

## MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

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## Ellsworth Kelly makes a 'shop sign' for Matthew Marks Gallery

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The wide, thick rectangle of painted aluminum that artist Ellsworth Kelly made for the facade of the Matthew Marks Gallery, opening this weekend in West Hollywood, is a precise plank of black pigment that visually caps a relatively modest white building. As shop signs go, it's emblematic more than practical. But it exerts an ineluctable presence, at once restrained and assertive, high overhead.

Carefully calibrated in scale and mass, the painted sculpture stands out several inches in front of the stucco wall. Ponder it and everything in your peripheral vision -- building, trees, passing cars, telephone wires, pedestrians and even the bright blue sky -- soon falls into equivalent abstraction. That's artistic power. As with the geometric abstractions of Malevich, Mondrian, McLaughlin or any number of now anonymous ancient, medieval, Islamic or Chinese Song dynasty artisans, the effect deserves to be called spiritual.

Kelly, 88, has been performing that sort of magic for six decades. (On Sunday a career retrospective of his prints opens at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.) The New York gallery's inaugural show for its L.A. branch features new Kelly paintings, but it also includes four black-and-white collages, the earliest made in Paris in 1952, plus a two-panel painting from 1966. Those early works all speak directly to the sculpture out front on the façade. Nobody said spirituality can't be Epicurian. Voluptuary art is best when it's also richly contemplative.

-- Christopher Knight