *Observatory at Jaipur*, and are documented by Leland Iron Works Press in a catalog of the same name.

2016 Lee is awarded the prestigious *Honored Citizen Award* presented by the Architecture Foundation of Oregon, for outstanding contributions to the visual culture of the region.

2017 *Lee Kelly: Sculpture & Prints*, a small survey of his work, is organized by the

Bend Art Center, Bend, Oregon.

Nepal, a large Cor-ten sculpture, is purchased by McMinnville Art In Public Places, McMinnville, Oregon and installed in a residential neighborhood.

Purchase and installation of *Akbar's Elephant at the Fox Tower*, Portland, Oregon

2018 *Six Decades at Elizabeth Leach Gallery*, Portland, Oregon marks the anniversary of his first solo exhibition, in 1958, at Marylhurst College, Marylhurst, Oregon.

PLACE, an architecture and design firm based in Portland, purchases *Untitled*, a large work which, as a mobile, is almost *sui generis* within his oeuvre. Lee extensively restores and rebuilds the piece, originally a proof of concept for an unrealized public art project, and it is installed at the offices and studios of PLACE in Portland, Oregon.

2020 Susan Hammer (b. 1948), Lee's longtime partner and companion, dies at her home in Portland, Oregon.

2021 Purchase and installation of *Untitled [Marylhurst]* by The Reserve Vineyard & Golf Club, Aloha, Oregon.

Purchase of *Untitled [Omark]*, Hillsboro Art In Public Places, Department of Public Works, Hillsboro, Oregon. This is particularly important as it marks the return to public view one of his largest surviving works, seen for the first time since the dissolution of the Omark Corporation.

2022 Lee Kelly dies March 29 at Leland Iron Works, his home and studio in Oregon City, Oregon since 1963.

The Leland Iron Works Fund is established to support research and exhibition projects concerning the work of Lee Kelly and Bonnie Bronson. To donate: lelandironworksfund@gmail.com.

Selectons from Folios, Leland Iron Works, Oregon City, Oregon.

2023 *Lee Kelly & Bonnie Bronson: The Space Between*, two-person exhibition, Leland Iron Works, Oregon City, Oregon.

2024 *Bennington Suite & Color Studies*, Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland, Oregon.

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