

The Museum of Modern Art

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FACT SHEET

TITLE FRANK STELLA 1970-1987

DATES October 12, 1987 - January 5, 1988

ORGANIZATION William Rubin, Director, Department of Painting and Sculpture,
The Museum of Modern Art

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CONTENT American artist Frank Stella has remained a prominent and innovative practitioner of abstract painting since the late fifties. In 1970 The Museum of Modern Art presented a retrospective of the artist's work, beginning with his monumental and seminal Black paintings of the late fifties and ending with the Protractor Series of the late sixties. Since that time Stella has continued to create work of tremendous range and variety. His important later work is the subject of this major exhibition.

The exhibition contains approximately thirty-five large paintings from the many series--Polish Village, Diderot, Brazilian, Exotic Bird, Indian Bird, Circuits, Shards, Malta, South African Mines, and Cones and Pillars--that Stella has produced during the seventies and eighties.

THE ARTIST Frank Stella was born in 1936 in Malden, Massachusetts; he studied painting at the Phillips Academy in Andover and at Princeton University, where he graduated in 1958 with a degree in history. In 1959 he moved to New York and completed his first body of mature work, the Black series. At this time, several of his paintings were included in group exhibitions, including SIXTEEN AMERICANS at The Museum of Modern Art.

In 1960 Stella's Aluminum Series, his earliest shaped canvases, were the subject of his first solo show at the Leo Castelli Gallery. He then took his first trip to Europe, making sketches in Spain for what would become the series Concentric Squares and Mitered Mazes. During this time both the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and the Whitney Museum of American Art included his work in group exhibitions. In the later sixties he was represented in the U.S. Sections of the XXXII Biennale at Venice and the VIII Bienal de São Paulo, and he was given many solo exhibitions abroad.

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Stella has conceived his work in series since the early sixties, developing drawings and maquettes for a new project while completing the finished works of a previous one. While concluding his work on the Protractor and Saskatchewan Series during the early seventies, he began the Polish Village Series, named for 17th, 18th, and 19th-century synagogues destroyed in Poland by the Nazis. This group of works is the point of departure of FRANK STELLA 1970-1987. In different versions of the Polish Village series he moved from low-relief collage to high-relief works with surfaces of felt and painted cardboard. He also became increasingly involved in printmaking, creating series of prints at Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles, and Petersburg Press, New York, which repeated images that first appeared in earlier painting series.

Stella was extremely productive during the seventies, developing several major bodies of work, such as the Diderot Series, the largest of his Concentric Square pictures; and the Brazilian Series, etched and painted metal reliefs that were named for areas in and around Rio de Janeiro. These were followed by the Exotic Bird and the Indian Bird Series, freely painted metal reliefs whose titles were prompted by Stella's travels and new interest in bird-watching. During this decade the artist's work was regularly included in major individual and group exhibitions shown internationally. At the same time he began to travel extensively throughout Europe, as well as to Brazil and India.

A devotee of car racing, Stella painted a BMW for the Le Mans race in 1976. This interest led to one of his major series of the early eighties, the Circuits Series, which, according to Stella, is his "longest and most concentrated streak of work ever." The titles of these works were taken from the names of international auto race tracks. Next he completed the Shards Series, the largest of his painted metal reliefs, based directly on compositions of prints; and the Cone and Pillars Series, also large-scale painted metal reliefs titled after Italo Calvino's Italian Folk Tales.

Over the past seven years, Stella has received many honors, including the Skowhegan Medal for Painting (1981), The Mayor of the City of New York's Award of Honor for Arts and Culture (1982), an Honorary Doctor of Arts degree from Princeton University (1984), an honorary degree from Dartmouth College (1985), and an Award of American Art from the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia (1985). In 1983 Stella was named the Charles Eliot Norton Professor of Poetry at Harvard, the first abstract painter so honored. He delivered a six-lecture series entitled "Working Space," which was published in 1986 by Harvard University Press. Stella currently lives in New York City.

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TRAVEL After its New York showing, the exhibition travels to the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (February 7 - April 15, 1988) and to the Musée National d'Art Moderne (Centre Georges Pompidou), Paris (May 16 - mid-August, 1988). Since this is the first major exhibition of Stella's work in France, the Paris presentation is including earlier works to create a comprehensive retrospective. The American tour continues at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (October 15, 1988 - January 1, 1989); the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston (February 10 - April 23, 1989); and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (June 1 - August 13, 1989).

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