

# LÉVY GORVY 厲為閣

## LÉVY GORVY TO PRESENT FRANK STELLA'S FIRST EXHIBITION IN GREATER CHINA

### **American Master. Frank Stella: Polish Villages**

24 May—27 July 2019

Lévy Gorvy  
Ground Floor, 2 Ice House Street  
Central, Hong Kong

**Opening Reception: Thursday 23 May, 6-8PM**



Frank Stella. *Olkienniki II*, 1972. Corrugated cardboard, felt, paint and wood construction, 95 x 84 inches (241.3 x 213.4 cm). © 2019 Frank Stella / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

**Hong Kong**—Lévy Gorvy is pleased to announce *American Master. Frank Stella: Polish Villages* an exhibition of assemblages from Frank Stella's seminal *Polish Village* series (1970–74) that together will comprise the American artist's first exhibition in Greater China. Inspired by the 17<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> century wooden synagogues in eastern Poland that were destroyed by the Nazis during World War II, the series marks a critical point in the artist's evolution: his first direct engagement with sculptural relief in his paintings. Opening on 24 May, the exhibition will span the entirety of Lévy Gorvy's newly inaugurated space on the ground floor of the historic St. George's Building in Central.

In the late 1950s, Stella emerged on the scene with his Minimalist "Black Paintings," a reaction to the legacy of Abstract Expressionism that seemed to herald a new era in postwar art. Seeking to reject illusionism, Stella worked with symmetrical patterns, a restricted palette, and an impersonal application of paint, emphasizing both the flatness of the picture surface and the shape of the canvas itself to present an irreducible object. Working systematically in series, he developed a problem-solving approach to painting that, through variations in pigments and procedures, offered a progression of experimentation with the tension between painted surface and three-dimensional form.

Engaging with the logics of Cubism and Constructivism, Stella's *Polish Village* assemblages began around 1970 and found the artist breaking the surface plane established in his previous series. As Stella proceeded, elements of the pictorial sphere began to emerge as sculptural, architectural reliefs that orient toward a diagonal axis. His *Polish Village* paintings were inspired by Maria and Kazimierz Piechotka's book *Wooden Synagogues* (Arkady, 1959), in which the book's Jewish architecture experts compiled photographs and line drawings of seventy-one synagogues documented during an architectural survey in the 1920s and '30s. Sharing affinities with the angular architectures and sophisticated carpentry of the synagogues, each of Stella's compositions—named for the structures pictured in the Piechotkas' book—appears in several versions that are materially and formally distinct. In *Artforum* in 2016, Stella described an underlying concept of the series: where modernism's

Constructivist line can be traced from Moscow to Berlin via Warsaw, the course of the Nazis, who ruined these sacred sites, mirrored that path in reverse.



Frank Stella. *Rozdol I*, 1973. Mixed media low relief collage (felt, colored canvas, paint on Kachina Board), 114 x 94 x 5 inches (289.6 x 238.8 x 12.7 cm). © 2019 Frank Stella / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

On view at Lévy Gorvy will be *Olkienniki II* (1972) and *Rozdol I* (1973), two large-scale painted works which reveal the diverse materials Stella employed in his foray into relief, including corrugated cardboard, felt, wood, and colored canvas. The *Polish Village* series emerged following the artist's first retrospective, which opened at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in March of 1970, when Stella was just 34; he was the youngest artist to receive a full-scale retrospective in the institution's history to that date. Stella felt ambivalent about the formal debates surrounding his exhibition in the midst of the turbulence of the Vietnam War, and the *Polish Village* works comprise his poignant response. Likewise, the series ushered in the "maximalist" period of formal experimentation that characterized Stella's output throughout the '70s and '80s.

#### **About the Artist**

Frank Stella (b. 1936) was born in the Boston suburb of Malden, Massachusetts, and began painting as a student at Phillips Academy in Andover. His teacher Bartlett H. Hayes, Jr., a painter and the director of the Addison Gallery of American Art, promulgated the ideas of Bauhaus color theorist Josef Albers and proto-Abstract Expressionist Hans Hofmann, granting Stella with a notion of painting as a systemic project. Stella continued with painting courses under William Seitz and Stephen Greene at Princeton University while he earned his

degree in history. In 1958, he graduated and moved to New York, where he found himself reckoning with the legacy of Abstract Expressionism. Stella has recounted his conception of Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning at the time: "I sensed a hesitancy, a doubt of some vague dimension which made their work touching, but to me somehow too vulnerable." He was rather drawn to the restraint and sequential logic of Jasper Johns' flags and targets.

In 1959, when he was just twenty-three, Stella was the youngest artist included in the seminal exhibition *Sixteen Americans* at the Museum of Modern Art, with four of his "Black Paintings," which eventually comprised some two dozen large-scale canvases described by art historian Kate Nesin as "diagrammatic but also tactile." The following year, he mounted his first solo exhibition at Leo Castelli Gallery in New York. He began working systematically in series, arranging flat color fields into geometric patterns and non-illusionistic surfaces. Three series of his striped and then shaped paintings—*Black*, *Aluminum*, and *Copper*—were received as essential in the transition from Abstract Expressionism to Minimalism. A friend of Carl Andre and Donald Judd, Stella had a significant influence on the development of Minimal sculpture, coining the Minimalist expression "What you see is what you see" in 1964.

Stella's work was subsequently featured in group exhibitions that defined art of the postwar era, including *Geometric Abstraction* (1962, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York), *The Shaped Canvas* (1964–65) and *Systemic Painting* (1966, both at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York), and *Documenta 4* (1968). In 1970, he became the youngest artist ever to receive a full-scale retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art when they mounted an 11-year survey of his work; the institution devoted a second survey to the next 17 years of his production in 1987. During that interval, Stella's paintings began to project from the wall, as collages, then reliefs, and eventually as complex spatial constructions. He abandoned the restraint characteristic of his early work for bold, opulent gestures. He has described the progress of his work from the late 1950s on as one from Minimalism to "Maximalism." Stella is the author of many essays exploring painting and abstraction, and he

delivered a lecture series as the Charles Eliot Norton Professor of Poetry at Harvard University in 1983, which resulted in his 1986 book *Working Space*. In 2015, the Whitney Museum of American Art celebrated his six-decades-long career with a major retrospective of his paintings, reliefs, sculptures, painting-sculpture hybrids, and works on paper.

### **About Lévy Gorvy**

Lévy Gorvy cultivates a program devoted to innovation and connoisseurship in the fields of modern, postwar, and contemporary art. Founded by Dominique Lévy and Brett Gorvy, Lévy Gorvy maintains gallery spaces at 909 Madison Avenue in New York, in Mayfair, London, and in Central, Hong Kong. The gallery fosters continued dedication to the living artists and artists' estates that it represents and offers a robust program of exhibitions and multidisciplinary events. The gallery also produces ongoing art historical research and original scholarship, publishing exhibition catalogues, monographs, and other key publications. The Zürich office, Lévy Gorvy with Rumbler, offers bespoke private advisory services to collectors and institutions around the globe.

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