(frank) STELLA

The Construction of an Artist

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ABSTRACT

This paper serves to present American artist Frank Stella's public persona as a construction. Through personal connections and the authenticity lent by museums and galleries, Stella created for himself a reputation of greatness that has persisted to this day. This paper will investigate how Stella's upbringing and relationships helped form his image, and how he maintains that image. In addition, Stella virulently protects and reinforces that image both with his behavior and with the words and actions of his friends and connections. With regard to copyright, Stella staunchly defends his own property rights and, ostensibly the rights of others, but his own views on the subject are shortsighted and self-serving, all in the name of his public image.

Lastly, this paper highlights his longstanding working relationship with master printmaker Kenneth Tyler as an example of public recognition tied to his image. From 1967 to Tyler's retirement in 2001 the pair produced close to 1500 works, yet Tyler's name has never appeared on a single one of these works despite the closeness of their partnership. Although Stella mentions him in interviews and Tyler himself is quite well known in art circles, Tyler is not named as a primary artist in any of Stella's works, nor is he presented as an equal partner, although it can be easily argued that their work together is wholly collaborative.

I: STELLA THE MAN

A BRIEF LOOK AT STELLA'S LIFE

Frank Philip Stella was born in 1936 into an immigrant household, the firstborn of three children. As a child his left hand was damaged in an accident – he was left with only part of his left thumb and forefinger, which later curtailed his entry into the military. He also lost his four front teeth in a fight when he was 14. It was this aggressive behavior and Stella's general pugnaciousness (along with his readily apparent intelligence) that led his parents to send him to Phillips Academy in Andover for high school. Stella's father in particular had high hopes for his son and relentlessly pushed him, particularly in sports.

But it was also at Phillips that Stella began studying art, under the tutelage of Abstract artist Patrick Morgan. Morgan had studied under Hans Hofmann and owned a small art collection which included Hofmann, John Sloan, Arthur Dove and Edward Hopper, a collection which Stella termed a "concise history of 20th century painting".

Upon graduating from Phillips, Stella enrolled in Princeton. His classmates included artist/gallery owner Walter Darby Bannard, architect Sidney Guberman (who wrote Stella's only book-length biography to date) and critic Michael Fried. After writing his senior thesis on Hiberno-Saxon art, he graduated with a degree in art history in 1958.

Between 1958 and 1960, Stella had made enormous stylistic breakthroughs in his painting, producing the Black Series, his first successful series, and was exhibited at Oberlin College and at the landmark "Sixteen Americans" show at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). He had also met a number of influential people in the art world, including dealer Leo Castelli, artists Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, curators Henry Geldzahler and William Rubin and his first wife, art historian and critic Barbara Rose. This was the foundation for Stella's successes, and neither his output nor his ability to keep himself situated among the influential and notable has abated.

Stella's creative output shifted radically from superflat paintings to relief artworks in 1970 with his Polish Village series; since then he has worked exclusively with prints or with three-dimensional materials. He continues to produce art to the present, although his print work ceased in 2001 with the retirement of Kenneth Tyler, owner of Tyler Graphics and a widely acknowledged expert in the field of prints.

STELLA'S NETWORKS[1]

Stella's wealth of well-placed personal contacts was one of the major factors which accelerated the development of his meteoric success. It is almost too simple to trace Stella's career as a by-product of a tight social scene, which also produced the careers of Bannard and Fried. Others whose careers were influenced or assisted by this network included sculptors Carl Andre and Donald Judd, photographer and filmographer Hollis Frampton and painter Sidney Guberman, who also wrote Stella's only full-length biography. The years between 1958 and 1962 are crucial to Stella's success, and they merit a close inspection. They are a veritable who's who of the New York art world of that time, and through these connections Stella came close to eclipsing all of his contemporaries.

At Princeton, Stella's first painting instructor was William Seitz, who by 1965 was a curator at MoMA and showed Stella's work in his exhibition *The Revolving Eye*. When Stella entered Princeton in 1954, the school had no art program, only an art history course. Seitz had earned in Ph.D from Princeton in art history not long before; his major thesis was on Abstract Expressionist artists. He was hired in Stella's second year to provide art tutorial courses for architecture students. None of these art classes were offered for credit until Stella's senior year, and one had to audition for the class. Stella got in easily on his own talent. Among his fellow students in Seitz' classes were Bannard and Fried. The three of them formed an airtight friendship based on their mutual love of art and general abhorrence toward current art criticism. Fried, through Stephen Greene, Princeton's first artist-in-residence, met influential critic Clement Greenberg, and brought his two friends to meet him in fall 1958.

Upon leaving Princeton in June 1958, Stella moved to New York. Soon after moving into his first studio on the Lower East Side, Stella became a regular at the Cedar Bar, a hangout for artists such as Franz Kline, Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns (and, before

[1] Information on Stella's friendship networks presented here will be constructed from Harry Cooper and Megan R. Luke, *Frank Stella 1958*, Yale University Press 2006, and Sidney Guberman, *Frank Stella*. Rizzoli, 1995, unless otherwise stated.

Stella's time, Jackson Pollock and Barnett Newman). It is likely Stella met Rauschenberg and Johns directly through the Cedar Bar, although nothing exists to prove this statement outright. Both Rauschenberg and Johns were represented by Leo Castelli, who was rapidly becoming one of the premier gallery owners in New York. Although Castelli does not claim to know who informed him about Stella's work, he was impressed with it from the beginning and, shortly before Stella's showing as part of the landmark Sixteen Americans exhibition in 1959, became his first dealer.

Stella moved to a studio on West Broadway in September 1958, and it was here that he painted the majority of his Black Series, generally considered his artistic breakthrough. His apartment was located directly underneath the apartment of sculptor Niki de Saint-Phalle (she was the sister-in-law of Lawrence Rubin[2] and later the wife of sculptor Jean Tinguely). When Castelli came to Stella's studio for the second time in April 1959, he brought Dorothy Miller, then Chief Curator at MoMA. It was her decision to include Stella, then almost 23 years old, in her Sixteen Americans show – the youngest and least known of all the artists represented. The show also included works by Rauschenberg and Johns. Just after Sixteen Americans closed, Stella earned his first solo gallery show, through Castelli[3].

Bannard was in New York as well, and reconnected Stella with Carl Andre, who had attended school with him at Phillips Academy. Andre, a Minimalist sculptor, introduced Stella to his first wife, Barbara Rose. At the time Rose was a graduate student at Columbia; she later went on to teach at Sarah Lawrence College (along with William Rubin, later Chief Curator at MoMA and who orchestrated Stella's first career retrospective in 1970) and became a contributing editor and one of the first writers for Artforum magazine.

Through William Rubin or de Saint-Phalle, Stella met Rubin's brother Lawrence, who operated a gallery in Paris. Lawrence Rubin was Stella's first contact in Europe, and when Rose was in Spain for a Fulbright in November 1961, Lawrence gave Stella his first European show. Noted collector Robert Hirschhorn attended that show and became Stella's first major collector[4].

Stella and Rose married in November 1961 (receiving $100 from Hirschhorn as a wedding gift) and returned to the US in January 1962. By this time, Stella was now lambasted regularly in the press for his nonpainterly style, yet his work continued to be exhibited in museums (occasionally in exhibitions curated by William Rubin). Stella had also branched out into performance art territory, designing the costumes for a collaborative show entitled "The Construction of Boston", directed by famed choreographer Merce Cunningham. This was not the last time Stella and Cunningham would collaborate; they would work on another show, "Scramble" in 1967. This show also featured de Saint-

[2] Glueck, Grace. "Minding the Store at Home", *New York Times*, July 16, 1967
[3] This show was originally scheduled for November 1959, but was postponed when Miller selected Stella's work for the Sixteen Americans exhibition.
[4] Hirschhorn's collection is the base for the Hirschhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, now part of the Smithsonian. His collection of Stella's work totaled 41 pieces.

Phalle, sculptor Jean Tinguely, Rauschenberg (as stage director) and poet Kenneth Koch. It was performed once, to a sold-out Maidman Playhouse on May 4, 1962[5].

Another participant in this show was Henry Geldzahler, also known as Henry Garden. Geldzahler was the son of a Belgian diamond merchant, a graduate of Yale University in 1957 and a doctoral student at Harvard, dropping out in 1960 to join the staff of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. He was one of the first of his kind to ensconce himself within the artist community, actively participating in their projects. He was a well-known figure at Andy Warhol's Factory and appeared frequently in his short films. Geldzahler was one of the personages celebrated by Stella in his Purple Series (as Henry Garden), a set of geometric works in purple metallic paints with each piece named for one of his close friends or influences. Geldzahler and Stella probably met in 1960, possibly through Castelli's gallery. Geldzahler later became the first curator of contemporary art at the Met and showed Stella's work extensively as part of his New York Art: 1940-1970 show.

By the end of 1962, Stella's friendship network garnered him commissions from Andy Warhol (possibly through Geldzahler, for a series of maquettes based on his Benjamin Moore series) and made him a steady presence in New York art shows. The roots of Minimalism are almost entirely within this framework as well. Stella and Rose were neighbors of Donald Judd by 1962, and Bannard, who had assumed ownership of the Green Gallery by 1960, was showing Stella alongside Ellsworth Kelly, Robert Morris and Kenneth Noland.

THE CEDAR BAR

Stella became an artist against his family's wishes, and only after having been rejected by the Army after failing a physical. His father in particular had anticipated that Stella would become a professional, likely entering law school, and Stella had moved to New York in anticipation of only a short stay. Once he was dismissed from military service, however, Stella ingratiated himself with the artist community in earnest, and as seen in figure 1 his connections blossomed toward the end of 1958 and early 1959.

Stella was a semi-regular at the Cedar Bar at the time, a hypermale atmosphere which admitted few women (Helen Frankenthaler and Joan Mitchell were rare exceptions). It was a hangout for artists primarily because of its proximity to other art galleries, but had little else to recommend it. The bar itself was a ramshackle little dive in a highly questionable neighborhood. But the place was warm and open late, and drinks were cheap.

It was primarily the hangout for Abstract Expressionist artists, whose emotional torrents were acted out on canvas. This approach was the exact opposite of Stella's intent, but his reasons for going to the Cedar Bar have little to do with similar dispositions and everything to do with forging and maintaining friendships. This atmosphere at the Cedar Bar was not replicable elsewhere; the Bar itself attempted to update and relocate two

[5] "The Construction of Boston", http://www.bostoncecilia.org/prognotes/Constr_libretto.pdf

blocks away in 1964, but lost most of its clientele and its "vibe" in the process, and the scene never recovered.

II: STELLA THE MYTH

SELF-CONSTRUCTED IMAGE

Early in his career Stella was very aware of media attention and its impact on art careers. As Stella explains,

> "Darby and I used to play a game, which was to decide what the paintings were really like on the basis of what people wrote about them… and how you were supposed to look at something. And I think it's like some of the terrifically obvious examples were when (Name) showed at the (Gallery) and all of a sudden (Name) who was commonly reviewed in *Art News* about two or three pages from the beginning of the magazine is suddenly in the first pages of the review, and there's a photograph, and now (Name) has a breakthrough…"[6]

While this can easily be read as a facetious description of Stella's own career arc, it also explains why Stella was (and remains) furiously protective of his image. He had already developed an understanding of how the popular press could make or break a reputation, and through his own consumption of art media and press he also knew how these media were coded in favor of some artists and against others. It was a quick way of gauging how an artist was received by critics.

The authority of the museum has been done to death, but it factors significantly in Stella's career arc. Because Stella's earliest mature works were displayed in two museums almost immediately after their creation, Stella's work was given a legitimacy from almost its inception that other artists generally work for years to attain. Stella was approved by the Establishment as defined by a museum culture increasingly more focused at the time on collecting treasures as opposed to fulfilling any public education missions.[7] Indeed, because his first public showing was in a museum rather than a gallery, he may have been viewed by cognoscenti as somehow more authentic or more respectable (and therefore more valuable). His cachet only increased from there; MoMA acquired one of his Black Paintings, *The Marriage of Reason and Squalor*, in 1959, immediately after it was exhibited. He continued to work within the accepted markers of artistic success: Stella's first Whitney

[6] Cooper and Luke, pg. 14
[7] Skramstad, Harold, "An Agenda for American Museums in the 21st Century," in *Daedalus,* Vol. 128, No. 3 (Summer 1999), pg. 2

Biennial appearance was in 1963 (Rauschenberg won the Biennial that year), and the Tate Modern purchased and exhibited one of his works, "Hyena Sound", in 1965.

This imprimatur granted from the museum community also limited what Stella could do. Stella's work as featured in both Three Young Americans (Oberlin College) and Sixteen Americans (MoMA) defined his work more or less until his Polish Village series in 1972. Up to that point, Stella worked almost exclusively with variations on solid color stripes - curved stripes (the Protractor and Saskatchewan series), concentric squares made of stripes (Jasper's Dilemma), simple shapes made of stripes (the Notched-V series, the Purple Series). Only the Irregular Polygons series gave any indication that Stella conceived his work in any other terms (and even the majority of those incorporated some for of stripe as a border). When Stella released the Polish Village series, he may have been personally liberated from what was starting to become a claustrophobic, repetitive theme. Very little of his work has been directly imitative of itself since, although his longtime policy of self-referencing is quite evident to the present.

Stella has never been a critical darling. While positive reviews can be found (Stuart Preston kindly called Stella a "champion of the economy of means"[8]), the overwhelming majority of reviews are rather negative, sometimes even laughably over-the-top in their derisiveness.[9] One wonderful example states "It would be a mistake to regard an oeuvre like Mr. Stella's as an esthetic or historical sport. No doubt his work is currently overrated, but it nonetheless says something authentic – unhappily unauthentic – about the life of feeling among the cultivated classes in our society."[10] This statement not only slams Stella himself, but also the culture in which his work succeeded so wildly.

Defining Stella

> "One day while the show, "Three American Painters" was hanging at the Fogg Museum in Harvard [in 1965], [its curator] Michael Fried and I were standing in one of the galleries.... A Harvard student . . . [pointed at a Stella and] confronted Michael Fried. "What's so good about that?" he demanded. Fried looked back at him. 'Look,' he said slowly, 'there are days when Stella goes to the Metropolitan Museum. And he sits for hours looking at the Velàzquezes, utterly knocked out by them and then he goes back to his studio. What he would like more than anything else is to paint like Velàzquez. But what he knows is that that is an option that is not open to him. So he paints stripes.'"[11]

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[8] Preston, Stuart. "Housing in Art's Many Mansions", *New York Times*, October 2, 1960

[9] "Frank Stella's new paintings at Castelli's, 4 East 77th Street, are so much about nothing they turn lack of meaning into a thesis." O'Doherty, Brian. "Frank Stella and a Crisis of Nothingness", *New York Times*, January 19, 1964

[10] Kramer, Hilton. "Representative of the 1960's", *New York Times*, March 20, 1966

[11] Rosalind Krauss, quoted in Jones, Caroline. "Anxiety and Elation: A Response to Michael Fried". Critical Inquiry, Vol. 27 no 4, http://criticalinquiry.uchicago.edu/issues/v27/v27n4.jones.html#4, accessed 4/26/10

The effort to place Stella within the realm of Minimalism is another attempt to elevate Stella to a grandiose level. Rather than accepting that Stella likely sees himself as an Abstract artist and that he was trained in Abstract art, some historians and critics will go so far as to categorize Stella as the "father of Minimalism"[12]. As shown earlier, Rauschenberg presented some of the earliest work that could be considered Minimalist with his White paintings, and Johns' heavily worked encaustic paintings both blurred the emotion present within them and allowed the objecthood of the work to come through. But these two artists are never considered Minimalists, and these works, while often discussed, do not fall as neatly within the paradigm of Minimalism as, say, Stella's stripe paintings appear to be.

As Kirk Varnedoe has described, Stella's work was fiendishly difficult to categorize, a struggle Stella has also discussed. Stella has not deigned to define himself per se, but tends to view his work in terms of Abstract Expressionism, even as his style retaliates against some of its more noted practitioners. Although Stella tried for a "negative Pollockism" and an "all-overness where the intensity, saturation and the density remained regular over the entire surface[13]," he owed a great deal to his predecessors, both in terms of style and action[14]. Stella was and is considered a "painterly" painter, a term that Willem de Kooning farcically defined "you do it with a brush"[15] but reveals the artist's technique even as Stella takes pains to remove any trace of his physical touch. But Stella shared much in common with the Minimalists who came after him, such as Carl Andre and Donald Judd, and he believed in the value of objectivity with regards to art, a notion borrowed from Greenberg. Temporally, Stella's debut in 1959 was the crossroads between minimalism and Abstract Expressionism, confusing critics further.

It may be best to accept Michael Fried's assessment of Stella's work, as Fried was a longtime friend and witnessed Stella's development as a painter since they attended Princeton together. Fried sums up Stella's work with a fairly overwrought but accurate statement: "the depth of [Stella's] commitment to the enterprise of painting and the irreconcilability with that commitment of what may be called a reductionist conception of the nature of that enterprise" – in short, an Abstract painter embracing the potential of Minimalist approaches to the canvas..

CONSTRUCTED MASCULINITY

> "If machismo… is connected to fear, then the Abstract Expressionists feared for their maleness. America has had a history of suspicion with

[12] Jones, Jonathan. "The Prince of Whales". The Guardian UK, 5 April 2001, http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2001/apr/05/artsfeatures1, accessed 4/26/10. Jones is neither the first nor the last to use this term with regards to Stella, but this particular article/interview sums up the arguments nicely for both sides.
[13] Varnedoe, Kirk. *Pictures of Nothing*. National Gallery of Art, 2006, pg. 45
[14] Ibid., pg. 7
[15] *Who Gets to Call it Art?* Dir. Peter Rosen, Palm Pictures 2006

> regard to its artists and their manliness, and perhaps never more so than in the early 1950's when the rest of America was rolling up its shirtsleeves and getting down to work to defeat Communism."[16]

Stella grew up in the early 1950's, at a time when men were returning to the US and women were returning to the home after four years working at traditionally male occupations. It was a difficult transition particularly for women, who had become used to working outside the home and managing their own money. Throughout the decade, images of femininity predominantly showed women managing domestic affairs while men mastered the realm of work, ideas and the outside world. Masculinity and femininity continued to be polarized in the popular press, and gender roles were strongly enforced. His parents were representative of their time: his mother stayed home watching Frank and his younger brother and sister while his father worked 60 hours a week. His father was also engaged with maintenance of the home, a task in which he expected Frank's participation.

Stella's environment at Phillips Academy was predominantly male-oriented – an all-boys boarding school which placed value on physical strength and competitiveness. Stella, having attended public school before coming to Phillips, was viewed as particularly tough. "He told us of his fights with the Irish kids who used to lay for him after school to throw the 'Guinea' into the Malden River…. Since I was used to seeing Buckley boys called for after school in dark limousines, I admired Frank for the dangers of his past."[17] Stella's short stature (he grew to be 5'7"), dark complexion and physical issues may have forced him to find ways to prove himself to his peers. By his sophomore year, he had become a wrestler and lacrosse player.

It is no surprise, then, that with an all-male social and learning environment and an interest in art that he grew to be aggressive and protective of his masculinity. "There's this tremendous notion of artistic humility, which I didn't seem to have, one being too much success, and also because I seemed to be too smug about it in some kind of way." Stella's self- description, meant as a rejoinder to his critics, is incredibly accurate. Stella's demeanor in video is that of a stark intellectual attempting to be casual. He weaves heavy theoretical concepts with liberal uses of the tag word "like" and leading words such as "I mean". While his approach has softened over the years (compare his 1970 video with William Rubin released at the time of his retrospective with his reminisces in 2009 regarding his friend, the late curator Philip Johnson[18]), his general approach is that of a well-educated man who is aware of his elite status in society, and intends to retain it.

In designing and imagining this masculinity, Stella's interaction with the public is crucial. He makes it very clear that he did not and does not suffer for his art. There is not

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[16] Katz, Jonathan. "The Art of Code: Jasper Johns & Robert Rauschenberg". In *Significant Others*, ed. Whitney Chadwick and Isabelle de Courtivon, Thames and Hudson, 1993, pg. 192

[17] Bill Matalene, as quoted in Guberman, pg. 15

[18] National Trust for Historic Preservation, "Frank Stella: Return to the Glass House"(2009) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZfK13fpVoP8 , accessed 4/26/10

anything to suggest, in his writing, his speech or in his career arc, that he maintains any interest in the notion of the tortured artist. Even the most tarted-up sections of Stella's biography make no mention of actual pain or real hardship in the face of creating his works. When discussing his own works he embraces an intellectual distance that minimizes any emotional impact the creation of the work may have inspired, while paying lip service to his "detachment" in interviews. Furthermore, any actual suffering was often quickly mitigated. If he needed money, he asked for an advance from Castelli or Rubin, or his wife found work, or he sold a painting "just in time"[19]. The few instances of actual suffering as presented in his official life story involved a failed attempt at a Fulbright scholarship and the death of his father.

This lack of suffering, however, makes for a more confident, perhaps more original (or self-referential) art in that he need not pander to critical press or popular art movement; instead his work tends to retain an unabashed masculinity based in part on his persona. Visually it is manly art, all angles and edges and uncompromising austerity, and as its creator he represents it in a classically masculine manner. Even his most recent works retain much of the sparseness and lack of emotion that may be the hallmark of Stella's earliest work. He speaks of "apprehension/confrontation" with regards to his work, and of technique, but rarely of aesthetic or social concerns, relegating his work to more masculine spheres.

He brushes off his critical unpopularity with a flat tone of voice and a confrontational choice of words: "I think one thing you could say about my paintings, and it's a good thing, is that it's not immediately apparent how they're done. I mean you could say it's finely brushed or it's sprayed or it's this, that, or the other, but the first thing you do is see it, I think, and not see how it was done. And it's not a particular record of anything, I mean, and that may explain in some kind of way the unpopularity with critics. When I said 'make it hard for the critics to write about', I mean, there's not that much for them to describe. It doesn't do that much in conventional terms and they can't explain to you how one part relates to another. I mean, they say it's too easy, there's no suffering…"[20] This particular exchange highlights one of the main ways in which Stella distances himself from the overt emotionality of other Abstract Expressionists. He almost never speaks of his works in terms of meaning, but as objects in themselves. He discusses his technique and reveals his methods, but it is rare for Stella to discuss his works in terms of emotion or evocation of any symbolism outside of their own physicality. While this can be attributed to Stella's own art theories regarding art as object and painting as a solution to an artistic problem, it can also be in direct response to the overt emotionality of Abstract art. Although his training was almost exclusively within the milieu of Abstract art, once he saw Johns' work he began to pursue avenues of objecthood as opposed to emotional release.

ART AS OBJECT

[19] Guberman, pg.
[20]Emile De Antonio, "Painters Painting" (excerpt) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cN_rRCfRdmQ. This video is misdated as 1972.

"During the decade that followed the end of World War II, when American painting was imposing itself as a world force, it was widely agreed that the surest way to define one's artistic personality and open a path to success was to create a personal image, and above all to persist in it."[21] Abstract Expressionism was at that time the most current (but not the most popular) of art forms, and most artists developed a style and stuck to it. But this relentless drive to solidify within a particular style began to fray within fifteen years. As advertising legend and graphic artist George Lois noted "By the 1960's (Willem) De Kooning shows an easing-off of vitality… (Mark) Rothko was pretty much painting the same format, (Robert) Motherwell was still doing homages to the Spanish Republic, and the art community, though it didn't know it, needed a refreshment.[22]" The first artists to rebel against this personality/autobiography-based art form were Johns and Rauschenberg.

Not every artist or critic believed that Abstract art's goal was its raw emotional power. Critic Hilton Kramer explained "The real impulse of Abstract Expressionism was toward the reduction of painting to its aesthetic quintessence."[23] Certainly Rauschenberg and Johns embodied this in their works – Johns' Target paintings (1954-1958) were less about emotion and more about the object. But it was Rauschenberg's white paintings (1953) that introduced the idea of removing the artist from the painting. Rauschenberg himself stated that the paintings should be done by others using a roller brush[24]. Stella has cited Rauschenberg and Johns as primary influences on a number of occasions.

But Kramer could only take his aesthetic so far. "It just seems to trivialize the whole artistic enterprise to present this vast wall of horizontal stripes that more than fills your field of vision, present this as a kind of ultimate in artistic pleasure and artistic realization. Much as I admire it – and I do –… it really always leaves me in a kind of despair that so much talent has been engaged in such essentially trivial purpose." Kramer is speaking directly of Stella, and particularly of his Black, Aluminum and Copper Series. Stella counters "Hilton Kramer doesn't write much about the painting: he gives you a lot of 'it's cold and intellectual' and says I went to Princeton. He is interested more in the sociology of my success than anything else." This somewhat catty retort

Stella claims that the physicality involved in developing his stripe paintings was harder than any figural or gestural work he had performed[25]. William Rubin has interpreted this as "not only as his way of stressing the animated workshop nature of his enterprise, but of signaling the literalness of his product; an art of an unabashed and resolute materialism"[26], an anti-emotional art.

"I like to make paintings, and I work at that: it's my job. I don't consider myself that different from anybody else. So I live in the real world and while I'm living in it I'll be more

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[21] Rubin, pg. 8
[22] "Who Gets to Call it Art?", dir. Peter Rosen. Palm Pictures 2006
[23] De Antonio, Emile, and Tuchman, Mitch. *Painters Painting*, Abbeville Press, New York, 1984, pg. 143.
[24] Katz, pg. 195
[25] Rubin, William. *Frank Stella 1970-1987*. Museum of Modern Art, 1987, pg. 7
[26] Ibid.

or less like other people. At some points I'm going to cross common experiences. Some of them are going to stick and become a little bit peculiarly mine. I don't worry about that. I worry about the paintings – the drive to make art."[27].

III: Issues of Copyright

Opposition to Orphan Works Law

Stella is one of the most requested artists in the Artists Rights Society (ARS)[28], an organization that manages artist copyrights for visual materials. He is also virulently opposed to the Orphan Works Law, in which works that have been likely abandoned by their creators or rights holders could revert to the public domain, for the benefit of the general public. What Stella ignores in his vociferous argument in the Art Newspaper[29] is the nature of current copyright law – that copyright extends to 75 years after the creator's death, thereby likely protecting virtually any living stakeholder.

While Stella makes an interesting point in that the law does not apply to museums, libraries and archives, his argument is unconvincing. If a work is genuinely abandoned, a library, museum or archive (or for that matter an artist) would have reason to invigorate that work for their own purposes. Also, in the instance that a work is abandoned, there need be no cause for restricting the use of that work in terms of time or legislation. Stella has a point in that the law does not offer similar recourse to infringers as does standard copyright law, but his attempt to connect piracy with orphan works is incorrect. He claims that the financial penalty for infringing on copyright has proven to be enough to deter pirates, but an abandoned work is *prima facie* ownerless and therefore penalty-free.

In the case of proving ownership, Stella raises the claim that identification of copyrighted works and orphan works would be done on a visual basis using "unproven technology[30]" and that the process involved would be too complex for most artists to navigate. What Stella apparently does not realize is that a great number of his works have already been scanned and archived as part of the non-profit ArtSTOR image database resource, and that ARS is in a perfect position to establish a similar database of its own for its artists. The burden of proof on the part of the owner would be removed, as digital copies would be on file either with a non-profit (ArtSTOR, other digital repositories) or with the ARS. Artists to date do not pay to have their work digitized by ArtSTOR or by other third-party repositories to date. Lastly, it is in the best interests of ARS to either develop a repository of its own or to contract with a nonprofit to prove copyright in order to continue making money from licensing fees.

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[27] Ibid.
[28] Artist Rights Society, Most Requested Artists. http://www.arsny.com/requested.html, accessed 4/19/10
[29] Stella, Frank. "The proposed new law is a nightmare for artists". *The Art Newspaper,* June 1, 2008, http://www.theartnewspaper.com/article.asp?id=8580, accessed 4/19/10
[30] Ibid.

THE "AURA" OF STELLA

Stella's argument is fallacious and alarmist, but also quite understandable in light of Stella's constructed image. He maintains a strong interest in keeping his constructed image as tightly locked as possible, and this extends to representations of his work. Walter Benjamin famously states that mechanical reproduction of an artwork destroys what he called the "aura" of the work, the essence that made the work desirable. What Stella is doing is protecting his "aura", the identity ascribed to Stella through his public persona via his only tangible asset.

"Copyright can be employed 'positively' and 'negatively': positively in the sense of enabling reproduction to inure to the benefit of the copyright holder and negatively in the sense of prohibiting reproduction."[31] Because Stella has discussed his methods publicly[32] and because the majority of materials used, at least for his flat paintings, is readily accessible, replication of Stella's work is only a matter of skill. That copyright, combined with Stella's signature style, have combined to deter most imitations.

IV: STELLA AND TYLER

Stella and master printer Kenneth Tyler have worked together continuously since 1967, when Stella was in Los Angeles for a brief period[33]. It was Tyler who introduced Stella to printmaking, and virtually all of Stella's print output has been under Tyler's auspices. With the exception of the Swan Engravings and the Peterburg Press editions, all of Stella's printwork has also been created in Tyler's print factories, and all of his print output has included Tyler in some role, generally a creative or technical role.

Unlike Stella's paintings, where assistants are rarely acknowledged (if they are incorporated at all), the names of Tyler's assistants, at least for certain series, are known[34]. Tyler is also an advisor for many of Stella's sculptural relief works, helping to choose materials and suggest physical approaches to the work. Tyler's role is likely best described as a "collaborator", in that he is an active participant in Stella's vision. But it is not an equal partnership, in that Tyler does not share equal credit for Stella's works despite contributing significantly to the development and printing of the print. Tyler has long

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3131 Rotter, Jonathan. "Law, Economics, Technology and the Social Construction of Art". In *Journal of Arts Management, Law and Society*, Winter 2008, Vol. 37, Issue 4, pg. 288

3232 deAntonio, pg. 146-7

3333 Stella and his wife Barbara Rose had been contracted by UCLA in 1967- she as a professor of art history, he as an artist-in-residence. When asked to sign a loyalty oath upon coming to the university, he refused and was denied the position. Rose signed the oath and taught for a semester. Stella was contacted by Tyler directly; Stella initially refused, offering a myriad of excuses, including his unfamiliarity with print tools and his dislike of the medium.

34 "Many of the printers at Tyler Graphics are often entrusted with crucial aspects of printing and fabrication. They are active collaborators on shop projects…" A list of assistants follows. Axsom, Richard. "Frank Stella at Bedford". In *Tyler Graphics: The Extended Image*, Abbeville Press, New York, 1987, pg. 186. The team of assistants working with Stella on his Imaginary Places series are listed in Siri Engberg's *Frank Stella at Tyler Graphics*, pg. 18.

claimed to admire Stella's work, and for Stella as with most of his artists he prefers "to always have my foot in the studio, so to speak, the private studio of the artist, to have a better knowledge there and understanding of the artist so I can make a different kind of graphic in my workshop.[35]" It is Tyler's role to work out technical issues in replicating Stella's ideas – this is a partnership of a mastermind and an ardent fan willing to go to any length to fulfill the wishes of the creator.

Tyler has worked not only with Stella (almost certainly his most technically challenging client), but with other Abstract Expressionist artists such as Rauschenberg, Helen Frankenthaler and Ellsworth Kelly, and Pop artists such as Roy Lichtenstein. He has gone to great lengths for his artists, going so far as to move his print factory from Los Angeles to New York in 1974 to better meet his artists' needs (the majority of his artists lived and worked in New York; Tyler wanted to minimize the interruptions in his artists' creative process). He has also designed new equipment, including a table specifically for Stella made of honeycomb aluminum, and patented Tycore, a thick form of cardboard invented to accommodate the model-molding activities of his artists. For most of his artists, but particularly for Stella due to the technological challenges his work instigates, Tyler straddles between fandom and active participant, admirer and executor.

This partnership remained in place until Tyler's retirement in 2001; Stella has not embarked on any print work since. Stella's most recent works have forged little new ground in terms of materials; instead Stella has worked primarily with form instead. Much of his current work is self-referential, recalling both his striped paintings and many of his prints, specifically the sinuous curves and tangential offshoots of his Circuits series (1980-1983). This is not to say that Stella's work is stale or rehashed; it does prove, however, the impetus Tyler provided in spurring Stella's creativity.

The creative process regarding Stella's prints, especially those made after Tyler's move to New York, is fairly well delineated[36]. Stella approaches Tyler with an idea, often sketched out on graph paper as Stella has done throughout his career. Tyler then creates a plate for each layer of ideas Stella has developed, printing a series of proof images from these plates. These proofs are the size of Stella's sketches; the final prints will be built to scale as noted on the sketches[37]. Stella uses these proof images to create collages, spending hours at a time placing elements of the proofs together into a cohesive whole. Stella does not consider exhibiting these collages, nor does he consider them as anything more than

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[35] Ibid., pg. 162. Far from being unproven, digital scanning technology continues to improve and many museums, libraries and archives have begun systematic image databases of their collections as a preservation activity. See Association of Research Libraries, *Recognizing Digitization as a Preservation Method*, June 2004, for a basic overview of best practices, digital repositories, metadata and the viability of such digitization activities.

[36] The majority of discussion on the creative process between Stella and Tyler can be found in the exhibition catalogue *Frank Stella at Tyler Graphics* (Walker Art Center 1997, ed. Siri Engberg). For older prints, Richard Axsom's 1982 catalogue raisonne *The Prints of Frank Stella* is invaluable.

[37] Stella has long used the squares on graph paper as his scale. For instance, an image will be drawn onto the paper, and a notation indicating "3x" would mean that each square should be expanded by a factor of three for the final product.

intermediate drafts. "The collage is what it is, but the print is in a way better. It's the finalized version... there's a record of change in the collage and the print is a record of completion."[38]

From these collages a final set of plates is built to Stella's full-scale specifications. Plate materials may include wood, poured aluminum, cast bronze, honeycomb aluminum and scavenged materials. Older plates are saved in the event that Stella wishes to reuse them for later projects. Once a paper is selected and prepared (occasionally painted or dyed), each plate is loaded with inks and then mounted into a press. Depending on the print type desired (relief, offset, intaglio, etc.), the pressure is adjusted on the press. The plate is then forced down onto the sheet of paper, leaving the desired result. Plates are wiped and re-inked between each use.

Tyler works carefully with the technical aspects of creating and preparing the plates. Stella is the creative advisor during the printing process, approving each print as it comes off the presses and finishing each print with additional inpainting if the design calls for it. The assistants are instructed by both Tyler and Stella on the production of the prints. Each print in the end is a conglomeration of the two men's abilities.

In the end, however, only Stella's name is attached to the final product. It is Stella's vision, his idea, his sketches; but he does not operate the presses nor pour the aluminum nor make the paper[39]. A similar charge could be leveled against those working in other artistic mediums; a painter usually does not weave his own canvas. But a potter will often develop her own clay blends and glazes and a carver will select from a particular quarry, often choosing specific blocks of stone. Further, as Stella has noted before, painting is a mostly isolated exercise. It could be said that other art forms such as sculpting and photography are equally isolated.

Printmaking, unlike most of these other art forms, is heavily dependent on equipment and technology, and the human power involved can be extensive. While Tyler's printshop involves a division of labor similar to traditional artist workshops, unlike these workshops none of these employees are training as apprentice artists nor are they expected to specialize in one area of printmaking.[40] The employees are reduced to tools manipulated by both Stella and Tyler. Tyler himself, for all his technical brilliance, is denied the final public acknowledgement of sharing namespace with a work. Although Tyler's skill is justly recognized in art journals, scholarly works and by many fellow artists, he is not given the equal billing a true collaboration would incorporate.

Stella's single-name masthead is extolled by curator Richard Axsom, who wrote "What we see is the artist Frank Stella's, and no one else's, invention: his personal world of the imagination, his act of rendering it visible. Stella is the magician whose sleight of hand

[38] Frank Stella, quoted in Engberg, pg, 12
[39] Stella often has a hand in dyeing or pre-painting papers, but this is usually performed after the paper itself has been made – he is not integral to the manufacturing process.
[40] Axsom, pg. 186

with tools and materials conjures up fantastic illustrations out of mere printer's inks and papers."[41] Axsom elevates Stella to the status of a mythical creator, an individual who carves fiction into real life. In this same statement, Axsom eliminates all traces of Tyler's assistance, instead suggesting that Stella performed all the work on his prints alone. Because Stella is the only name attributed to his work, this myth of the solo artist continues, at least to an uninformed public who may not know or care enough to do the research necessary to uncover Tyler's contributions. This in essence renders Tyler as another semi-anonymous face in the guild of Stella.

V: Conclusion

Stella is undeniably a pivotal figure on the divide between Abstract Expressionism and what we call Minimalism today. His work is devoid of both attached or inherent emotion and of the artist's hand. In his pre-*Polish Series* work, the canvas is literally stained or manipulated to look as if the image was imprinted into the canvas. Stella carefully removed all traces of brushstrokes and eliminated himself from the works, allowing those examining his art to view the work in terms of objectivity alone. The painting is the painting is the painting, and what you see is what you see, to borrow from Stella's own words.

While the effacement of the artist is the point of the work, it is not at all the point of Frank Stella. He is an established brand hero, a constructed image of an artist whose raison d'etre is to promote pure objectivity via a masculinization of the artist himself. Stella protects this image in myriad ways, including fighting for copyright and denying acknowledgement of other artists' contribution to his work. His arguments are occasionally naïve and shortsighted, but in sum he has successfully made himself among the most famous and recognizable artists of the past fifty years.

None of this is to say Stella is a bad artist; his work is in fact immensely technical and generally satisfying to those who have any art or art history training. But this love is not universal; rather, Stella's reputation was fostered over a very short period of time by an imprimatur granted to his work via established channels, i.e. museums and renowned galleries. Critically, Stella was and is skewered in the press, but his friends and collectors have been prominent enough to offset bad press and vault him to the top of the art world, a position he has kept throughout his career.

[41] Ibid., pg. 183-4

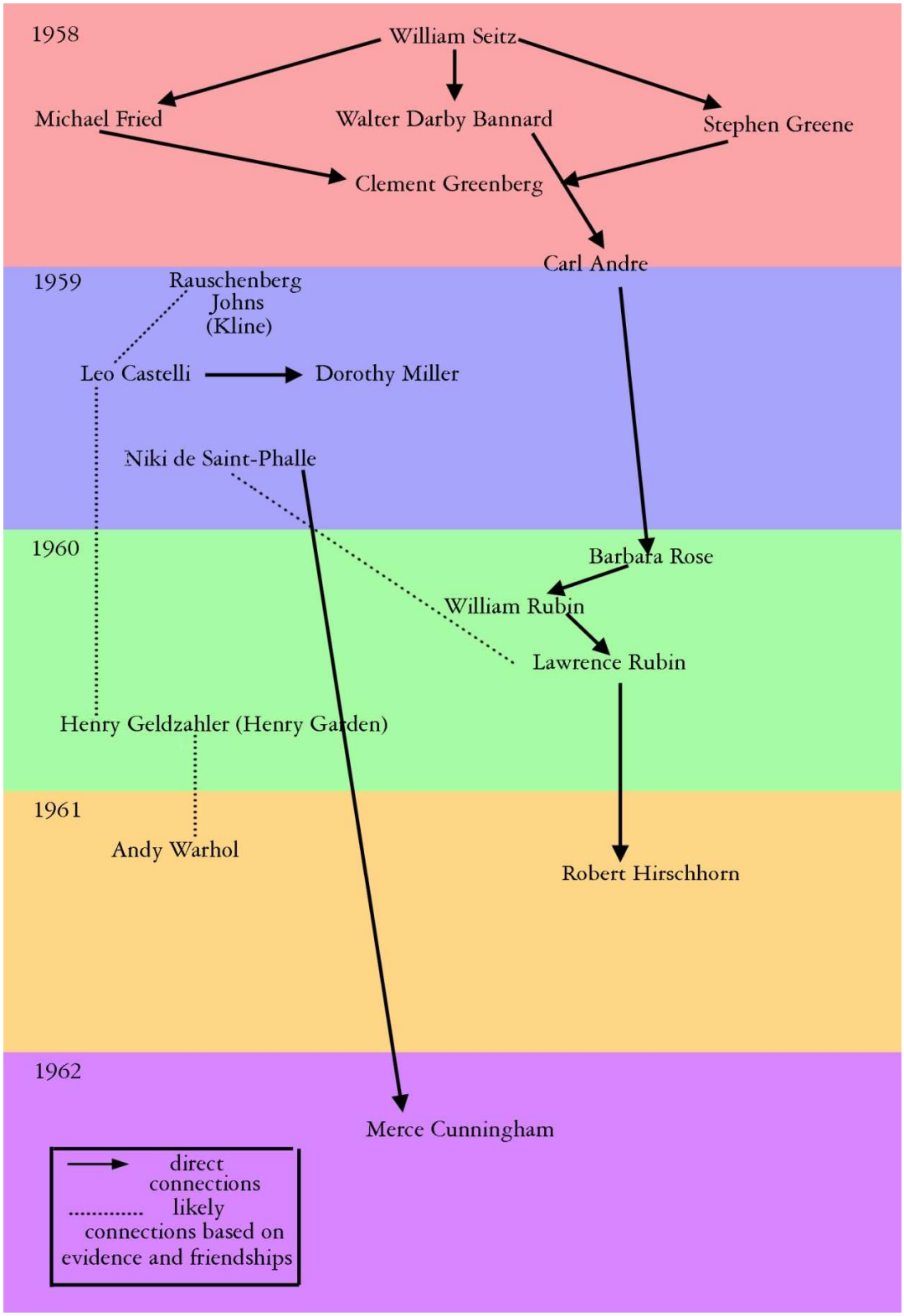

Figure 1: A diagram of Stella's friendship networks, with respect to their influence on Stella's career.