

MNUCHIN GALLERY

WIDEWALLS

In a Historic First, Mnuchin Gallery Presents Frank Stella's Indian Birds Series



Frank Stella - Maha-lat 5.5x, 1978-1979. Mixed media on metal relief; 87 3/4 x 111 x 38 1/2 inches (222.9 x 281.9 x 97.8 cm) © Frank Stella/ Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photography by Bill Orcutt.

By Kame Hame

October 23, 2023

Over the course of nearly six decades, American artist Frank Stella has explored the possibilities of Abstraction in paintings, prints, and sculpture by pushing their boundaries well past conventional norms. Thus, he played a major role in the development of Abstraction movement in the US during the 20th century.

Currently on view at Mnuchin Gallery is the artist's exhibition entitled *Indian Birds*. The solo show features maquettes, archival drawings, and six *Indian Birds* created during the late 1970s. The display of these one-of-a-kind works offers a rare opportunity to discover novel perspectives on the intersection of painting and sculpture.

The Maquettes

Throughout his career, Frank Stella has always stayed true to his goal of reinvigorating painting by inventing a new pictorial space. The *Indian Birds* series stood quite apart from his earlier works, such as *Black*, *Aluminum*, and *Copper* paintings characterized by straight lines and one or two colors. Unlike them, the *Birds* are all in curves bursting with vibrant colors.

Stella first realized the series in October 1977 during a twelve-day stay in Ahmedabad, India. As a guest of the Sarabhai family, who often extended their hospitality to visiting artists, he was generously provided with assistants and everything else he might need to work. The artist drew inspiration from instruments used by marine and architectural draftsman, specifically the forms found in Danish ship curves and railroad curves. First, he drew two drawings and then superimposed them to create a third, which his assistants used as a blueprint to cut the tin alloy maquettes.



Installation view of Frank Stella: *Indian Birds* at Mnuchin Gallery, October 4 - December 9, 2023. © Frank Stella/ Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photography by Tom Powel Imaging.

Frank Stella's "Maximalist" Paintings

Although there have been many debates about whether the works in the series are sculptures or paintings, the artist himself always refused to call them anything else but paintings. In fact, due to their sculpture-like qualities, he coined the name "maximalist" paintings.

The maquettes had no paint on them, which he would add later on to the finished works he created between 1978 and 1979. The full-scale *Indian Birds* were 5.5 times larger than their respective

maquettes. The first constructed piece was a transparent gridded armature that held all the metal mesh, screening, and metal curves, which he painted in bright colors. Frank Stella said:

I have to have a structure worth painting on. If it fails, as in all my earlier work, it fails by what happened before I begin painting.

Indian Birds At Mnuchin Gallery

With this series, the artist created pictorial compositions that transcended the confines of two dimensions and challenged the painting's conventional notion of flatness. Upon their completion, *Indian Birds* were first exhibited in a 1979 exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art in New York. This is the first time the audience will be able to enjoy the complete series since their inaugural show. The exhibition will be accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue, authored by Karen Wilkin.



Installation view of Frank Stella: *Indian Birds* at Mnuchin Gallery, October 4 - December 9, 2023. © Frank Stella/ Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photography by Tom Powel Imaging.

The exhibition *Frank Stella: Indian Birds* will be on view at Mnuchin Gallery in New York until December 9th, 2023.