

# The Museum of Modern Art

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## FRANK STELLA: THE INDIAN BIRD MAQUETTES

An exhibition of fourteen small maquettes and a pair of drawings by the noted contemporary painter Frank Stella will be on view in the first-floor galleries of The Museum of Modern Art from March 12 through May 1, 1979. These maquettes were made in preparation for Stella's Indian Bird series of paintings, eight of which were exhibited recently (January 1979) at the Leo Castelli Gallery in New York City. FRANK STELLA: THE INDIAN BIRD MAQUETTES is being directed by William S. Rubin, Director of the Department of Painting and Sculpture, who is also the author of the brochure which accompanies the exhibition.

The Indian Bird maquettes were executed in October 1977, while the artist was a guest of the Sarabhai family in Ahmedabad, India. Stella developed each maquette by first doing a pair of drawings on transparent paper and then superimposing one over the other. Indian assistants--Stella's crew ranged in number from four to twenty-four--then traced the forms from aluminum stencils Stella had brought with him and cut them out of scrap metal. Most of these were tin alloy sheets silk-screened with misregistered and multiple overprintings of the names and logos of various soft-drink and food-processing companies. (Only #2, Maha-lat, the first of the series to be undertaken, was preceded by a preparatory model--the paper version shown in this exhibition. The aluminum version was made after Stella's return to the U.S.)

"The characteristic shapes of these reliefs are all irregular curves, taken from instruments used by marine and architectural draftsmen," notes William Rubin in his wall label for the exhibition. "The majority of forms in the Indian Birds are Danish Ship Curves, but there are also Railroad Curves, used to plot the patterns on which rail bedding turns. The composition of these received forms is intended to provide a structural starting point for the actual process of painting. 'In order to start painting,' says Stella, '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.' The actual painting took place only on the definitive works...which are 5.5 times larger in scale than the maquettes. In the maquettes there is virtually no painting; with the exception of some scumbled color or scribble--designed to bridge the color gaps on some of the imprinted tin--the material was used as found, though it was selected for variety."

In the full-scale, finished Indian Bird paintings, Stella translates the printed and chance patterns of these maquettes into brash, heightened colors. Thus, the brilliant Indian Bird paintings are as heterodox in their way as Stella's early paintings with their "'non-color'" and minimum of visual incident. Mr. Rubin: "What I have always liked about Stella's art is that it consistently forced me to expand the boundaries of my experience. Indeed, it has expanded the definition of what painting can be, to the profit of a whole generation of artists."

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