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**“WHAT YOU SEE IS WHAT YOU SEE”: FRANK STELLA
AND THE ANDERSON COLLECTION AT SFMOMA**

Gifts of Stella Masterworks Shown Together for the First Time

The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) presents “*What You See Is What You See*”: *Frank Stella and the Anderson Collection at SFMOMA*, from June 11 through September 6, 2004. This focused presentation provides an up-close study of the art of Frank Stella, comprising eight major works that span the artist’s prolific four-decade career. The eight paintings are shown together for the first time since they entered the Museum’s collection in 2001 and 2002—*Zambezi* as a gift in 2001 from Harry W. and Mary Margaret Anderson, followed by six works as gifts and partial Museum purchases, also from the Andersons, and one as a gift from the artist in the Andersons’ honor. These eight works were added to SFMOMA’s holdings of nine other Stella works. Organized by Janet Bishop, curator of painting and sculpture, the presentation reconsiders Stella’s use of strategic paint-handling from his debut in 1959 to the present and allows the Museum to tell a more complete history of his changing styles and often controversial explorations of formal abstraction.



Frank Stella, *Zambezi*, 1959; enamel on canvas; Collection SFMOMA, gift of Harry W. and Mary Margaret Anderson; © Frank Stella/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Born in 1936, Stella is celebrated as one of the most significant and influential artists of the latter twentieth century through today. Each work in the exhibition, organized chronologically, illustrates an important stage of his abundant and diverse output, which evolved serially: the watershed Black Paintings are followed by shaped canvases, then the vivid geometric works known as the Protractor series, followed by relief paintings that aggressively challenged the most fundamental assumptions about the difference between painting and sculpture, and finally evolving to encompass mixed-media relief and profuse three-dimensional assemblages of metal that flirt with representation.

The exhibition takes its title from Stella’s now-famous remarks from 1966 that addressed a problem many young American artists were grappling with in the 1960s: what and how to paint in the wake of Abstract Expressionism. Stella remarked that in his early paintings “What you see is what you see,” a statement that marked a watershed between then-waning Abstract Expressionism and emerging Minimalism and became the unofficial slogan of minimalist practice.

A legend of Minimalism, Stella would later challenge the principles inherent in that movement. Today the artist states these works were, in fact, extremely painterly and never intended as a deliberate refusal of the artists who came before him (such as Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko) but rather as a furthering of their accomplishments. Indeed, Stella's liberal explorations at the other aesthetic extreme seem almost a parody of abstract expressionist clichés (and have elicited a wide range of critical response). In either case, Stella has continued to hold public interest for nearly fifty years, and his work and rhetoric have shaped the history of abstraction. His relentless investigations of geometry, color, and form hold an unquestioned position among American masterworks of the twentieth century.

Eight Major Works

Zambezi, 1959, first exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, when Stella was only twenty-four years old, is the most well known of his so-called Black Paintings—the series of twenty-three works produced in 1950–60 that rocketed the young artist to overnight fame. He composed this austere, intellectual canvas by quartering it diagonally and then painting in black stripes whose width was determined by that of a standard two-and-a-half-inch paintbrush. With its restrained geometry and delicate brushwork, *Zambezi* embodies what would become the artist's lifelong preoccupation with the tension between lyricism and detachment.

Following the spare purity of the Black Paintings, Stella worked with irregular-shaped canvases and even cooler paint application in his Dartmouth series, 1963–64, which further reinforced the impersonal quality of the painting as an object. *Polk City*, 1963, is an excellent example from this series, featuring bright monochromatic chevrons joined at such an angle as to blur the boundaries of their independent geometries.

In the group of ninety-three works known as the Protractor paintings, 1967–71, the artist warmed his color palette and explored interlocking circles and curves borrowed from the common geometry tool for which the series is named. These works looked toward other cultures, in this case Islam, for inspiration and expanded in scale to architectural proportions, exemplified here by *Firuzabad*, 1970, which measures ten by fifteen feet.



Frank Stella, *Firuzabad*, 1970; acrylic on canvas; Collection SFMOMA, gift of Harry W. and Mary Margaret Anderson and Museum purchase; © Frank Stella/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Stella's Polish Village paintings from the early 1970s introduced relief, building off the canvas into physical space. These explorations in three dimensions were given extra presence and texture by the use of collage. As one of his earliest forays into relief, *Lipsko III*, 1972, with its combination of felt, fabric, and acrylic on cardboard, exemplifies this important phase of Stella's artistic development.

By the late 1970s the artist was fully immersed in what is now widely considered his "second" career of works in three dimensions. *Shoubeegi*, 1978, represents almost all of the elements now present in Stella's recent works. The "ground" of traditional painting has become a somewhat wavy, three-dimensional grid on which neon color and organic forms are at once swarming in chaos and precisely composed. These forms include the signature French curves borrowed from traditional engineering tools, further illustrating Stella's interest in the relationship between art and architecture, abstraction and representation.

With *Guifà, la luna, i ladri e le guardie, 4x*, 1984, an early example of Stella's Cones and Pillars series, the artist added a clear sense of movement through space to his giant reliefs, using the oblique lines of cone shapes to their full visual advantage. This series also introduced a new style of painterly execution for Stella: exact, simplified stripes on the cone and pillar shapes that contrast vividly with gestural coloration that adorns the abstract forms.

The Quadrant, 1987–88, part of Stella's Wave series, takes the artist's exploration of contrasts still further. Rendered in a simplified perspective reminiscent of technical illustration, the work also encompasses writhing sheets of striped metal layered with stark right angles of "frame" fragments in both the foreground and background.

At seventeen by fourteen feet, *The Duel (Der Zweikampf) F (N#8)*, 2001, is one of seven large paintings in Stella's "Heinrich van Kleist" series. This massive painting is turbulent with contrasting techniques and forms, including grids, spirals, and loops. The work's surface is flat only in fact—the dynamic jumble of forms that have been spray painted, stenciled, and computer projected onto the canvas appear vividly three-dimensional. Stella leaves the work's orientation open for interpretation; *The Duel (Der Zweikampf) F (N#8)* may be hung either horizontally or vertically.

The Andersons

Bay Area residents Harry W. and Mary Margaret Anderson began to collect art seriously soon after they moved to California in the mid-1960s and quickly created one of the first collections of national significance in Northern California. Their relationship with Frank Stella's work is long standing and mutually supportive: They began by acquiring prints and then bought major examples from each decade of his career. The Andersons initially chose to focus their collecting on modern art and subsequently developed a carefully considered plan to acquire works from the New York School, including this important group of works by Stella. The Andersons are also important friends and patrons of SFMOMA, with a remarkable thirty-year tradition of generous and deliberate gifting of major postwar works including Jasper Johns's *Land's End*, 1963; Robert Rauschenberg's *Collection*, 1953–54; and important works by Clyfford Still and David Park. In 1992 the Andersons gave the Museum a core group of American Pop works by Claes Oldenburg, Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, Jim Dine, and James Rosenquist, among others, which have been on view in the Museum's new building since its opening in 1995. In the fall of 2000 SFMOMA exhibited over three hundred works from the Anderson Collection in the critically acclaimed *Celebrating Modern Art: The Anderson Collection*.

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Museum hours: Open daily (except Wednesdays) 11 a.m. to 5:45 p.m.; open late Thursdays until 8:45 p.m.; summer hours (Memorial Day to Labor Day) open at 10 a.m.; closed Wednesdays and the following public holidays: Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's Day. Koret Visitor Education Center: open daily (except Wednesdays) 11 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.; open late Thursdays until 8:30 p.m. Summer hours: open at 10 a.m.

Admission prices: Adults \$10; seniors \$7; students \$6. SFMOMA members and children twelve and under are admitted free. Thursday evenings, 6 to 8:45 p.m., admission is half price. The first Tuesday of each month admission is free.

SFMOMA is easily accessible by MUNI, BART, Golden Gate Transit, SamTrans, and Caltrain. Hourly, daily, and monthly parking is available at the SFMOMA Garage at 147 Minna Street. For parking information, call 415.348.0971.

Visit our Web site at www.sfmoma.org or call 415.357.4000 for more information.

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