



## QUICK VIEW:

### Synopsis

Throughout his prolific career as a painter, sculptor, printmaker and architect, Frank Stella has been known for helping to launch the Minimalism movement and then for breaking away from it. First impacting the art world by endowing non-representational artwork with new significance, Stella's instantly acclaimed 1958 Minimalist paintings contrasted Abstract Expressionism's emotional canvases. He has constantly reinvented himself, creating increasingly textured, dynamic and vivid work. Stella continues to work and advocate for artists' right today.

### Key Ideas / Information

- Although he began creating art when Abstract Expressionism's gestural brushstrokes were the dominant technique, Stella painted flat, smooth works that led the art world in another direction, towards Minimalism.
- Stella was an early advocate of making non-representational paintings, rather than artwork that alluded to underlying meanings, emotions or narratives. He wanted his audiences to appreciate color, shape and structure alone.
- Stella challenged the very notion of a painting by declaring his flat canvases, structured reliefs, metal protrusions and freestanding sculptures all to be paintings.

## DETAILED VIEW:

### Childhood

Frank Stella was born the oldest of three children to first-generation Italian-American parents. In his sophomore year of high school at Phillips Academy in Andover, MA, he began learning to paint from Abstractionist Patrick Morgan, who taught at the school.

Stella continued taking art courses at Princeton University while earning a degree in history. His Princeton professors, painter Stephen Greene and art historian William Seitz, introduced Stella to the New York art world by bringing him to exhibitions in the city, shaping his earliest artistic aesthetic.

## Early Training



These trips to New York galleries exposed Stella to artists such as Jackson Pollack, Franz Kline and particularly **Jasper Johns**. Johns' geometric paintings of flags and targets inspired Stella's work during his Princeton years. After graduating, Stella moved to the Lower East Side of New York, where he set up a studio in a former jeweler's store. Almost immediately, he drew massive attention from the art world. His innovative work, which utilized a monochromatic palette and flat surfaces, signaled a break from the thick, textural paint and gestural compositions of the Abstract Expressionists. Stella famously called a painting "a flat surface with paint on it - nothing more," which demonstrated his view of art as an object in itself, rather than a representation of something emotional, intellectual or physical. With their emphasis on form, not content, his early paintings are

often credited with helping to establish the Minimalist artistic movement. For his first major works, the stark "Black Paintings" (1958-1960), Stella covered canvases with black house paint, leaving unpainted pinstripes in repetitive, parallel patterns. At only 23 years old, he gained instant recognition for these intense paintings. The MoMA included four in its 1959-1960 *Sixteen Americans* exhibition and purchased one for the permanent collection. That same year, famed gallery owner Leo Castelli began representing Stella and his work.

### **Mature Period**

From his *Black Paintings*, Stella moved onto the *Aluminum Paintings* (1960) and the *Copper Paintings* (1960-1961), for which he created his own geometrically shaped canvases, challenging the traditional rectangular structure. Much of his work at this time drew on the stripe motif begun with the *Black Paintings*, but he soon expanded to brighter colors and worked complex circular forms into his compositions, especially in the *Irregular Polygon* (1965-1967) and *Protractor* (1967-1971) series. During this period, Stella also began delving into printmaking, an aspect of his work he passionately pursued throughout his career.



In 1970, Stella was the youngest artist to become the subject of a retrospective at MoMA, receiving a second in 1987. Following this exhibit, Stella reinvented himself once again, and began incorporating collage and relief into his paintings - an extension of the layered bands of color in his previous works. For the *Polish Village* series (1970-1973), he attached paper, felt and wood to canvas. And building on this trajectory, the later *Indian Birds* series (1977-1979) featured an assemblage of painted aluminum forms protruding from the wall. This growing focus on three-dimensionality and dynamic textures sharply contrasted the flat, smooth work that had first brought Stella into the public eye. He continued pushing the idea further, creating sculptural works marked by elaborate tangles of curves, spirals and loops, which were more representative of a Baroque style than his initial Minimalism. Yet, even these highly sculptural works are still "paintings" in Stella's eyes. He claimed, "A sculpture is just a painting cut out and stood up somewhere."

### Late Period

In 1980s and 1990s, Stella expanded his three-dimensional paintings into increasingly explosive, vividly colored and multifaceted pieces, while still continuing to create innovative prints. His series based on Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* includes works of all types, from metal reliefs, to giant sculptures, to mixed-media prints combining diverse techniques such as woodblock printing, etching and hand-coloring. After moving towards freestanding bronze and steel sculptures, Stella's work then grew to include architectural structures, reflecting his comment, "It's hard not to think about architecture when you've gone from painting to relief to sculpture." These works include an aluminum band shell in Miami (1999) and a monumental sculpture, *Prinz Friedrich von Homburg, Ein Schauspiel, 3X* (1998-2001), on the lawn of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. (1998-2001). Currently living and working in New York, Stella continues to create large-scale sculptures, as well as designs for potential architectural projects.



### Legacy

Frank Stella secured his place in art history as one of the first proponents of Minimalism, and has remained a key figure through his consistent ability to re-conceive his artistic directions. While many thought his earliest paintings were a rejection of Abstract Expressionism, Stella never viewed them as such, and his admiration for the movement's dynamism and tactility was realized in his later work.

### ARTISTIC INFLUENCES

Below are Frank Stella's major influences, and the people and ideas that he influenced in turn.

ARTISTS	CRITICS/FRIENDS	MOVEMENTS
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 <b>Jackson Pollock</b>	 <b>Clement Greenberg</b>	 <b>Abstract Expressionism</b>
 <b>Barnett Newman</b>	 <b>Richard Meier</b>	 <b>Minimalism</b>
 <b>Jasper Johns</b>	 <b>Philip Johnson</b>	 <b>Color Field Painting</b>
 <b>Hans Hofmann</b>		 <b>Pop Art</b>
 <b>Caravaggio</b>		

**INFLUENCES ON ARTIST**



**Frank Stella**

**Years Worked: 1958 - Present**



**INFLUENCED BY ARTIST**

ARTISTS	CRITICS/FRIENDS	MOVEMENTS
 <b>Frank Gehry</b>  <b>Daniel Libeskind</b>  <b>Sol LeWitt</b>  <b>Dan Flavin</b>	 <b>Donald Judd</b>  <b>Carl Andre</b>	 <b>Minimalism</b>  <b>Post-Painterly Abstraction</b>

**Quotes**

"What you see is what you see."

"A sculpture is just a painting cut out and stood up somewhere."

"Making art is complicated because the categories are always changing. You just have to make your own art, and whatever categories it falls into will come later."

"I think that many gestures artists make, gestures that seem casual and improbable but surprisingly effective in making art, can be made available to architecture."



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**Major Works:**



**Title:** The Marriage of Reason and Squalor, II

**Description:** *The Marriage of Reason and Squalor, II*, along with others from his *Black Paintings* series, catapulted Stella into the art world spotlight. Although inspired by the stripes in Jasper Johns' *Flag* paintings, Stella rejected representational imagery entirely and focused on creating objective shapes and designs. His flat, structured works initiated a new Minimalist direction in the New York art scene.

**Year:** 1959

**Materials:** Enamel on canvas

**Collection:** The Museum of Modern Art, New York



**Title:** Harran II

**Description:** Part of Stella's *Protractor* series, *Harran II* was named for an ancient Asia Minor city and illustrates his continuing interest in brightly colored stripes and rectilinear shapes. Yet, more importantly, it marked his initial foray into the use of curves and arcs, significant motifs on which he would expand in later paintings and sculptures.

**Year:** 1967

**Materials:** Polymer and fluorescent polymer paint on canvas

**Collection:** Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York



**Title:** Michapol I

**Description:** For his *Polish Village* series, *Michapol I* was inspired by Polish towns with intricately designed architecture and wooden synagogues. In these paintings, Stella added paper, felt, canvas, and wood to create reliefs. He moved away from the flatness of his earlier work and began utilizing the sculptural techniques that would become increasingly prevalent in later pieces.

**Year:** 1971

**Materials:** Mixed media on canvas

**Collection:** The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles



**Title:** Shoubeegi

**Description:** *Shoubeegi*, from the *Indian Birds* series, further elaborates on Stella's sculptural, layered motifs. Stella created this piece from painted honeycomb aluminum and integrated the etching technique he had been using for his prints. Despite its many three-dimensional elements and assembled parts, Stella views this piece, and others like it, as a painting or painted relief.

**Year:** 1978

**Materials:** Enamel and glitter on metal

**Collection:** San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco



**Title:** The Fountain

**Description:** Printmaking has been an important method in Stella's career since the 1960s. *The Fountain* is his most extensive work on paper and reflects his interest in multiple techniques and layers, featuring woodcut, collage, etching, screen-printing, and hand-coloring. This work is part of a large series of diverse pieces Stella created between 1985 and 1997 based on Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*.

**Year:** 1992

**Materials:** Print, relief, intaglio, stencil, collage and hand-coloring

**Collection:** National Gallery of Australia, Canberra



**Title:** Prinz Friedrich von Homburg, Ein Schauspiel, 3X

**Description:** After creating many paintings with three-dimensional elements protruding from the wall, Stella began producing freestanding sculptures comprised of spiraling

forms and clusters. Stella named *Prinz Friedrich von Homburg, Ein Schauspiel*, 3X after a play of the same name by 18th century German playwright Heinrich von Kleist. Sitting outside the National Gallery of Art, it is one of Stella's first monumental works. He has continued expanding in this direction, with both large-scale sculptures and architectural structures.

**Year:** 1998-2001

**Materials:** Stainless steel, aluminum, painted fiberglass and carbon fiber

**Collection:** National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.