

The  
Shaped  
Canvas,  
Revisited

LUXEMBOURG & DAYAN





"Systemic Painting", installation process, Lawrence Alloway (far right) installing artwork by Neil Williams and Frank Stella, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, September 1966. ©SRGF, NY.



"Shape and Structure," Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York, 1965.  
Photo: John D. Schiff. Courtesy of the Leo Baeck Institute

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# THE SHAPED CANVAS

DECEMBER 1964

THE SOLOMON R. GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM  
1071 FIFTH AVENUE      NEW YORK

Catalogue cover for "The Shaped Canvas"  
The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1964-65

# Foreword

The story of the shaped canvas has been intertwined with the history of painting for the last fifty years—a history shaped by rebellious acts against tradition. Like any worthwhile account of history in the making, it is a complex story that can be told in numerous ways: the shaped canvas can simultaneously be claimed by diverse and sprawling artistic movements, as well as by individual bursts of imagination; it has been utilized for various, often contradictory, conceptual purposes.

Our exhibition, “The Shaped Canvas, Revisited” seeks to present this narrative in its full complexity and breadth. We were inspired by various historical exhibitions that focused on the paradigm of the shaped canvas. Curator Lawrence Alloway’s seminal exhibition “The Shaped Canvas,” at the Guggenheim in 1964, marked what was then uncharted territory. Other exhibitions that followed presented an expansive selection of works united by their concern with shape as a dominant feature; these include “Shape and Structure” at Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York in 1965 (curated by Frank Stella, Henry Geldzahler, and Barbara Rose), and “Shaped Paintings” at the Visual Arts Museum, New York in 1979 (curated by Jeanne Siegel).

In many ways, the term “shaped canvas” registers as a throwback to the 1960s and 1970s. And though the notion of a shaped painting was not wholly invented then, this period is when it found its most pronounced start. As artists in the early 1960s were seeking to topple hierarchies in art—as in society—the prescribed rectangular canvas became a prime sounding board for experimentation. In order to truly start from a blank slate, painters felt compelled to reinvent its shape.

In New York, artists like Frank Stella and Kenneth Noland sawed and attached the wooden stretcher bars in various ways, so that their abstract paintings took on new forms as they moved away from

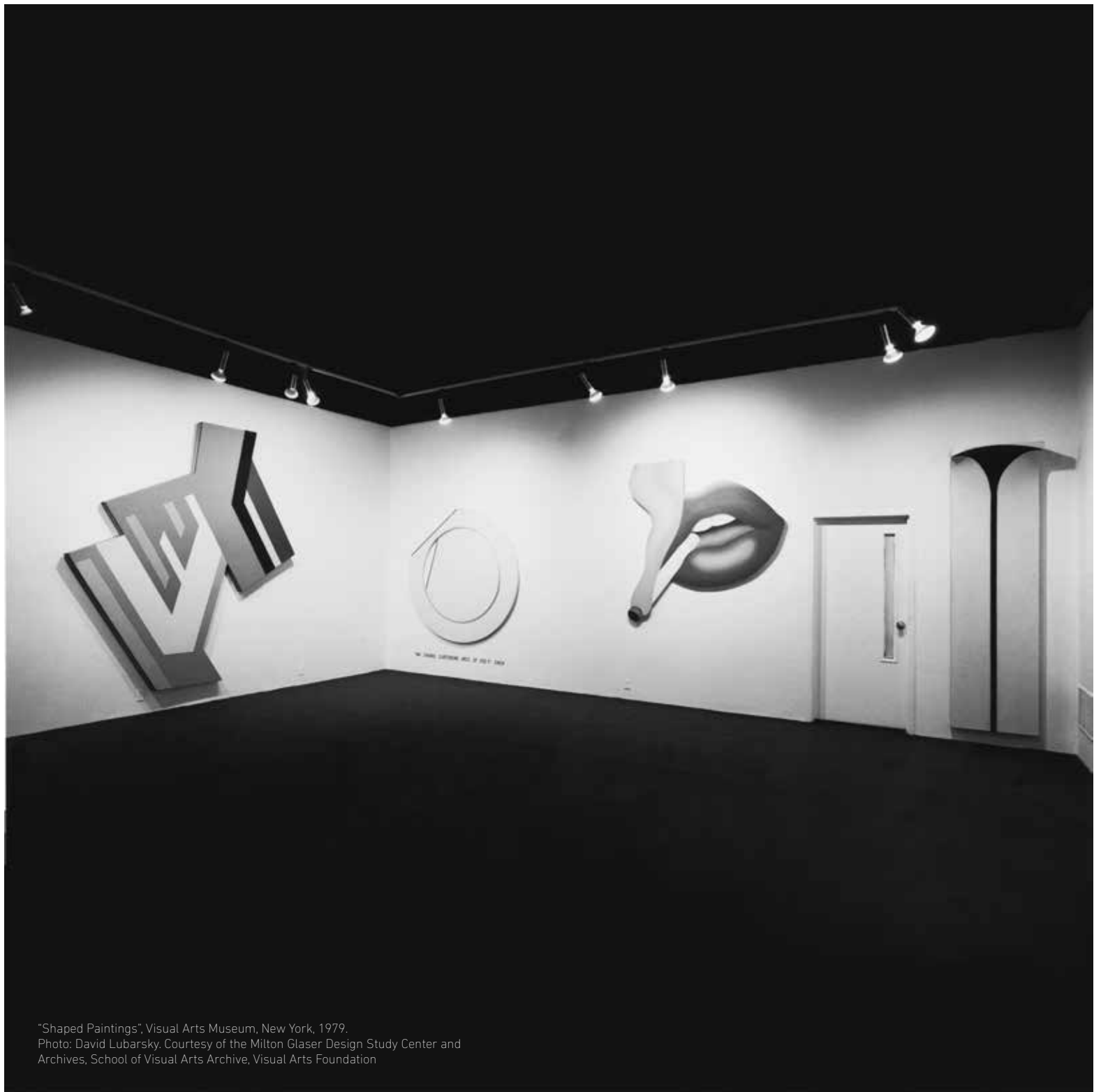
illusory space and into real space. A similar shift occurred concurrently in Milan and Rome, where artists such as Lucio Fontana, Pino Pascali, and Paolo Scheggi variedly assaulted the standardized, flat rectangular support of painting.

Other artists working in the figurative vein of Pop art, like Tom Wesselmann and James Rosenquist, began shaping the canvas to emphasize and play with the outline of their pictorial compositions, creating a sense of “high definition” in their crisp cut-outs. And still others, like Richard Tuttle, Claes Oldenburg, and Lynda Benglis, independently used the canvas sans stretcher as material to be morphed, stuffed, twisted, or simply to be left as a shell hovering on the wall.

We could not have done this exhibition without the generous participation of galleries, private collections, and the following artists’ studios and estates: Ron Gorchov, Mary Heilmann, Charles Hinman, Wyatt Kahn, the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation, Nate Lowman, Olivier Mosset, Claes Oldenburg, Richard Prince, Frank Stella, and the Tom Wesselmann Estate. We are particularly indebted to artists Justin Adian, John Armleder, Jeremy DePrez, Jacob Kassay, and Rebecca Ward, who were inspired by the concept and created works especially for the exhibition. Additionally, we would like to extend our appreciation to Barbara Betrozzi Castelli, Marianne Boesky, Dominique Lévy, and Lisa Spellman for their support.

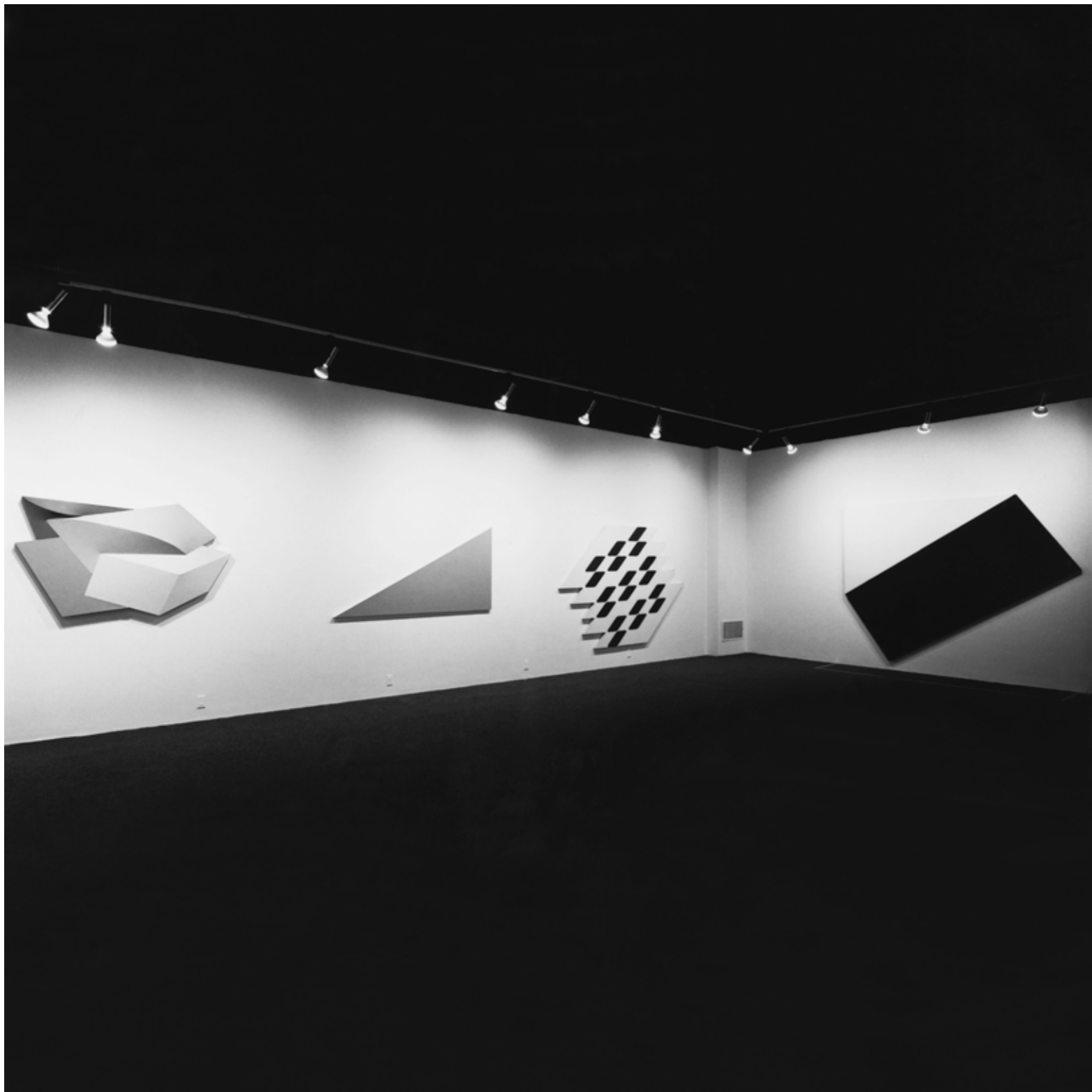
Finally, we would like to thank Frank Stella and Suzanne Hudson for their fascinating conversation conducted for this catalogue that illuminates the roots of the shaped canvas, and helps to shed new light on Stella’s paramount role within this narrative.

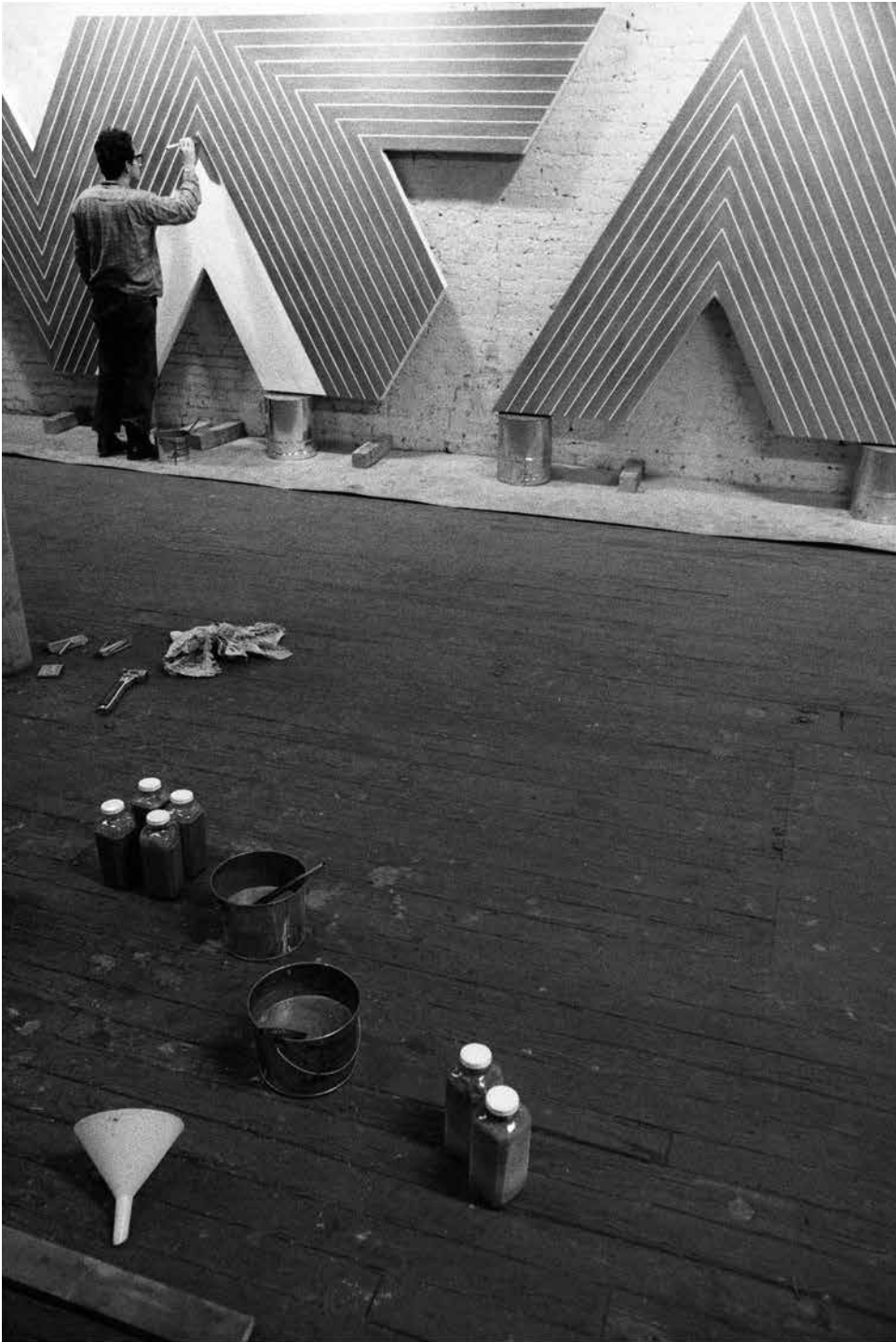
Luxembourg & Dayan  
New York, May 2014



"Shaped Paintings", Visual Arts Museum, New York, 1979.  
Photo: David Lubarsky, Courtesy of the Milton Glaser Design Study Center and  
Archives, School of Visual Arts Archive, Visual Arts Foundation







# Interview with Frank Stella

## Suzanne Hudson

In 1959, Frank Stella exhibited a suite of “Black Paintings” (1958–60) at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in the context of Dorothy Miller’s contemporary exhibition “Sixteen Americans.” Like most of the shows in the “Americans” series, mounted between 1942 and 1963, “Sixteen Americans” sought to introduce the public to an array of painting and sculpture by established and emerging artists—like Stella, newly graduated from Princeton. With this series, Miller aimed to expose the incommensurable nature of simultaneous practice (though there were exceptions: “Fifteen Americans,” 1952, showcased the New York School, and “Americans 1963” displayed a Pop sensibility). As she wrote on the occasion of the pervasively catholic “Sixteen Americans,” “Differences rather than similarities in point of view, as well as in age, experience and fame, have been emphasized in these exhibitions at the Museum. . . . ‘Sixteen Americans’ continues the pattern by bringing together distinct and widely varying personalities, contrasting these personalities sharply rather than attempting to unite them within any given movement or trend.”<sup>1</sup>

Stella’s presence in the show was decisive. His paintings, like *The Marriage of Reason and Squalor, II* (1959), which the museum purchased out of “Sixteen Americans,” comprised black, commercial enamel stripes, laid down freehand with a housepainter’s brush in patterns that relate to the physical limitations of the support. Dismantling illusionism, Stella achieved symmetry without perspective by placing lines parallel to one another. Indeed, he was keen to turn pictorial space into something decidedly physical. He insisted on the surface as an entity that gains in significance relative to the literal edge of where that flat ground stops. In the years that followed, Stella’s “Black Paintings” only grew in critical import, with Michael Fried finding in the work of his friend continuance of modernist painting; meanwhile, others in his cohort (including studio-mate Carl Andre and Donald Judd) saw Stella’s work as harbingers of an object-oriented Minimalism that would skew to the production of sculpture. Figuring Stella as a crux within advanced art of the 1960s is not an overstatement.

Important as this history is, it has tended to fix Stella in 1959. It accounts for neither the work he was doing just before—brightly colored stripe paintings inspired by the motif of the flag as painted by Jasper Johns—nor for major paintings to come just after.<sup>2</sup> If the “Black Paintings” make the support active, the shaped canvases that Stella began in 1960 are their

1. Dorothy C. Miller, foreword to *Sixteen Americans*, ed. Dorothy C. Miller (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1959), 6.

2. For a discussion of Stella’s move to the “Black Paintings,” see Harry Cooper and Megan R. Luke, *Frank Stella 1958* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

Opposite: Frank Stella in his Studio at 84 Walker Street, New York, 1964. Photo: Ugo Mulas © Ugo Mulas Heirs



Matthias Grünewald  
*The Isenheim Altarpiece* (closed), ca. 1515  
 Oil and tempera on limewood panels  
 106 x 256 in. (269 x 650 cm)  
 Musée d'Interlinden, Colmar  
 Photo: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY

logical apotheosis, in that they make visible in even more startling ways that fundamental element of the armature. Of course, all canvases are shaped, if their geometry is naturalized in standard presentational formats: They are rectangles or squares, most commonly, but also circles (e.g., Renaissance tondos) or something else entirely, as in a medieval altarpiece or a panel fitted into architectural constraints. Stella made these norms focal, even a nominal subject.

Stella's "Benjamin Moore Paintings" (1961) are emphatically squares (painted with the eponymous brand's alkyd house paints), and the same can be said of his "Concentric Squares and Mitered Mazes" (1962–63), though more often he worked against perfect forms. He maintained one-color formats in the notched "Aluminum Paintings" (1960) yet cut away corners and deeper midline grooves, then moved on to the H-, L-, U-, and T-shaped "Copper Paintings" (1960–61), which even more decisively broke with the rectangle and allowed for fuller incorporation of the gallery walls as pictorial incident. The "Purple Paintings" (1963) were named for friends — a decagon for Emile de Antonio; a parallelogram for Carl Andre; a square for Hollis Frampton; a triangle for Leo Castelli — and implied picture frames in their orientations around central voids.

While William S. Rubin, who curated Stella's 1970 retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art, would name the artist a "pioneer of the 'shaped canvas,'" <sup>3</sup> Stella was not singular in this regard, nor did he imagine himself to be. In fact, he was rendered generational in his participation in Lawrence Alloway's 1964 exhibition "The Shaped Canvas" at the Guggenheim Museum, where he was shown alongside Paul Feeley, Sven Lukin, Richard Smith, and Neil Williams. In the show's catalog, Alloway began forthrightly by pronouncing, "A shaped canvas is not sculpture. It may be three-dimensional, in that it carries projections or is opened up, but it retains connections with the paintings we are accustomed to, flat right-angled planes on the wall. Notches and serrations, points and curves, do not separate these works from painting." <sup>4</sup> Donald Judd objected to the exhibition on precisely these terms, charging that it did not represent "the development of painting to three-dimensional work," even as he maintained Stella's preeminence therein (he was, according to Judd, "the outstanding practitioner" of this format). <sup>5</sup>

Remaining within the conventions of painting and extending the implications of his own "notches and serrations," Stella worked with V-shapes in subsequent works (as in the "Notched V Paintings" and the "Running V Paintings," both completed in the aftermath of the Guggenheim show). With chevron-shaped sections abutting one another, these paintings allow for greater irregularity of overall contour while indulging in a kind of perceptual play of recession and expansion. Stella moved away from paintings divided by lines with the "Irregular Polygons" (1965–66), which are organized according to flat, colored planes and banding. Each of the eleven templates of the "Irregular Polygons" exists in four versions that preserve the integrity of the outline while employing different interlocking color combinations. <sup>6</sup> Some involve DayGlo fluorescents, and all embrace surprisingly illusionistic depth (if to varying degrees), as would the paintings in the "Protractor Series" (1967–71), which are activated by interlacing and interpenetrating curvilinear bands of riotous color in a dynamic equilibrium.

These later-'60s efforts demonstrate that the Sisyphean task of ridding painting of illusion was never accomplished — perhaps for the best. (Even earlier, Stella's *Line Up* [1962], a grisaille square with vibrating intensities, was selected for MoMA's 1965 show "The Responsive Eye," an important outing in the history of Op art.) This retreat from anti-illusionism might be

3. William S. Rubin, *Frank Stella* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1970), 50.

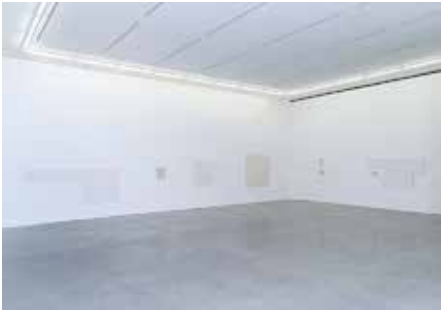
4. Lawrence Alloway, *The Shaped Canvas* (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1964), n.p. Other important exhibitions around the shaped canvas in these years include Stella's own curatorial venture with Henry Geldzahler and Barbara Rose, "Shape and Structure" at Tibor de Nagy Gallery (1965), as well as "Painting: Out from the Wall" at the Des Moines Art Center (1967) and "Shaped Paintings" at The Visual Arts Museum (1979).

5. Donald Judd, "The Shaped Canvas," *Arts Magazine* 39 (February 1965), reprinted in *Donald Judd: Complete Writings, 1959–1975*, 161.

6. For an extended discussion of these works, see Brian P. Kennedy, *Frank Stella: Irregular Polygons, 1965–66* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England for the Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, 2010).

deemed a lapse if one assumes either stasis or positivistic telos as the key explanatory model. For his part, Stella doggedly pursued series after series, exploiting the possibilities afforded by the established parameters of each set — and then he moved on, sometimes in ways that contravene priorities past, and sometimes quite the opposite. Regardless, the point is that Stella did move on, which makes the appropriation of the shaped canvas on the part of so many artists today that much more arresting. This contemporary recovery testifies to Stella's prescience, even as it offers an instance of historical parallax, returning to the would-be source to make meaning in the present. Still, the priority of the shaped canvas now remains asynchronous with Stella's more recent expressionistic wall reliefs and even his forays into architecture proper, no less than his longstanding involvement with printmaking.

On the eve of the fiftieth anniversary of "The Shaped Canvas," I sat down with Stella to retrace these years, and to discuss the turn to the shaped canvas, again.



Jacob Kassay  
IJK  
303 Gallery, New York,  
November 1 - December 20, 2013  
Installation view  
© Jacob Kassay, courtesy 303 Gallery, New York

**Suzanne Hudson** In recent years it seems that there has been something of a resurgence of deliberately and maybe even extravagantly shaped canvases, canvases that foreground their having been shaped into something with irregular angles or at least attenuated outlines. For example, there was a show that Cheyney Thompson did at Andrew Kreps in 2009 that addressed the materiality of canvas and its historical formats. For these works, Thompson scanned, enlarged, and reproduced the grid of a section of raw linen on a series of new canvases of different shapes and sizes — the circular format of a Renaissance tondo, or a narrow band, or a lozenge. More recently, Julia Dault has been making what she calls "drapes," which are stretcher-less shaped paintings that hang from a nail or pin and need to be remade with each hanging. Or yet one more example: Jacob Kassay. He has been spray-painting raw linen in irregular shapes — they relate to the dimensions of leftover scraps of canvas — with a speckled paint. It seems like the idea of using the stretcher (or lack thereof) in this particular way calls attention to both the painting's physical parameters as an object and the conventions of painting. Maybe these artists even use that conventionality, and the shaping as part of its history, as the basis for their work. When you first began your shaped canvases, did you see this move as within the tradition of painting?

**Frank Stella** You need to be pretty weird to think that you are stepping outside the history of painting when you make a painting, I mean weird or ignorant.

**SH** I guess I am asking about the conditions that for artists today are a given, which for you were harder won. To explode a rectangle, say. Your work from the 1960s feels so rigorous and structural in your working through the possibilities of the support.

**FS** Well, it's probably true. But I don't know about being a touchstone for artists now. I mean, I think the shaped canvas is just *there*.

**SH** You don't think that things are more or less alive at different moments? These possibilities may have been there all along, but for whatever reason they are especially engaging at some times and not others.

**FS** You know, it depends. Here you focus on the idea and you put it in a show and that means something. But it's still a small piece of the pie. I'm now old enough that I really don't see much of what's going on anymore. Not necessarily by choice, but I just don't get to see it because time runs out and the space runs out: physical limitations. And unfortunately, most of the people who used to tell me about what's going on are gone.

**SH** Let's talk about some of the early works and how you arrived at the shaped canvases.



Jasper Johns  
*Target*, 1958  
Oil and collage on canvas  
36 x 36 in. (91.44 x 91.44 cm)  
Collection of the Artist  
Photo: The Bridgeman Art Library  
© Jasper Johns/VAGA, New York, NY

**FS** When I was working in school [Princeton, 1954–58], I did a lot of things that were a bit like Robert Rauschenberg. Somehow I got onto Jasper's show [Jasper Johns's 1958 show at Leo Castelli Gallery] with the target. I actually don't remember seeing a flag there, but maybe it was in a magazine? Anyway, then I started making paintings with bands, and they were basically abstract versions of landscape paintings. The bands went from one side of the canvas to the other in such a way that you became pretty conscious of the shape that you were working on, just because you were traveling across it with a band of color. I kept making these banded paintings when I came to New York in 1958. I made them a little more complicated and a little larger. I also introduced some—well, you could call them figurative elements, or you could call them holes. I put blocks in the middle of the field of bands, and I worked around those. I had a lot of variations on it, and actually I kind of liked it. And then I had another idea, which was for the "Black Paintings." I was looking at some diagonals, and I painted one out one night, and it looked pretty good in the morning. Then I began to think that I didn't have to use a lot of color and instead would just have a program of painting them black.

**SH** With the earlier paintings, was the palette something you thought a lot about, especially since they do suggest landscapes?

**FS** No, I never thought much about it. I used whatever was at hand, the simplest thing, like just about everybody did. I would buy paint on the street, cheap house paint, usually paint that had gone out of style. That's how I got a lot of greens and pinks.

**SH** This was in Princeton or in the city?

**FS** This was in New York, when I had my studio on Eldridge Street.

**SH** Were you seeing a lot of shows when you were in college, before you moved?

**FS** Yeah, I had a pretty good idea of what was going on. All I really cared about was Abstract Expressionist painting. You know, the de Kooning and Kline, Pollock and Newman, Rothko and Gottlieb syndrome.

**SH** Was the Princeton museum doing any interesting shows during those years?

**FS** No, they've never done any interesting shows at Princeton. They have an unblemished record. (*laughter*) They didn't need to, because everybody went into the city.

**SH** Did the American paintings in the collection mean anything to you at the time?

**FS** I don't even know if there were any there. If there were, they were pretty well hidden. But I knew painting, the American painting, before I came there from high school [at Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts]. The Addison Gallery had a very good collection. And of course things were available in New York.

**SH** Your works are often completed as a series, sometimes with a number of variations that you anticipate from the outset. But when you started the "Black Paintings," did you have any idea of them as being an open series that you might return to?

**FS** I think it's pretty clearly laid out in Brenda Richardson's book.<sup>7</sup> I started by making a set of working drawings.

**SH** Did you feel from the beginning that once you had gone through the permutations that corresponded with the drawings, it would be a closed set? Or did you think that you might do more at some later juncture?

**FS** I didn't have any strong feelings about that. I was just working day to day on what I had. I didn't have any idea of the ending or the beginning.

**SH** It seems like the subtle variations among the different versions take on an amplified significance within the series.

**FS** I think you can say that, but the reality is that you make them and then you don't worry about it too much. You just see how they work.

**SH** Which of the "Black Paintings" do you think work especially well?

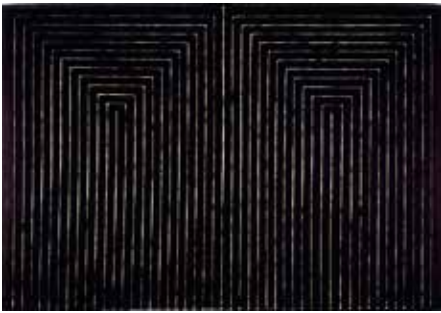
**FS** I didn't have the sense that any were more important than the others. They did vary as it went on. Some of them became difficult because the lines weren't very straight. When you draw on the canvas on the floor, you have a line to follow, but when you stretch that canvas with the pencil line and paint on it, all those straight lines curved. People don't talk about that too much.

**SH** I've noticed that some seem to have a slight slope.

**FS** Yeah, and a couple of them were so bad that I repainted them, trying to straighten them up a little bit.

**SH** What made you want to move beyond the rectangle?

**FS** Nothing. I mean, I didn't really move beyond the rectangle. I worked on the "Aluminum Paintings," which were something like the stripe of the "Black Paintings" with a jump in it... sort of like an electric circuit. I showed the drawings for those to Darby Bannard, who was working in Princeton and also working in a frame shop. I said, the problem is that at the end



Frank Stella  
*The Marriage of Reason and Squalor II*, 1959  
Enamel on canvas  
90 3/4 x 132 3/4 in. (230.5 x 337.2 cm)  
Collection of the Artist  
Photo: Art Resource, NY  
© Frank Stella / ARS, NY

7. Brenda Richardson, *The Black Paintings* (Baltimore: The Baltimore Museum of Art, 1976)

you get to lift over square, and he said, well, if you don't like it, take it out. So I built the canvases with notches, and that seemed to work pretty well. Once you did that, you could make any kind of shape.

**SH** How long were you simultaneously working on the "Black Paintings" and the shaped canvases? Or did you finish the one before beginning the other?

**FS** I always had plans, and I had drawings that I was thinking about. At that time I was building my own stretchers, so I did not get too far ahead of myself. Basically I did one at a time. Several canvases would be stretched up, but I usually worked on one at a time.

**SH** How did you actually stretch them, the ones with the notches?

**FS** Well, they tend to wrinkle in the corners—that's a tough problem. But over time they sort of smooth out. You re-stretch them and they're pretty good. Theoretically, you could re-weave the canvas where it is cut, and you could get it right. But nobody has bothered to do that yet.

**SH** They look very taut, though.

**FS** Yeah, sometimes. The wood is old, so it expands.

**SH** Have any of them needed new structures?

**FS** I don't know. I hope not. You could reinforce the old stretchers, but to build new ones—I don't know, it seems like a tacky idea to me.

**SH** Even if it is a conservation issue?

**FS** Well, it's not a conservation issue unless something is eating the wood.

**SH** You would rather have the bow expand?

**FS** Well, it doesn't expand much, and anyway they're pretty stable by now.

**SH** How about the paints? How are they holding up?

**FS** They've lasted better than they should have. They're all industrial paints. The enamel was a particularly cheap version. The aluminum was so standard that people usually used it for covering railings. People want to call it radiator paint, but I don't I think it was. And the copper paint in the "Copper Paintings" is antifouling paint. That is pretty hard to work with, actually. It's granular; there are real particles, and they drag on the brush.

**SH** Did you do tests with the different materials before you started working with them?

**FS** No, no testing. It's not about testing.



**SH** Were there paints that you tried that just didn't work out?

**FS** There was one, a metallic aluminum paint that was supposed to be purple [for the "Purple Paintings"]. It was just too light-sensitive, so it looks silver now, or kind of aluminum. The paintings look okay; it's just that originally they were a different color. But they are simple enough, and the color was really not that important.

**SH** Did the color become even less important to you at a certain point?

**FS** Working with the industrial-strength paints meant that the color was simply given, so I didn't have to worry about it. It was just there.

**SH** But some of your work seems to be about color relations. I would even think of you as a colorist in the "Irregular Polygons." As it becomes less about lines and more about juxtaposed shapes, the relationships of colors, one next to another, becomes so important in establishing those optical and spatial relationships.

**FS** You can say all those things, but the reality is that you work with what's available. I mean, it's sort of like a guy playing the saxophone: The notes are what's given, but the music is about what he plays when he's not looking at the notes.

**SH** Once you moved back into color — out of the "Black Paintings" — did you make more deliberate choices about where to put which colors?

**FS** You know, you just don't want it to be like the one you did before, and you want to try things out.

**SH** How did you get into DayGlo, the fluorescence?

**FS** That was another commercial paint. I didn't use art paint, oil paint, until very much later.

**SH** But you used an art-grade support?

**FS** The canvas? I used what everybody else was using, unsized cotton duck, which was easy to stretch.

**SH** There has been so much written about the width of the stretchers, the depth of the paintings. Would you say a little bit about that decision and the implications of that choice? It played a big role in how your work was first experienced and talked about.

**FS** Well, it's just the easiest way to build a stretcher. I guess technically it's called a restrainer. You put the wood on one end like that and then you just nail it together so it's easy to figure out what size you're going to make. Then you go to the lumberyard and have it cut and come back and nail them together.



Frank Stella  
*Tuftonboro III, 1966*  
Fluorescent alkyd and epoxy paint on canvas  
100 ¼ x 110 ½ x 3 in. (254.6 x 280.6 x 7.6 cm)  
Photo: Steven Sloman / Art Resource, NY  
© Frank Stella/ARS, NY

**SH** How did you feel about the critical responses to the “Black Paintings” in “Sixteen Americans” or afterwards?

**FS** I didn’t think about it too much. Most of the criticism was hostile, but I was lucky to have very good support. With Leo Castelli and Alfred Barr in your corner, you know, you don’t have to worry very much about what other people are saying.

**SH** Right, you weren’t doing so badly.

**FS** There was a certain amount of luck to it. There was quite a group of younger painters, like Jim Rosenquist. It was a good time; as painters you didn’t have to wait until you were thirty-five or forty years old to get noticed. It was just a big sea change in the attitude towards young artists, and I happened to benefit from it. Nobody cared what anybody said as long as you got attention. And, you know, it wasn’t like you made money or anything; it was a great achievement to be self-supporting.

**SH** With people like Donald Judd writing criticism, did you ever feel pulled to participate in that way?

**FS** No, I wasn’t really interested in it. I mean, my wife [Barbara Rose] was a critic. One in the house was enough for me.

**SH** Let’s talk a bit more about the shaped canvases. How did you start devising the compositions once you had begun doing the notches? Did you think about composition in the same way as you had with a rectangular support, or did you feel that the notches immediately demanded a different response?

**FS** Once you start thinking about shaping the perimeter, you begin to notice that it’s always been there. There have been crucifixes shaped like crosses. I was doing things that were relatively simple at the time, and I just thought, okay, well, I have done the notches and that’s pretty nice. I had already made geometric, full-size canvases with simple designs. I was really interested in an abstract idea that was simple. I went back and looked at the drawings for the “Black Paintings” and tried to think about how much I could take away from a painting and have it still be a painting. Not a cutout or something, but a painting that retained that pictorial quality instead of having a design quality. *Creede* (1961) was a pretty good example. I had taken away as much as I could and you still got the sense of it being a painting. You could still feel the rest of the rectangle or the square or whatever. That was what it was about.

**SH** From that point, you started doing sketches for what would become the “Irregular Polygons,” but there were a couple of series in between.

**FS** There was something kind of in between. But my basic interest was to find geometry that was more expansive and not so defensive.

**SH** How did you do that?

**FS** I'm not sure I knew at the time.

**SH** How did all this relate to the Guggenheim's "Shaped Canvas" show in 1964?

**FS** I never even saw that show. And I had already made these drawings before '64. I did know Malevich. The "Black Paintings" seemed to me what geometric painting had come to be in America and in Europe and South America. Basically the issue was that abstract painting had somehow skipped Malevich and got hung up on Mondrian, and everyone read Mondrian as dividing up a surface or space. And I didn't. I was thinking about the shapes. If you put a triangle in a square, if you float it on the square, what happens? You get a triangle on a background. People would put another triangle or square on the bottom or something, but they were always staying within the perimeter, and I was just thinking, well, what happens if you don't? There is the famous painting by Malevich with a black rectangle and a blue triangle, and he just fixed it in. I did that, first overlapping with a sort of collage, and then I began working on drawings with ideas about shapes penetrating each other. And then something happened that was interesting: It stopped being about geometry relating to each other. In other words, the triangle stopped relating in any way to the square.

That was because I was hung up on these stripes and bands, so I was outlining. I was outlining the triangle, and then internally drawing another triangle so that I had bands in there. When I pushed the bands into the rectangle or the square, they had a really interesting quality to them. You could feel something like what happens when you make sculpture. It was as though the Z-shape could expel the triangle, like it was spring-loaded. It was as though they were forced together, which was a very different idea from dividing a surface. They became more active. It's not a big deal, but it looks really interesting.

**SH** I recently reread the transcript that Lucy Lippard edited of a conversation with you and Judd (and Dan Flavin edited out).<sup>8</sup> I was surprised by how nationalist the rhetoric around precedents got, with Judd talking about throwing out all of European tradition.

**FS** Yeah, but these paintings actually did it. Not that they were trying; that wasn't their goal. I wasn't thinking about taking some kind of pragmatic stand against European humanism, though that was perfectly okay to do. Most of the stuff that came from Europe at that time was pretty gushy and suspect in a lot of ways; it wasn't serious. So I didn't disagree with the idea, but it wasn't important to me.

**SH** So what concerns got you up in front of a canvas every morning?

**FS** No concerns. That's just the only thing I like doing. And I always had programs; I always had plenty to do. With the "Irregular Polygons" I had eleven ideas that I was sure of and I was building four of each. So that was going to keep me busy for a couple of years anyway! By then I had another idea, about the "Protractor Paintings," and then that kept me busy for a while.

**SH** How did you deal with the issue of the mark? I think somewhere you say something to the effect of, instead of painting the gesture, the whole shaped canvas becomes the gesture.



Kazimir Malevich,  
*Black Square, Blue Triangle*, 1915  
Oil on canvas  
26 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 22 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>16</sub> (66.5 x 57 cm)  
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam  
Photo: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY

8. [Interview with Bruce Glaser, "Questions to Stella and Judd," ed. Lucy R. Lippard, *Art News*, (September 1966)].



Hollis Frampton  
#3 (*painting Getty Tomb*) from "The Secret World of  
Frank Stella", 1958-62  
Black and white photograph  
Photo: Albright-Knox Art Gallery/Art Resource, NY

**FS** It was set in the "Black Paintings," or even before that, when I was dragging the brush or painting my way across the canvas. It's relatively uninflected, and I worked as a house painter, so that's the way I painted. I didn't need to find any other technique.

**SH** You play with the edges so carefully.

**FS** Yeah, yeah. We used to put wood on the side to protect it, and that's all. I never worried about that until the metal paintings, when I worried about painting behind them. But I got tired of that, too.

**SH** So they are painted all the way around?

**FS** Some are painted on the back later.

**SH** I wanted to ask you about the idea of decoration, which comes up a lot.

**FS** It was a kind of cliché out there that abstract painting was decorative. And then abstract painting had to prove that it wasn't decorative in order to be as good as—I don't know what, because there wasn't any non-abstract painting that was any good at the time, certainly not in the '50s and '60s. It's hard to know what people were talking about; you assume they were talking about Michelangelo or Botticelli. Anyway, the way people thought about it, it was just a pure kind of trivial abstraction, which shows that they didn't think very much about art.

**SH** Are there other points of contention that you have with what has been written about you?

**FS** There is a little overemphasis on the idea that the "Black Paintings" were so different from the other painting that was going on. Actually, if you look at them now, they really look a lot like Rothko and Newman. They were intended to be Abstract Expressionist paintings. That's what I wanted them to be. I think maybe with the aluminum and the copper paint, I did sort of drift away. But people had already decided that the "Black Paintings" had signaled that departure. It didn't really happen until later, though. And by then I was interested in something else.

**SH** That makes me think about your titles. Do they come before or after the paintings?

**FS** Sometimes I have them before, and sometimes I find them afterwards. When I made the drawings, I often made title notations on the side.

**SH** Most of the titles have a personal resonance, no? The public can relate to them, but they are actually very private, about friends or places that you have connections with.

**FS** Yeah, I never thought about it very much. I don't see why a painting shouldn't have a title. There was the assumption that abstract paintings could just be numbered. That didn't thrill me. I like K.R.H. Sonderborg. He titled his paintings with minutes, seconds, and hundredths of a second, using a stopwatch. They are pretty good titles, actually; the paintings weren't that bad either.

**SH** Well, a title is definitely a gift to people who want to know with certainty which painting is being talked about. Judd's system is really tricky. But that's a question of how things get sorted more than a philosophical question about how meaning gets attached to something. Why the landscape titles?

**FS** It fit into the way the pieces came out.

**SH** Did you want people to read them in relation to the compositions, or are they red herrings? Or something else?

**FS** I didn't care. Nobody worries about how people are going to understand their paintings. You can't think about that. You can only worry about what you're doing.

**SH** What was it like to be working in the middle of so many people saying such different things? Did it make you want to be—I don't know if the word would be *defensive* or *proactive*. Or did you try to frame the interpretation in any way? Or you just kind of said, well, this is what I'm doing and you guys can figure it out?

**FS** It really wasn't anything to think about, because people were always talking about something I was finished with, so it wasn't that relevant to what I was doing.

**SH** It wasn't relevant to how you considered a future series or the next work or even the one that you were doing at that moment?

**FS** I never know what that is going to be. I only know about the here and now. No one is ever talking about that. They are always talking about last week or what next week should be.

**SH** How did you deal with past works? Were there issues of translation from page to painting? Of scale, even?

**FS** No, I mean, you have hopes for some things, and they are all basically the same.

**SH** When you got a painting on the wall, did you ever decide to rotate it?

**FS** Yeah. *Union* (1966) was originally upside-down. John Kasmin came in the studio and said, turn it around. I turned it and it was a lot better.

**SH** Ideally, how high do you want them hung?

**FS** Well, all of the "Irregular Polygons," including *Union*, are pretty close to the floor, mainly because most places aren't that tall.

**SH** Is it important to you that they become relational to our body in that way, because of their size and also their placement?



Frank Stella  
*Union I*, 1966  
Fluorescent alkyd and epoxy paint on canvas  
(265.4 x 441.3 x 10.5 cm)  
Photo: Detroit Institute of Arts, USA/Founders Society  
Purchase/Friends of Modern Art Fund/The Bridgeman  
Art Library  
© Frank Stella / ARS, NY

**FS** Yeah, it's hard to tell; everything is so big or so small that there's not much room for discretion. I always wanted things closer to the floor than everybody else hangs them. And now I find myself actually wanting new things I'm working on up higher.

**SH** Why?

**FS** I don't know why, I can't tell you. I just don't like them down low. I like them centered at about fifty-five inches—that's usually the center line for ordinary paintings.

**SH** To come back to the present, are the shaped works still important for you now, and if so, how?

**FS** Maybe they are in the past, in a sense, but everything is shaped now. There's no problem with calling something a shaped canvas, it makes things just a little more complicated. Or maybe it isn't so different. Building in three dimensions is not so unusual.

**SH** How do you regard their significance for you, the work you made with shaped canvases in the '60s? Do you think back on them much?

**FS** No, and I hardly ever see them. They are long gone.

# Biographies

**Frank Stella** (b. 1936) is a leading American painter and printmaker, known for pioneering Minimalism and post-painterly abstraction. His work was first shown in the exhibition *Sixteen Americans* (1959–60), organized by Dorothy Miller at the Museum of Modern Art, which heralded a new generation of American avant-garde artists following Abstract Expressionism. Stella's work was subsequently included in exhibitions that came to define the 1960s, such as "The Shaped Canvas" (1964–65) and "Systemic Painting" (1966), both at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. In 1970, The Museum of Modern Art mounted a retrospective of his work, making him the youngest artist to hold this institutional honor. Since then, he has been the subject of numerous retrospectives in the United States, Europe and Asia, most recently at the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg in Germany (2012–13). In 1984, Stella delivered the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures at Harvard University on the subject of Baroque pictorial space and its possibilities for abstraction, later published in a book format titled *Working Space* (Harvard University Press, 1986). Among many other distinctions, Stella holds an Honorary Doctorate of Arts from Princeton University, Dartmouth College and Brandeis University, as well as the award of *Ordre des Arts et des Lettres* from the French Government. He is the recipient of the 2009 National Medal of Arts, awarded to him by President Barack Obama.

**Suzanne Hudson** (b. 1977) is Assistant Professor of Art History and Fine Arts at the University of Southern California. Her work has centered on the history of painting and abstraction in the twentieth and twenty-first century, which she approaches through a variety of perspectives that encompass process, pedagogy, American philosophy, and theories of aesthetics and institutions. She is co-founder of the Contemporary Art Think Tank and the Society of Contemporary Art Historians, for which she currently serves as President Emerita and Chair of the Executive Committee. She previously taught in the University of Illinois, The New School University, Princeton University, and at the Whitney Museum of American Art. A regular contributor to *Artforum*, her writing has also appeared in such publications as *Parkett*, *Flash Art*, *Art Journal*, and *October*, as well as numerous catalogs and artist monographs, including *Blinky Palermo* (Dia Art Foundation, 2010) and *Christopher Wool* (Guggenheim Museum, 2013). She is the author of *Robert Ryman: Used Paint* (MIT Press, 2009; 2011) and the co-editor of *Contemporary Art: 1989–Present* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2013). Her book *Painting Now* is forthcoming from Thames & Hudson. She is currently at work on a manuscript on Agnes Martin and a study of the roots of process art in America.

## Installation Views

Luxembourg & Dayan

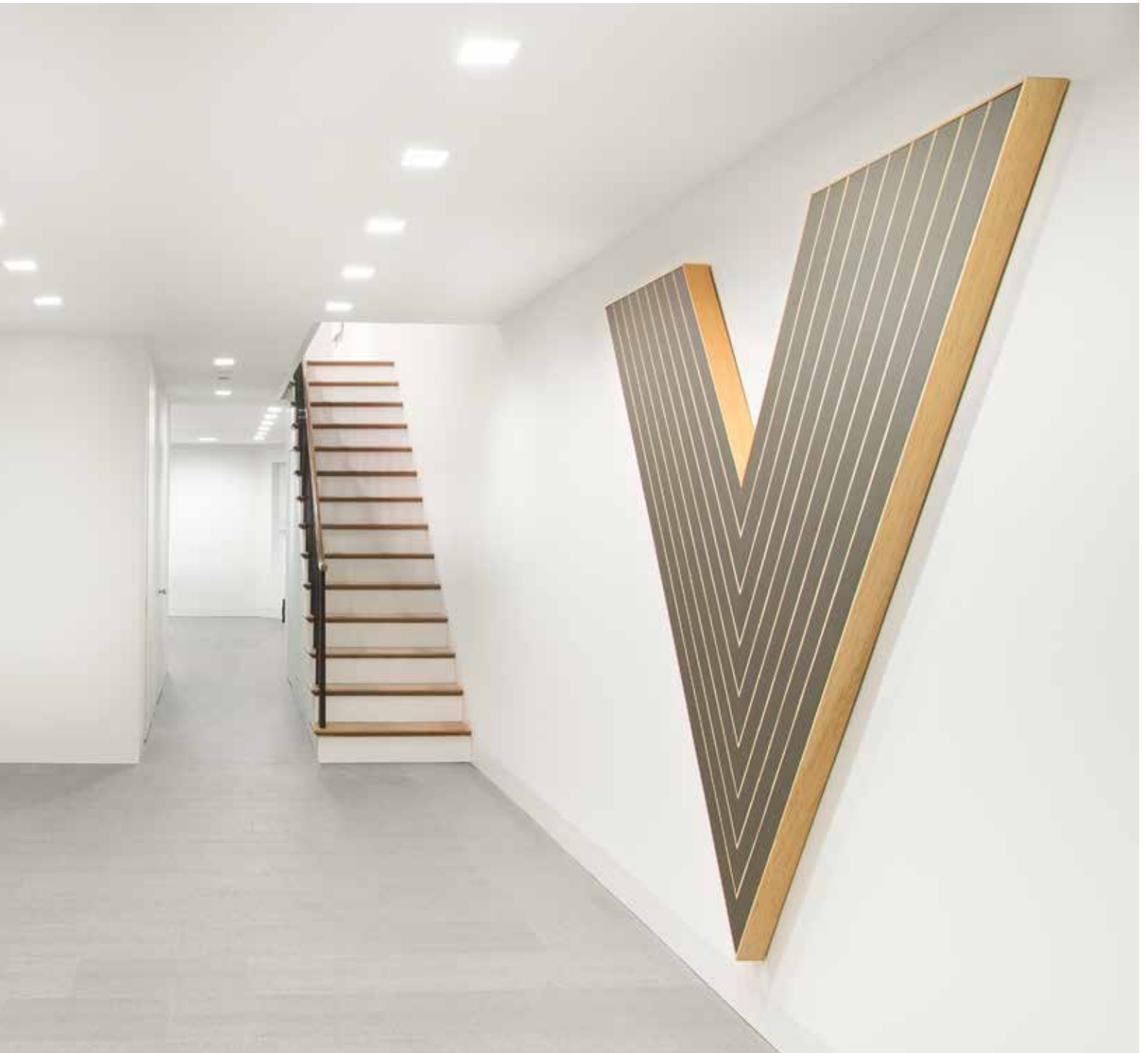
New York

May-July, 2014



Left to right: Tom Wesselmann, Frank Stella









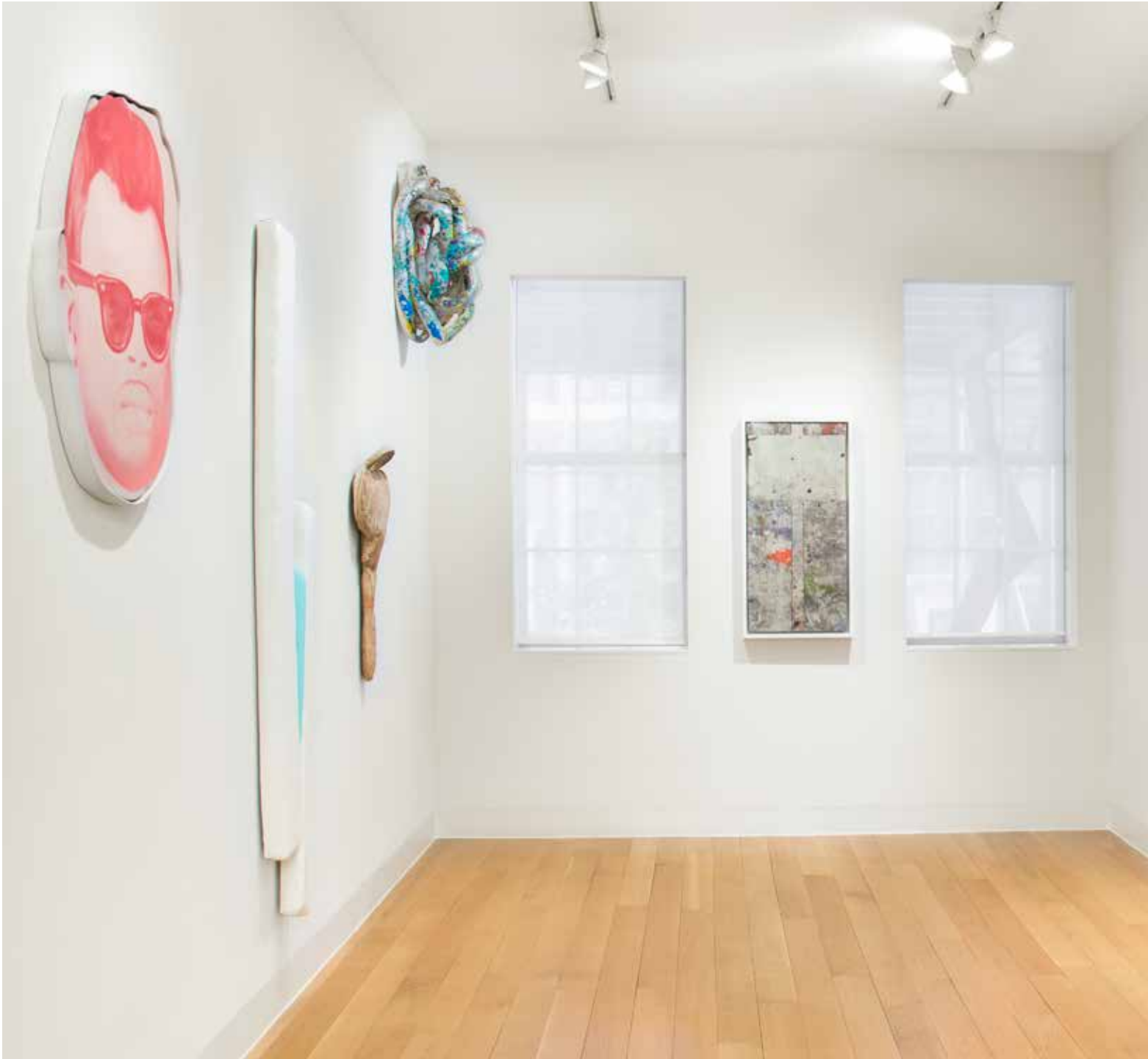
Left to right: Roy Lichtenstein, Kenneth Noland,  
Wyatt Kahn, Charles Hinman



Left to right: Harvey Quaytman, Nate Lowman,  
Roy Lichtenstein



Left to right: Kenneth Noland, Wyatt Kahn,  
Charles Hinman





Left to right: James Rosenquist, Justin Adian, Claes Oldenburg, Lynda Benglis, Richard Prince, Mary Heilmann, Elizabeth Murray



Left to right: Richard Tuttle, James Rosenquist,  
Justin Adian, Claes Oldenburg





Left to right: Mary Heilmann, Elizabeth Murray, Ron Gorchov



Left to right: Paolo Scheggi, Rebecca Ward,  
Olivier Mosset, Lucio Fontana



Left to right: Pino Pascali, Frank Stella



Left to right: Jeremy DePrez, John Armleder



Left to right: Damien Hirst, Steven Parrino, Jacob Kassay

# Works Exhibited



Lynda Benglis  
(b. 1941)  
*PSI*, 1974  
Aluminum screen, cotton  
bunting, plaster, enamel,  
silver paint, and sparkle  
33 x 12 x 15 in.  
(83.8 x 33 x 38.1 cm)  
Collection of the artist  
Courtesy of Cheim & Read,  
New York



Justin Adian  
(b. 1976)  
*Between Us*, 2014  
Oil enamel on canvas on  
ester foam  
80 x 16 ½ x 2 ½ in.  
(203.2 x 41.9 x 6.4 cm)  
Courtesy of the artist



Jeremy DePrez  
(b. 1983)  
*Untitled*, 2014  
Acrylic on canvas  
72 x 56 in.  
(182.9 x 142.2 cm)  
Courtesy of the artist and  
Zach Feuer Gallery, New  
York



John Armleder  
(b. 1948)  
*Lotta di gladiatori - The Best*,  
2014  
Acrylic on canvas  
55 x 49 ¼ in.  
(139.5 x 125 cm)  
Courtesy of Galerie Andrea  
Caratsch, Zürich



Lucio Fontana  
(b. 1899 d. 1968)  
*Concetto Spaziale I Quanta*,  
1959  
Waterpaint on canvas  
14 ½ x 18 ¾ in.  
(36 x 48 cm)  
Private collection



Ron Gorchov  
(b. 1930)  
*Untitled*, 1974  
Oil on linen  
34 ½ x 24 ½ in.  
(87.6 x 62.2 cm)  
Collection of the artist



Damien Hirst  
(b. 1965)  
*Thebaine*, 1993  
Household paint on canvas  
57 x 83 ½ in.  
(144.8 x 211.8 cm)  
Private collection



Mary Heilmann  
(b. 1940)  
*Maricopa Highway*, 2014  
Oil on canvas  
42 x 42 in.  
(106.7 x 106.7 cm)  
Collection of the artist  
Courtesy of 303 Gallery and  
Hauser & Wirth



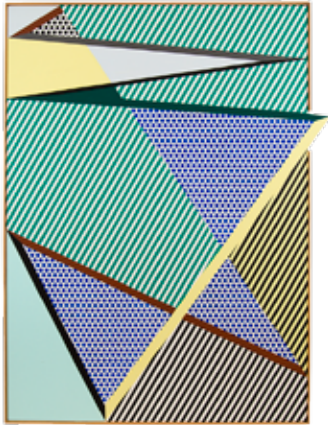
Wyatt Kahn  
(b. 1983)  
*Night Flight*, 2012  
Canvas on canvas on panel  
49 ½ x 39 in.  
(125.7 x 99 cm)  
Private Collection



Charles Hinman  
(b. 1932)  
*Oceanus*, 1981  
Canvas, wood, and paint  
37 x 76 x 6 in.  
(94 x 193 x 15.2 cm)  
Private Collection



Jacob Kassay  
(b. 1984)  
*Partial Credit*, 2014  
Acrylic on canvas  
74 x 16 in.  
(188 x 40.6 cm)  
Courtesy of the artist and  
303 Gallery, New York



Roy Lichtenstein  
(b. 1923 d. 1997)  
*Imperfect Painting*, 1988  
Oil and Magna on canvas  
50 x 38 7/8 in.  
(127 x 98.7 cm)  
Estate of Roy Lichtenstein



Elizabeth Murray  
(b. 1940 d. 2007)  
*Twist of Fate*, 1979  
Oil on canvas  
56 1/4 x 54 1/4 in.  
(142.9 x 137.8 cm)  
Courtesy of Pace Gallery



Nate Lowman  
(b. 1979)  
*White Escalade*, 2005-2008  
Silkscreen ink and acrylic  
on canvas  
60 in. diameter  
(152.4 cm diameter)  
Private Collection



Kenneth Noland  
(b. 1924 d. 2010)  
*Midnight*, 1979  
Acrylic on canvas  
74 x 35 inches  
(188 x 88.9 cm)  
Private Collection



Olivier Mosset  
(b. 1944)  
*Copper Star*, 2008  
Polyurethane sprayed on  
canvas  
69 2/3 x 73 1/4 in.  
(177x 186 cm)  
Courtesy Galerie Andrea  
Caratsch, Zürich

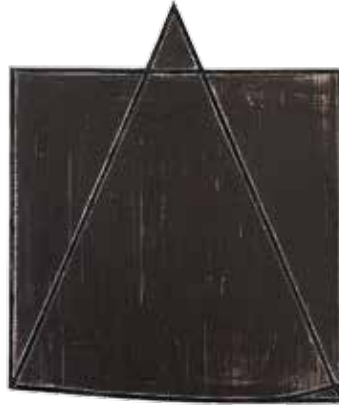


Claes Oldenburg  
(b. 1929)  
*Soft Key*, 1965  
Canvas stuffed with kapok,  
stenciled with enamel  
36 1/2 x 17 1/2 x 1 in.  
(92.7 x 44.5 x 2.5 cm)  
Collection of the artist





Steven Parrino  
(b. 1958 d. 2005)  
*The Chaotic Painting*, 2004  
Enamel on canvas  
63 x 72 ¾ in.  
(160 x 184.8 cm)  
Private collection  
Courtesy of the Parrino  
Family Estate and Gagosian  
Gallery



Harvey Quaytman  
(b. 1937 d. 2002)  
*Shade*, 1979  
Acrylic on canvas  
36 x 30 in.  
(91.4 x 76.2 cm)  
Courtesy McKee Gallery,  
New York



Pino Pascali  
(b. 1935 d. 1968)  
*Coda di Delfino*, 1966  
Black paint on canvas and  
glue on wood  
structure  
56 ½ x 26 x 34 ½ in.  
(143 x 66 x 87 cm)  
Private collection



James Rosenquist  
(b. 1933)  
*Head on Another Shape:  
Study for Big Bo*, 1966  
Oil on canvas  
35 ¼ x 26 ¼ in.  
(89.5 x 66.7 cm)  
Hall Collection



Richard Prince  
(b. 1949)  
*Untitled (protest painting)*,  
1994  
Acrylic on canvas  
40 ½ x 20 ¾ in.  
(102.9 x 52.4 cm)  
Collection of the artist



Paolo Scheggi  
(b. 1940 d. 1971)  
*Intersuperficie Curva Blu*,  
1965  
Acrylic on three overlapping  
canvases  
23 ¾ x 19 ¾ x 2 ¼ in.  
(60.3 x 50.3 x 5.5 cm)  
Private collection



Frank Stella  
(b. 1936)  
*Creede II*, 1961  
Copper paint on shaped  
canvas  
82  $\frac{5}{8}$  x 82  $\frac{5}{8}$  in.  
(209.8 x 209.8 cm)  
Private collection



Rebecca Ward  
(b. 1984)  
*backslapper*, 2014  
Oil on stitched canvas  
60 x 48 in.  
(152.4 x 121.9 cm)  
Courtesy of the artist



Frank Stella  
*Slieve More*, 1964  
Metallic powder in  
polymer emulsion on  
canvas  
77 x 81  $\frac{1}{4}$  in.  
(195.6 x 206.4 cm)  
Private Collection



Tom Wesselmann  
(b. 1931 d. 2004)  
*Smoker #11*, 1973  
Oil on canvas  
88  $\frac{1}{2}$  x 85 in.  
(224.8 x 215.9 cm)  
Estate of Tom Wesselmann



Richard Tuttle  
(b. 1941)  
*Untitled*, 1967  
Dyed and sewn canvas  
38  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 46  $\frac{1}{2}$  in.  
(98.4 x 118.1 cm)  
Private Collection

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Tom Wesselmann, *Smoker #11*, 1973

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Frank Stella, *Slieve More*, 1964

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Frank Stella, *Creede II*, 1961

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Olivier Mosset, *Copper Star*, 2008

Photo: Stefan Altenburger.

Lucio Fontana, *Concetto Spaziale I Quanta*, 1959

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