

The Museum of Modern Art

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FRANK STELLA by William S. Rubin, the most comprehensive book on the 33-year-old artist yet to appear, will be published by The Museum of Modern Art on September 1, 1970. This presentation of Stella's work, which spans the entire decade of the young artist's activity, contains reproductions of his work ranging from the controversial Black pictures of the late fifties to the lyrical and sensuous paintings of the last few years.

Mr. Rubin, Chief Curator of the Painting and Sculpture Collection at The Museum of Modern Art, was one of the first critics to write enthusiastically about Stella's work, and has followed his development since his earliest exhibitions in 1959. The book was written in connection with the retrospective exhibition of Stella's work Mr. Rubin organized, which was shown at the Museum last spring, and is now traveling abroad. The monograph, which includes a chronology and a bibliography, will be published in two editions: hardbound, retailing for \$12.95; and paperbound, at \$6.95.

Sixty-five black-and-white illustrations include documentary photos and installation views as well as reproductions of the paintings. Among the 18 colorplates are four fold-outs on which some of Stella's largest paintings are reproduced. These illustrations provide the reader with an extraordinary view of the scope of Stella's work, about which Mr. Rubin remarks, "In a period in which abstract painting has been frequently marked by the narrowness of its stylistic and conceptual range, Stella's variety has been breathtaking."

In tracing Stella's development from one successive series to another, Mr. Rubin quotes extensively from the artist himself. In addition, the author frequently refers to the writings of other critics who have followed Stella's work, particularly Robert Rosenblum and Michael Fried.

Stella was one of the first among the younger artists to react against the brushy, gestural style of the Abstract Expressionists--a style that was still the dominating influence on the New York art scene in 1958 when the young artist set up his Eldridge Street studio after his graduation from Princeton University. Over the years, he would propose

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an art that emphasized control and stressed a meditative and classic rationalism as over and against the romantic and improvisational character of Abstract Expressionism. Describing the impact of Stella's rejection of the Abstract Expressionist tradition to which he still felt "rooted," Mr. Rubin says:

In a period in which many young painters were concocting pastiches of Abstract Expressionist styles, the authentic originality of Stella's art, and the conviction with which he pursued its premises, provided a new challenge for American painting. By the end of the decade, Stella had contributed to the already varied vocabulary of American art a style--and a concomitant approach to painting--that would, in the course of the 1960s, emerge as one of the few genuinely new paths for the continued development of non-figurative art.

The biographical portions of the monograph give an account of the artist's education at Phillips Academy and Princeton, his attitude toward the New York School, the impact of the work of Jasper Johns. Mr. Rubin discusses the milieu that influenced the "transitional" works Stella painted during his first months in New York and traces the steps that led to the enigmatic and austere Black paintings. Mr. Rubin views these earliest works in the context of both past and future and refers back to them often during the course of the book. In conclusion he points out that Stella, at 33, is at an age when many major painters have not yet found their mature styles. "His endurance faces many challenges," he says, "not the least of which is the quality of his own past."

In presenting other writers' views of Stella's development, Mr. Rubin provides the reader not only with an interesting look at the critical crosscurrents of the art of the sixties, but with a resume of the critical response that Stella's work has inspired. He argues with Michael Fried, for example, about the influence of Barnett Newman on Stella, contending that Stella's original inspiration for the Black paintings was not Newman, as Fried suggests, but Jasper Johns, whose Flags, with their repetitive stripes and bands, made a considerable impression on him while he was still at Princeton.

The retrospective of Stella's work organized by Mr. Rubin was on view at the Museum from March 26 to May 31, 1970, and contained 41 paintings and 19 drawings covering a period of slightly more than one decade. A modified version of the exhibition is

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currently circulating under the auspices of the Museum's International Council and will be shown at the Hayward Gallery, London; the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; the Pasadena Museum of Art, California; and the Art Gallery of Ontario, Canada.

Mr. Rubin, who has been a member of the Museum staff since 1967, directed the major exhibition DADA, SURREALISM, AND THEIR HERITAGE, which was on view at the Museum in the spring of 1968. The text he wrote to accompany the show was called by Hilton Kramer, art news editor of The New York Times, "the best account of dada and surrealist art I know."

Mr. Rubin selected the paintings and directed the installation for the exhibition THE NEW AMERICAN PAINTING AND SCULPTURE: THE FIRST GENERATION, shown at the Museum in the summer of 1969, which contained work by artists of the post-World War II generation already in or promised to the Museum's painting and sculpture collection. He is currently preparing a major publication on this school. Now on view at the Museum is an exhibition he has installed of recent acquisitions by artists who matured earlier in the twentieth century such as Braque, Klee, Matisse, and Miró.

A graduate of Columbia College, Mr. Rubin earned an M.A. in history and a Ph.D. in the history of art from Columbia University, whose Press published his first book, The Church of Assy and Modern Sacred Art, in 1961. He has lectured widely and written for many publications and was formerly American editor of Art International. He has taught at Sarah Lawrence College, Hunter College of the City University of New York, and is currently Adjunct Professor at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University.

FRANK STELLA. Text and notes by William S. Rubin, supplemented by chronology and a bibliography (compiled by Carolyn Lanchner). 9x10 inches; 176 pages; 83 illustrations (18 in color); hardbound edition, \$12.95; paperbound edition, \$6.95.

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