

ArtReview



Frank Stella. Courtesy Marianne Boesky Gallery.
Photo: Kristine Larsen

FRANK STELLA, AMERICAN POSTWAR PIONEER, 1936–2024

BY ART REVIEW STAFF

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American artist Frank Stella has died aged 87, following a battle with lymphoma.

Stella was a leading artistic figure in America's postwar period, pioneering the minimalist artistic movement. The artist's early *Black Paintings* (1958–60) – large canvases of geometric pinstripes made from black enamel paint – are often cited by art historical sources as among the first minimalist artworks and were included in Dorothy C. Miller's watershed *Sixteen Americans* exhibition, alongside Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Ellsworth Kelly and Louise Nevelson. Critics were initially sceptical of this new mode of artmaking, but Stella famously declared in 1964, 'What you see is what you see', rejecting any interpretation of his artworks. The following year, Stella represented the United States at that year's Venice Biennale with his minimalist canvases – a departure from the American Pop works of Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Jim Dine and Claes Oldenburg also in the show.

In the late 1960s, Stella began painting his bright *Protractor Series* (1967–70) that were a colourful departure from the *Black Paintings*, but which still maintained a preoccupation with composition and form through painterly motifs and shaped canvases. Stella told the journal *Sculpture* in 2011, 'By the late '60s, I seemed to hit a wall with the very large Protractor paintings. I didn't think I could take color and surface flatness any farther.' In the following two decades, Stella would begin to play with assemblages and sculpture in what he called his 'maximalist' works, which contrasted the simplicity of his earlier ones and also attests to the artist's penchant for reinvention.

In 1995, Stella produced *Fishkill*, a large steel sculpture that [ArtReview critic Jonathan T.D. Neil describes](#) as 'a car wreck of cast stainless steel, [which] shows how Stella embraced digital modelling and manufacture early, but only as part of a sustained attack on the formal coherence that had dictated his earliest painting series'. Stella was not shy to criticise his earlier works, while still maintaining an innovative vision for his later practice. Writing of the 2015 show in which Stella revisits the conceptual origins of *Fishkill*, Neil concludes, 'Stella has been ahead of his time before'.