

LEILA HELLER GALLERY.

FRANK STELLA

November 13 – January 4, 2016



La Scienza della Fiacca, 3.5x (1984)

Leila Heller Gallery Dubai is pleased to announce an exhibition of six large-scale, high-relief works by American artist Frank Stella, opening November 13th 2016. Known for his pioneering minimalism and post-painterly abstraction, this extraordinary collection of works represents Stella's heroic refutation of the moribund dialogue of the death of painting and refusal of the spiritualist discourse of abstraction. The artist seeks instead to supplant the illusionist window of the canvas with the literalist production of space in collaged, often high contrast aggressive forms—engaging as well as unsettling the viewer.

First rising to international recognition with his early series of *Black Paintings* (1958-1960), which founded the discourse of minimalism from the 1960s onward, by the late 1970s and early 1980s, Frank Stella pursued a practice to push the limits of the pictorial, exploding the bounds of the canvas in high-relief works which strove to paint without painting. This often led to experimentation not only in form, but also material. On a 1983 trip to Malta, in advance of his much celebrated series of lectures of Harvard University, entitled *Working Space* (compiled in a book of the name), Stella was influenced by the isle's fortified architecture. The resulting *Malta* series, of which *Zejtun* (1983) is a part, is, like *Blyvoors* (1982), composed in honeycombed aluminum, continuing the artist's previous use of metal forms to effectively attempt to both address and move beyond the bounds of painting: giving attention to edge and preserving the effects of the tableau while pursuing the continual materialization of space which has marked the trajectory of his entire oeuvre.

Also on display, *Giufa E La Berreta Rossa* (1985) (*Giufa and the Red Beret*) along with *La Scienza della Fiacca, 3.5x* (1984) (*The science of laziness, or The science of doing nothing*) are each seminal expressions of Stella's willful rejection of the common conceit that abstraction necessarily commands reduction; rather in a gesture towards narrative allusion in literalist space, here Stella presents dynamic studies in the limits of pictorial form—exploring, as Michael Auping notes for the artist's 2015 Whitney retrospective, "how

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much information he can load into abstraction." Taking inspiration from Paul Cézanne's famed admonishment to "Treat nature by the cylinder, the sphere, the cone," continuing, "everything in proper perspective so that each side of an object or a plane is directed towards a central point," both works belong to Stella's aptly named *Cones and Pillars* series (1984-1987), a bricolage of cyclical projections whose movement and instability is underlined by the continuous perspectival redirection of each collaged form. The artist calls the series itself, "a battle of forms fighting for position in the paintings", which also owe a debt to a late 19th century diagrammatic drawing in an architectural treatise on classical stonecutting. Here the stones float, protruding with both illusionist depth and literal vibrancy in a high contrast conflict of form. The artist also turns to his own Italian heritage naming each work after a chapter in Italo Calvino's Italian Folktales, themselves recounting ancient lore. In the former case, '*Giufa and the Red Beret*' recounts a fool cycle from Sicily, believed to be of Arab origin, while in the latter, '*The science of laziness*' relates the desire of a Turkish father, averse to labor, to have his son receive an education in the art of doing nothing.

Such storied, layered multivalence of form and meaning, Stella brings forward in his heroic Moby Dick series (1986-1997), represented here in the mixed media maquette, *The Honor and Glory of Whaling* (1991), one of several hundred works completed by Stella representing the 135 chapters of Melville's classic narrative. As though a metaphor for Stella's own Ahab-like unrelenting struggle against mythical weight of abstraction's limits as well as the limits of the picture plane, these physical, gestural works reveal a composition of ever more organic, dynamic forms.

About the artist:

Born in Malden, Massachusetts and based in New York City, Frank Stella (b. 1936) has produced an extraordinary body of work over the past six decades. Since his first solo gallery exhibition at Leo Castelli Gallery in 1960, Stella has exhibited widely throughout the U.S. and abroad. Early in his career, his work was included in a number of significant exhibitions that defined postwar art, including *Sixteen Americans* (Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1959), *Geometric Abstraction* (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1962) *The Shaped Canvas* (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1964-65), *Systemic Painting* (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1966), Documenta 4 (1968), and *Structure of Color* (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1971).

About the Gallery:

Since its establishment over three decades ago in New York, Leila Heller Gallery has gained worldwide recognition as a pioneer in promoting creative dialogue and exchange between Western artists and Middle Eastern, Central and Southeast Asian artists. It has garnered a reputation for identifying and cultivating the careers of artists leaving a lasting impact on contemporary art and culture. Currently representing a diverse roster of Western and Middle Eastern artists, the gallery is also active in the American, European and Middle Eastern secondary art markets. In November 2015, Leila Heller Gallery opened its first international location in Dubai's Alserkal Avenue. At 14,000 square feet, the state of the art gallery features three exhibition spaces, making it the largest gallery in the UAE. Showcasing leading regional and international artists, many of whom will be presenting their work in the Middle East for the first time, the gallery is dedicated to supporting the evolving practice of established artists.

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