

Abstract Frank Stella sculpture 'Adjoeman' joins Cedars-Sinai artworks



Artist Frank Stella stands beside his sculpture "Adjoeman," which was created in 2004. The sculpture has been installed at the intersection of Beverly and San Vicente boulevards, in front of Cedars-Sinai Medical Center. (Luis Sinco / Los Angeles Times)

By **DEBORAH VANKIN**

JULY 7, 2014, 5:00 AM

An enormous abstract sculpture, a sailboat of sorts, rests on a pedestal at the intersection of Beverly and San Vicente boulevards in West Hollywood. Its dark, carbon-fiber sails seem to billow in the wind, and corkscrew spirals of stainless steel, like twirling gusts of air, dance around it. Cedars-Sinai Medical Center rises up behind it, like towering, angry waves.

Frank Stella, the abstract artist who made the piece, circles it on foot, viewing it for the first time since it was installed. In a dapper sports coat and brown fedora, the 78-year-old New York artist — a fixture in the modern-art world for more than 50 years and one of the fathers of Minimalism — assesses the sculpture while in perpetual motion. He speaks quickly, pausing only to look up at the piece from

different angles, hand on hip, squinting into the sunlight.

"It's nice. Yeah, yeah, looks nice," he says in a nasally New York accent. "I like it up high like that, it almost floats. Yeah."

The sculpture, "Adjoeman," is on long-term loan from Stella to Cedars-Sinai. It's one of the newer pieces in the medical center's massive modern and contemporary art collection, which dates to 1976 and includes more than 4,000 original paintings, sculptures, new-media installations and limited-edition prints by the likes of Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg, Richard Diebenkorn, Sam Francis, Claes Oldenburg, Willem de Kooning, Raymond Pettibon and Pablo Picasso — not to mention 61 additional Stella works.

"Their collection represents some of the marquee names of the 20th century," says Bill Eiland, director of the Georgia Museum of Art in Athens, who's been to Cedars twice for art viewing. "In its breadth and quality of the artists, it would be comparable to the Phillips Collection in Washington, though with more California artists. It surprised and delighted me."

An endorsement of art's power to heal, the artworks — paired with explanatory wall text and framed in museum-grade Plexiglass — are surprisingly accessible, lining hospital corridors, filling waiting rooms and adorning administrative offices. A David Hockney hangs around one corner, a Roy Lichtenstein around another. One Picasso print hangs above a microwave in the Blood Donor Facility.

Nine large-scale works dot courtyards, parking lots and public walkways throughout the approximately 30-acre campus. A Robert Irwin light installation was recently added, and a Jennifer Steinkamp multimedia projection — long tendrils of multicolored plants and flowers — appears after dark on both walls of a breezeway.

"I try to give an enriched environment," says Cedars' full-time art curator, John T. Lange, who oversees the collection, 90% to 95% of which is on display at any given time. "It's something interesting and enjoyable for the visitors, the staff, the patients. It's this pleasant sort of distraction from why you're really here."

Stella says he's unsure about the healing powers of art, pointing out that his father was a gynecologist, his wife and son are pediatricians, another son is a radiologist and his granddaughter is in medical school.

"I go by whether you get out of the hospital with an infection or not!" he jokes in a Cedars conference room before the sculpture viewing. He slides down in his seat, letting out a rapid-fire giggle, his shirt

pocket bulging with pens, a phone and a half-smoked cigar. "People say [art] has an effect. Whatever healing effects art may have, it's the attention that goes with the art that's paid to the patient that really helps with the result."

Stella came to Los Angeles for a Cedars event honoring the nine artists who have outdoor artwork on display. Guy Dill, Woods Davy, Irwin and Steinkamp also attended the reception at the restaurant AOC later that afternoon. The work of Billy Al Bengston, Jonathan Borofsky and Fletcher Benton is also on view along with a reproduction of Michelangelo's "Moses."

Cedars' art collection — developed by the late philanthropists Fred and Marcia Weisman — consists entirely of gifts from donors, other institutions and occasionally the artists themselves. The hospital says it's not able to comment on the value of the collection; the bulk of works by big-name artists are signed and numbered editions, as opposed to original paintings. The only money the medical center spends on art, it says, is for occasional transfer and installation expense and the art staff, which consists of Lange, a management assistant and two preparators who help with framing and installation. There's no additional security. The paintings are simply bolted to the walls with special fasteners.

Lange works with an 18-person advisory council of collectors, consultants, artists and former museum staffers who vet donations and seek out acquisitions. Dill and Davy are on the advisory council and both personally gifted Cedars with their works. In the late '70s, Warhol gave Cedars a series of 10 hand-watercolored, floral serigraphs.

The collection typically grows by about a dozen works a year, Lange says. A slow year might see 10 new works; in 2008, however, the hospital acquired 400 mostly photographs from Chicago's Ruttenberg Arts Foundation, which was slimming its collection. Given the needs of patients, however, Cedars is especially careful about what art they accept and where they place it. No spiral abstracts on a floor with patients recovering from strokes, who might get dizzy, Lange explains.

"We have to be mindful of our audience, we don't want to be too offensive," Lange says. "We have to make sure the works aren't too big or too fragile because we're not a museum. There are carts and gurneys being pushed around, things could get bumped and cracked."

Stella mounted the sculpture on a circular track, intending for it to spin; for safety reasons, the hospital bolted it down but agreed to rotate the piece every so often to help realize Stella's vision.

Lange frequently rotates the art in the collection and creates installations of like-minded work, often juxtaposing images to make broader statements. An exhibit of 12 Rauchenbergs are by one waiting

room, and elsewhere six black-and-white Stella prints hang next to a Hockney print that references the Stella prints.

"It's ever-evolving, especially as we get things in that relate to one another," Lange says.

Lange works with nurses on how to use wall art to their advantage, and he occasionally leads tours for patients to aid in their recovery. One rehab floor has an exhibit of portraits by Life magazine photographer Leigh Wiener.

"We use the faces as landmarks: 'Today we're gonna walk to the Judy Garland, today we're gonna walk to the JFK,'" Lange says. "For cognitive recovery, we'll ask them, 'Do you know who this is?' It's reconnecting those synapses, rebuilding those bridges."

Stella's "Adjoeman" loan is an indefinite one. Why a long-term loan as opposed to a gift?

"I'm not a philanthropist, I'm in the business of supporting myself and making art," Stella says.

Stella's "Adjoeman," which he finished in 2004, is one in a series about Bali, where Stella vacationed in the '80s.

"One thing about abstraction is that if it's gonna have a life of its own, it's gotta find some way to have a narrative quality or narrative impulse," he says. "This series is all titles of words in Balinese language. There's something about Bali that's special."

Stella says he was surprised that Cedars accepted his sailboat sculpture, which was installed in October 2012. He wasn't sure it would work in L.A., but he's pleased to have it displayed among so many artists he respects, many of whom are old friends.

Finishing up the "Adjoeman" viewing, Stella circles his sculpture one last time.

"Yeah," he says in that accent. "It works here."

He looks around at the traffic circling the corner and the swaying palms circling the intersection — concentric circles of movement.

"For some [artists], it's not about producing the work, it's about creating momentum," he says. "They can't stay with it unless they're moving and the work is moving. It seems to me now, looking back, it doesn't so much matter what you do — just that you keep doing it."

deborah.vankin@latimes.com

Copyright © 2014, Los Angeles Times