

SCHOLASTIC

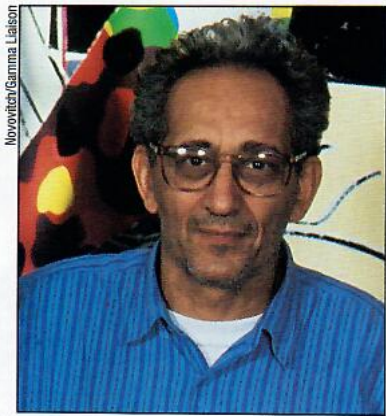
# ART

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**ABSTRACTION**  
Frank Stella

 SCHOLASTIC



COVER: Frank Stella in his studio with one of his large painted metal reliefs from the series called *Cones and Pillars*. Photo: Lacombe, Inc.

SCHOLASTIC

ART

Maurice R. Robinson, founder of Scholastic, Inc., 1895-1982

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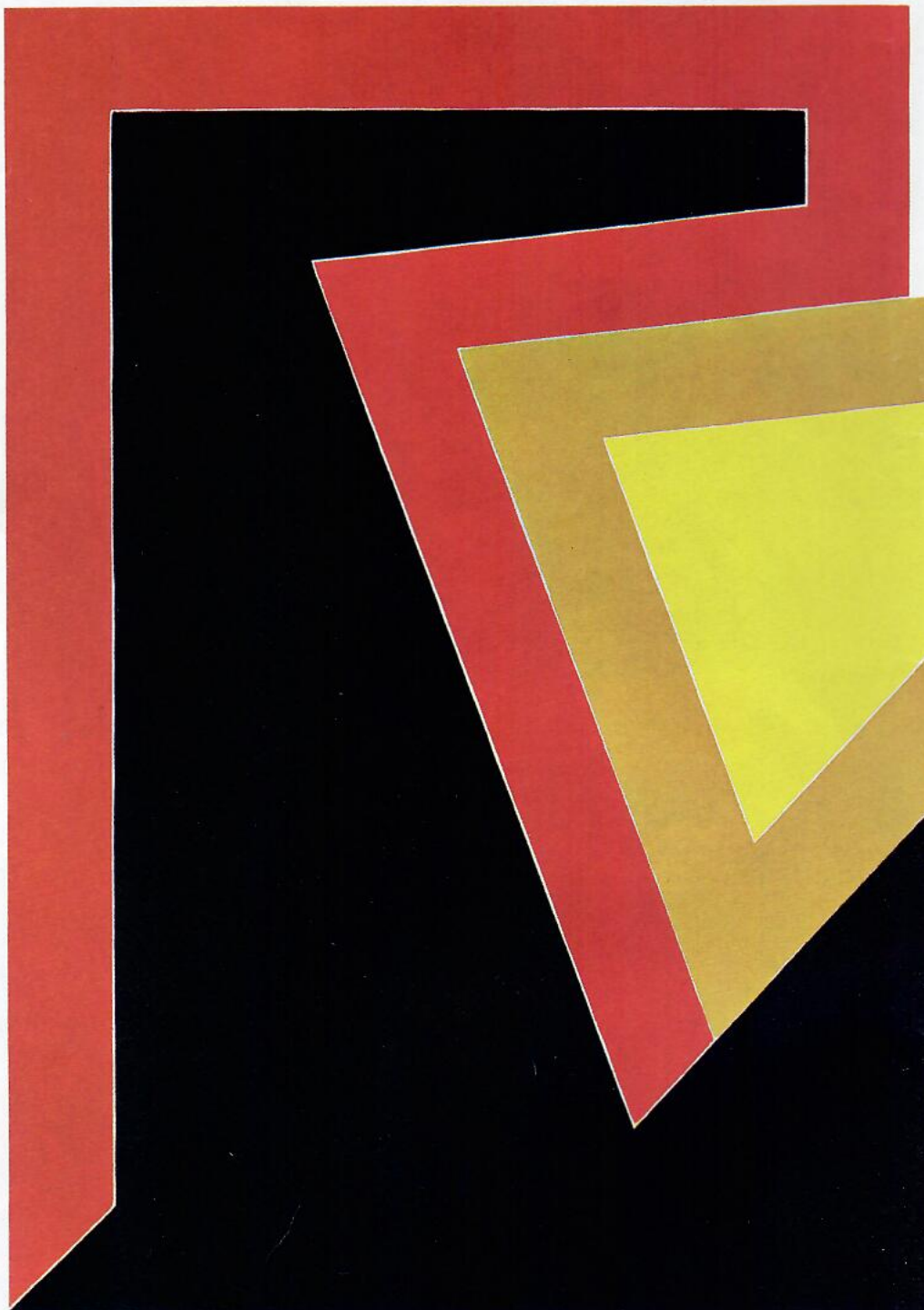
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# Frank



"The experience of looking at a painting should not seem to end at the frame."

—FRANK STELLA

Frank Stella b. 1936. *Tultonboro*, 1966. 8' 3" x 9' 1". Private Collection, Photo courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery, NY, NY.

All Stella paintings in this issue  
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# Stella

## BEYOND THE FRAME

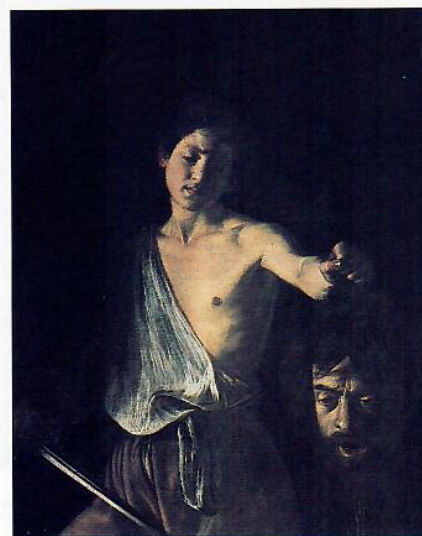
What could the two images shown here—a young man holding up a human head, and an abstract painting of a yellow triangle and a red line set within a black square—possibly have in common?

The subject chosen by 16th-century Italian artist Michelangelo da Caravaggio—the Biblical story of David who killed the giant Goliath—in the painting (right) is very brutal and dramatic. And the artist's painting style heightens the effect of this shocking scene by making it look as though David is actually thrusting Goliath's head right into the viewer's face. The way in which Caravaggio deals with *space*—the **dramatic lighting**, the **diagonal lines**, and his use of **foreshortening** (the hand and head are made larger so they seem to be closer) involves the viewer and creates a strong emotional reaction to this work.

In his painting on the left, American artist Frank Stella uses the same compositional device as Caravaggio, but in a very modern and contemporary way. Caravaggio's figure appears to be breaking out of the frame just as Stella's red *line* seems to be pushing a yellow *triangle* out of a black *rectangular* frame. Caravaggio has used recognizable images while Stella has reduced his composition to pure shapes, lines, and colors.

Contemporary painter Frank Stella is regarded as one of the most important and inventive abstract artists working today. Stella never wanted to paint realistically. He says, "I always wanted to make abstract paintings...I wanted my paintings to live in a world of their own." Nonrepresentational art began early in the 20th century. In mov-

*"There must be a vital exchange between viewer and painting if both are to live."*—FRANK STELLA

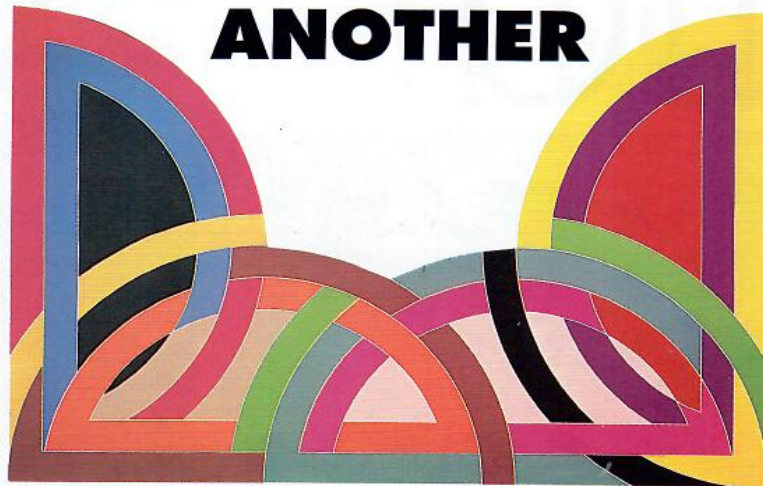


**"Abstract paintings must be as real as those created by the 16th-century Italians."**—FRANK STELLA

Michelangelo da Caravaggio (1571-1610).  
*David With the Head of Goliath*, c. 1606.  
Borghese Gallery, Rome. Photo, Art Resource.

ing away from recognizable images, artists were able to express themselves in a way that was free of associations with the external world. Abstract artists want the viewer to respond directly to the formal **elements** and **principles** of composition—**shapes, lines, colors, spaces, balance, rhythm, harmony**. The artist offers no clues to the ideas and emotions within the work; the response to it depends on what the viewer brings to it. Like many of the "Minimal" abstract artists working during the 1960s, Frank Stella reduced his canvases to a few, usually flat, shapes. The paintings are huge, so the viewer feels surrounded by a physical presence. In this issue, you'll see how Frank Stella's art changed from spare "Minimal" pictures to complex and exciting new forms.

# INTO ANOTHER

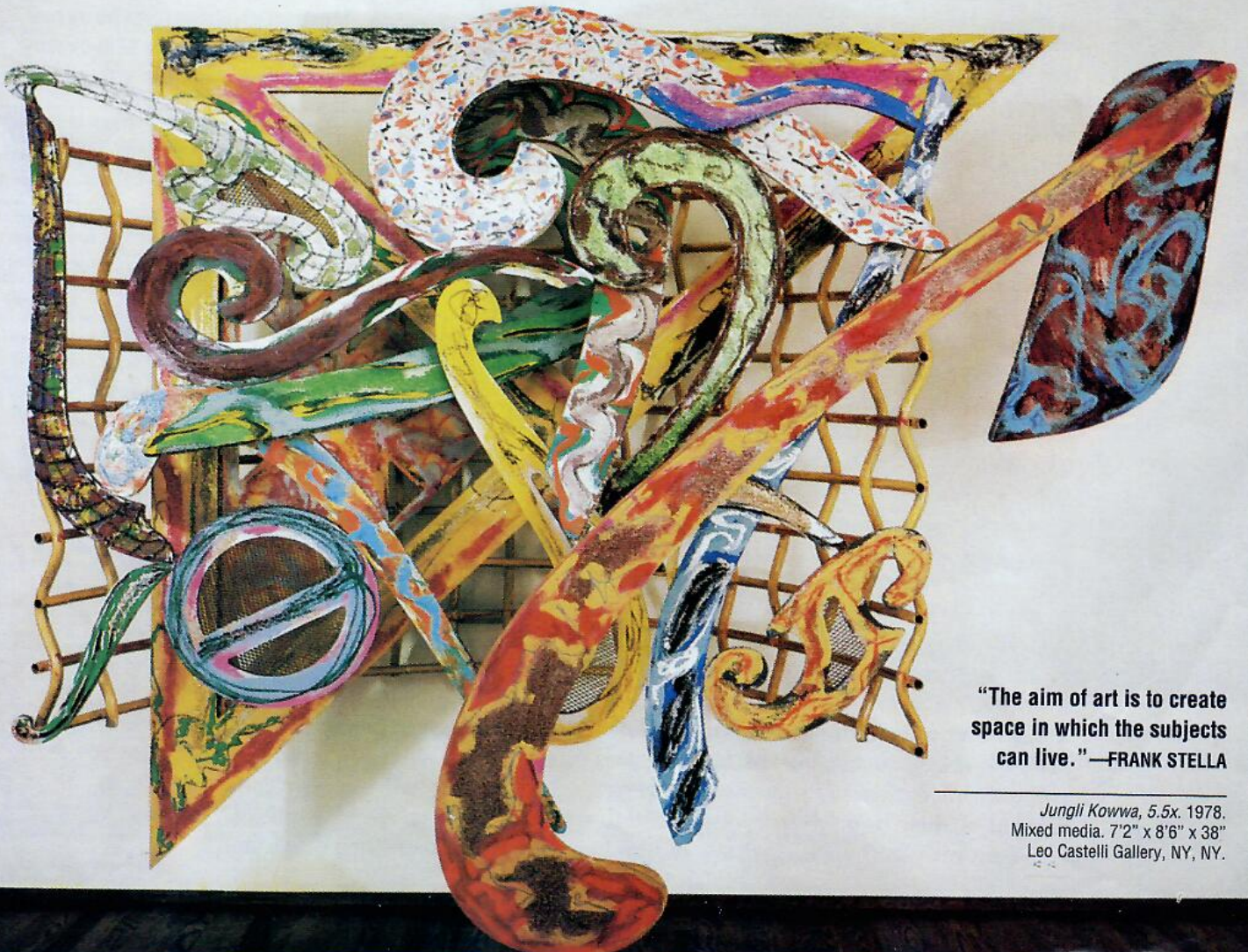


“Painting does not want to be confined—it needs room to move and breathe.”

—FRANK STELLA

*Sinjerli Variation IV*, 1968. Diameter 10".  
Leo Castelli Gallery, NY, NY.

# Dimension



“The aim of art is to create space in which the subjects can live.”—FRANK STELLA

*Jungli Kowwa*, 5.5x. 1978.  
Mixed media. 7'2" x 8'6" x 38"  
Leo Castelli Gallery, NY, NY.

**F**rank Stella was born in 1936, grew up in a middle-class Boston suburb, and went to high school at Phillips Academy in Massachusetts. He remembers his first high school art project, which began his career as an abstract painter.

The assignment was to paint a still life of a pot of sickly looking ivy sitting on a table. While everyone else painted realistic ivy, Stella's solution was completely abstract. He hasn't painted naturalistically since then. After high school, the artist went to Princeton University; in 1958, he moved to a studio in New York City.

*Abstract Expressionism*, a style of painting characterized by thick, freely brushed strokes, drips, or pourings, all used to express emotion, was very popular at the time. Frank Stella wanted to create a kind of abstraction that was completely different. So he painted a series of formal, unemotional works depending on a *minimum* of colors and shapes. His "Black Paintings" (right) were all done in a single color—black—and made up of even, symmetrical (the same on both sides) stripes of equal width. These paintings were meant merely to be experienced and to have no other messages. The artist said, "What you see is what you see." But when you look at this painting, does it seem to have happy associations? What might the title, *Jill*, mean? What about some of Stella's other Black Paintings' titles—*Getty Tomb*, *Bethlehem's Hospital*? Stella's paintings were included in a show featuring the work of unknown artists at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1959. It made the 23-year-old painter famous overnight.

After the Black Paintings, in his search for pure, flat design, Stella abandoned a traditional rectangular format. He began painting on huge shaped canvases. Squares, semicircles (above, left), triangles, hexagons were repeated in interlocking, geometric patterns done in bright, luminous colors. All the artist's work during the 1960s emphasized impersonality and flatness.

In the 1970s, Stella's work changed completely. The artist spoke later about what he felt had happened to him: "One day after



***"Abstract painting of today has lost touch with the energy and vitality of the past."*** —FRANK STELLA

arriving in Rome...I wandered over to the Capitoline Museum, and there I saw a painting by Caravaggio. And that painting just suddenly seemed like the only painting there—as though it were not just better than anything else there, but more *real*. I'd never before felt such a physical thing about a painting." Still later the artist said, "Flat is dead—space, roundness, fullness are life-giving. Why can't abstraction be as alive?"

Stella transformed his rigidly straight geometric shapes and flat colors into freely painted three-dimensional reliefs (left and on the cover), filled with swirls and found objects. Trips to Brazil and India resulted in a series of huge, layered constructions made of aluminum, metal tubing, and wire mesh painted with startling Day-Glo paint. He made scores of these monumental pieces, which he called *Exotic Birds* and *Indian Birds*. As the artist said, "I want my pieces to soar."

**"Black Paintings," like the one shown above, made Frank Stella a famous artist.**

*Jill*, 1959. 7'6" x 6'6". Enamel on canvas. Leo Castelli Gallery, NY, NY.

MASTERPIECE  
OF THE MONTH

Preview

# W MAKING Waves

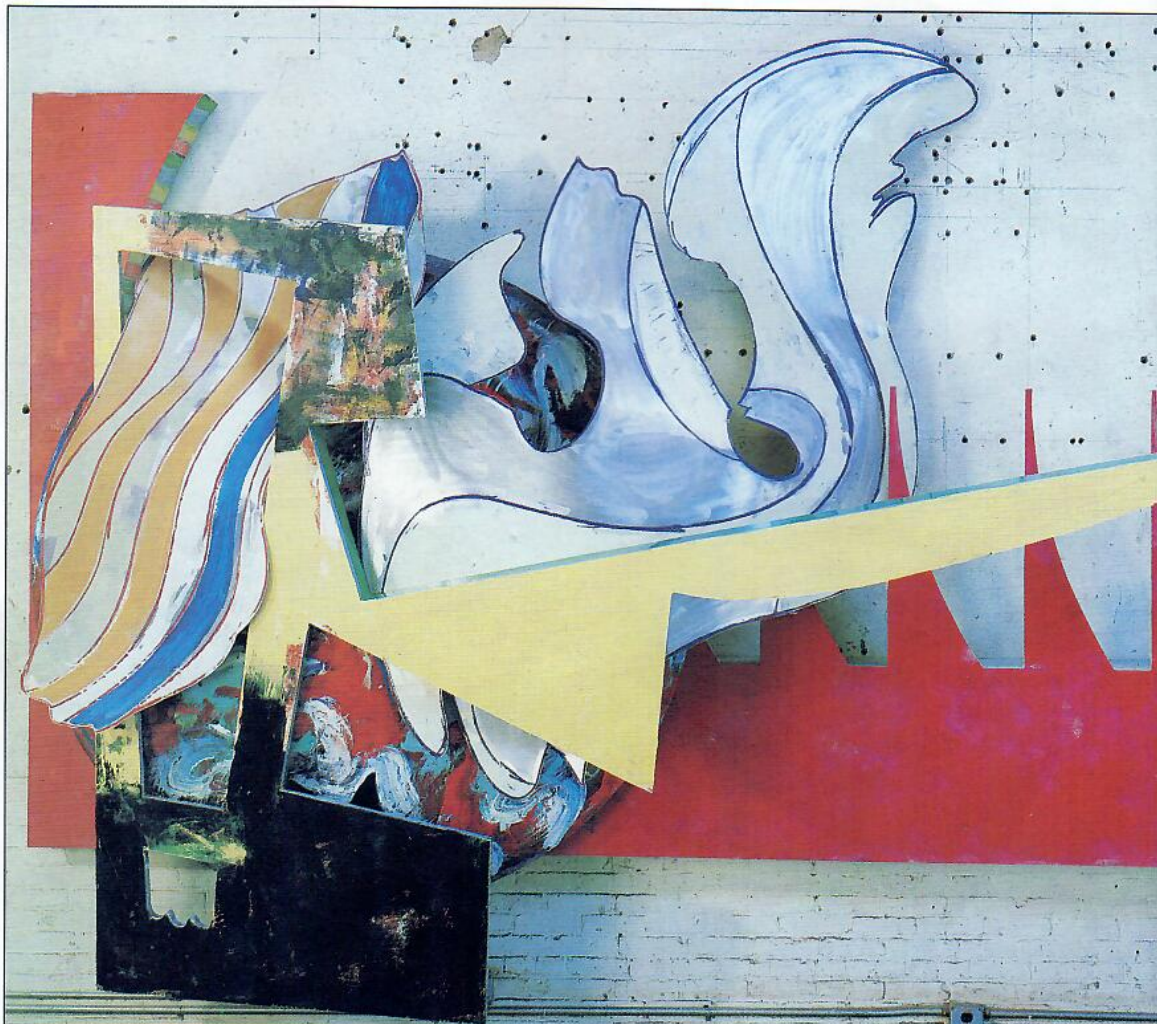


Interviewer:  
“You still  
call these  
paintings?”

Frank Stella:  
“Yes. They  
are in  
fact,  
paintings.”

In abstract works like  
*The Chase*, above,  
Frank Stella has invented  
a whole new visual  
vocabulary.

*The Chase, First Day*, 1988-89.  
Mixed media. 101" x 229" x  
50 1/2". Photo courtesy Knoedler  
Gallery, NY, NY.

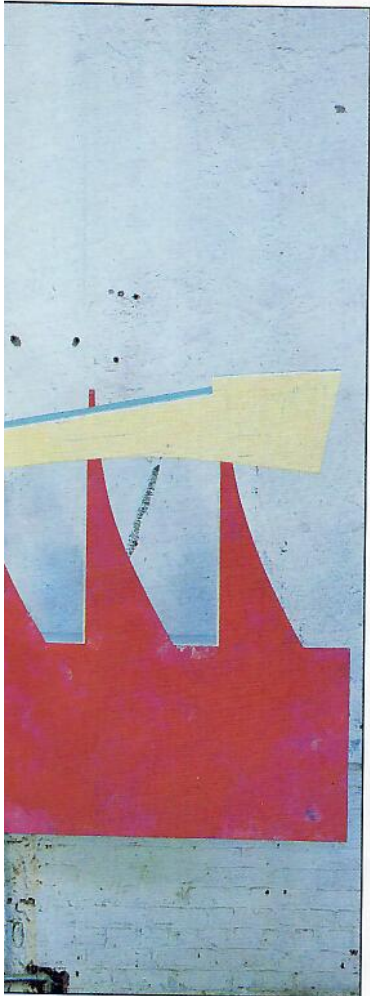
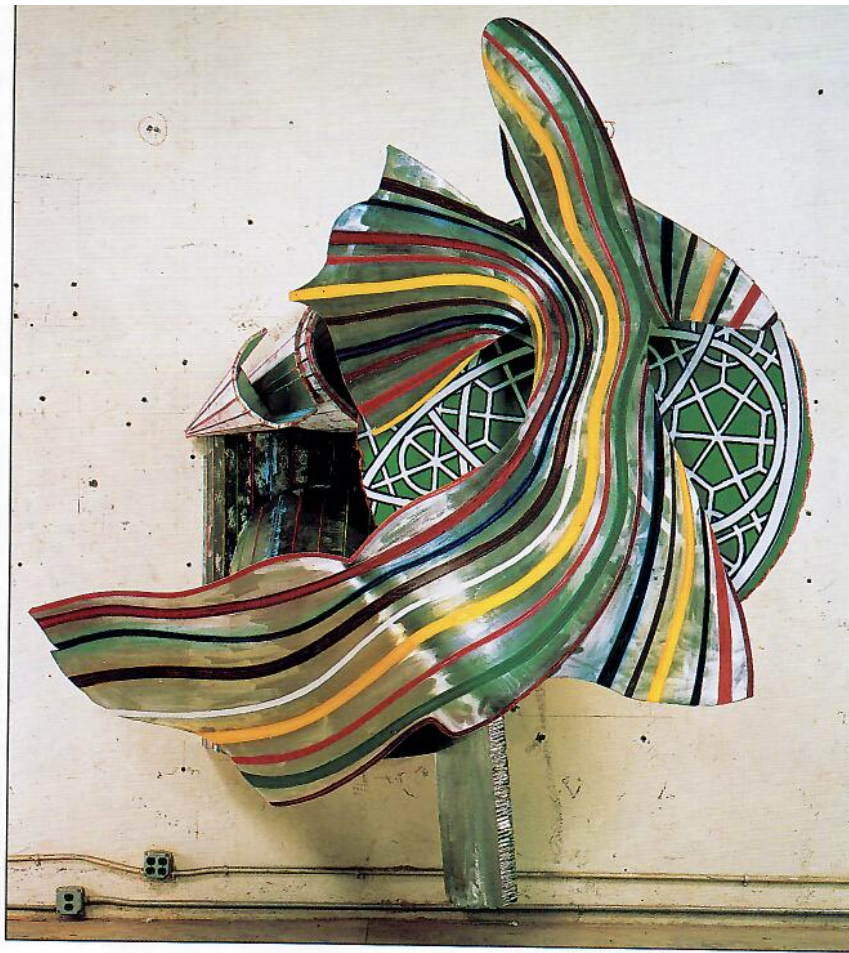


Without looking at its  
title, what does the  
construction on the right  
remind you of?

*The Shark Massacre*, 1988. Mixed  
media. 117" x 180" x 49 1/2".  
Photo courtesy Knoedler Gallery,  
NY, NY.

Does the curved shape on the right resemble the ocean or anything that lives in it?

*The Spirit Spout*, 1988.  
Mixed media. 125" x 108" x 42 1/2". Photo, courtesy Knoedler Gallery, NY, NY.



**B**y the mid 1980s, Frank Stella's works had become so large, complex, and three-dimensional that it was hard to define them as paintings. He made a series of works based on geometric shapes—*Cones and Pillars* (cover)—but they were anything but geometric, filled with giant fiberglass shapes and wildly painted with Day-Glo colors.

Stella's pieces are always abstract, but they are often based on some association. He usually gives titles to his works only after they are done. Many of his titles are not supposed to be directly related to the work, but they are still very meaningful. What do you think of the Stella constructions shown here and on pages 8-9? Without looking at the titles, what might the long diagonal lines, circles, and swirling shapes in these pieces mean?

The *formal design elements*—**lines, shapes, colors, space, and textures** are still the most important characteristics of these works. In the vertical piece above right, a **round, flat, still, green shape anchors** the active, **swirling, silver shape** that appears to swoop in front. The painted lines on the silver shape add to the sensation of movement. In the large horizontal piece (below, left) the

**geometric** (straight) and **organic** (rounded) shapes on the left are **visually balanced** by the large **jagged, flat, red shape** on the right. What additional meaning do these works take on when you read the titles the artist has given them? Does *The Spirit Spout*, above, now remind you of the sea, whales, ghosts? What part of a ship might the long yellow shape suggest in *The Chase, First Day*, above, left? Does the pointed red area mean more when you know the title of the work below left is *The Shark Massacre*?

In 1987, Frank Stella began making models for his largest works yet. He had the enormous pieces made in a metal-cutting factory and began building his "Moby Dick" series. The huge works—based on a wave motif—were designed to be seen from the side as well as the front. Constructions like *The Chase, Second Day* (pages 8-9) are not literally based on American novelist Herman Melville's book about the search for a great white whale. But they do convey some of the same sensations as the novel—pursuit, the power of the ocean, the majesty of sailing ships, the beauty of the sea. In this group of three-dimensional works constructed on an epic scale, artist Frank Stella pays homage to an American literary epic.

SCHOLASTIC

# ART





MASTERPIECE OF THE MONTH #4

# THE CHASE

# Frank Stella

**“Great painting creates space and spreads light” —FRANK STELLA**

Frank Stella b. 1936. *The Chase, Second Day*.  
Mixed Media. 110" x 218" 5/8" x 51 3/4".  
Photo, courtesy Knoedler Gallery, NY, NY.

**“Nobody sees a flower  
—I’ll paint it so big, they  
will have to look at it.”**

**—GEORGIA O’KEEFFE**

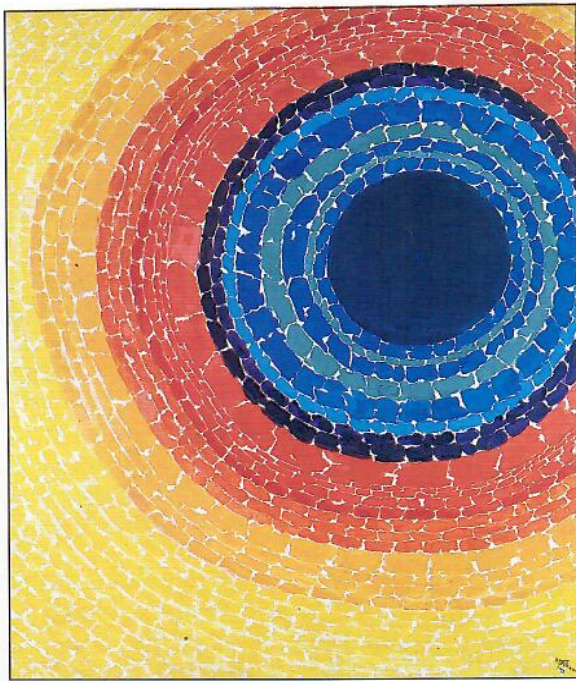
Georgia O’Keeffe (1887-1986). *Jack-in-the-Pulpit VI*, 1930. 36” x18”. National Gallery of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, Bequest of Georgia O’Keeffe.

## ***Abstracting from Nature***

Does the painting on the left look at all like any real object you’ve ever seen? Twentieth-century American artist Georgia O’Keeffe painted abstractions, but her works are nearly always based on nature. At first this image looks like a *white* hook-like shape set against a *dark* background. When you look again, could the work be made up of two large *dark* shapes set against a *light* background? The artist has created **positive shapes** and **negative spaces** that can be “read” one way, then **reversed**. Some areas of the painting appear **flat**, others look **modeled** (solid). All the **elongated, vertical shapes** are **organic** (curved).

Have you guessed on which natural object O’Keeffe has based her painting? One way to create an abstraction is to **enlarge** a small detail, then use it to fill the entire canvas. Like Frank Stella, Georgia O’Keeffe did many paintings based on a single *motif*. In this case, she has moved so close to a flower—the “Jack-in-the-Pulpit”—that she has completely changed the way we see it. The plant has been so **simplified** and **stylized** that it has lost all sense of **scale** (sizes of objects in relationship to each other). O’Keeffe has transformed this flower into a powerful abstraction that communicates an intense feeling about nature.





## Cosmic Colors

The painting on the left, by 20th century African-American Alma Thomas might at first look completely abstract. But, as soon as you read its title, you will probably begin associating this painting with a natural object. Despite their nonrepresentational quality, Thomas's images came directly from the natural scenes she saw every day—the tree outside her

window, the flowers in her backyard, the sky above her house in Washington, DC., where she lived almost all her life. Her works are characterized by bold strokes of brilliant color, made to seem even brighter by the areas of white canvas between the brushstrokes. In works like *Eclipse* (left), **concentric circular bands of color radiate from a blue focal point. Cooler colors (purple, blue, green) are closest to the central shadow. Warmer colors (red, orange, yellow) suggest the temporarily hidden warmth and heat of the sun. The asymmetrical, abruptly cropped composition suggests the movements of the earth and sun at the moment of a total eclipse.**

**“Light reveals to us the spirit and living soul of the world through colors.”**

—ALMA THOMAS

Alma Thomas (1892-1978). *The Eclipse*, 1970. 62" x 49 3/4". The National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

## ART SPOTLIGHT

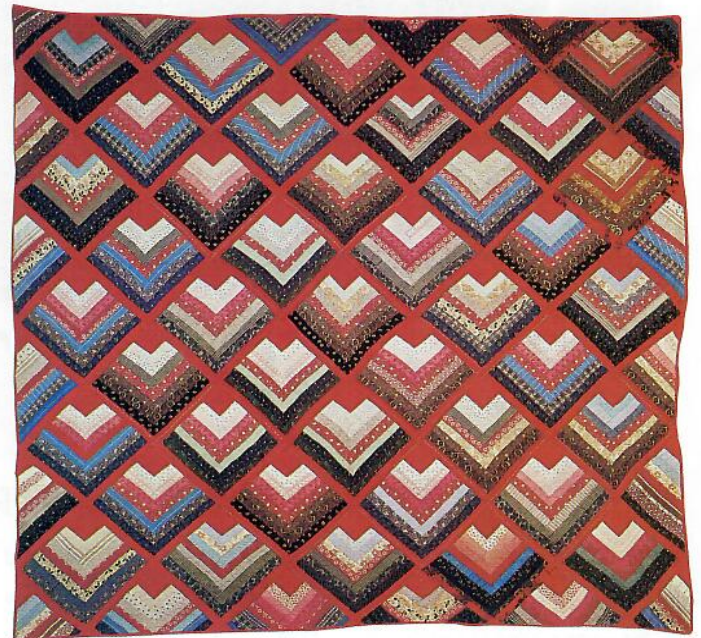
# LINKED TO LIFE

## Three artists who transformed everyday objects into abstract works of art

### *Fragments of the Past*

Even though nonobjective art was not developed before the 20th century, the nonrepresentational design on the right was made by an American artist over 100 years ago. Since there were no washing machines, vacuum cleaners, or dishwashers in the 18th and 19th centuries, women didn't have time for creative activities like painting or sculpting. But women of the time could excel in one field—sewing—because it was useful.

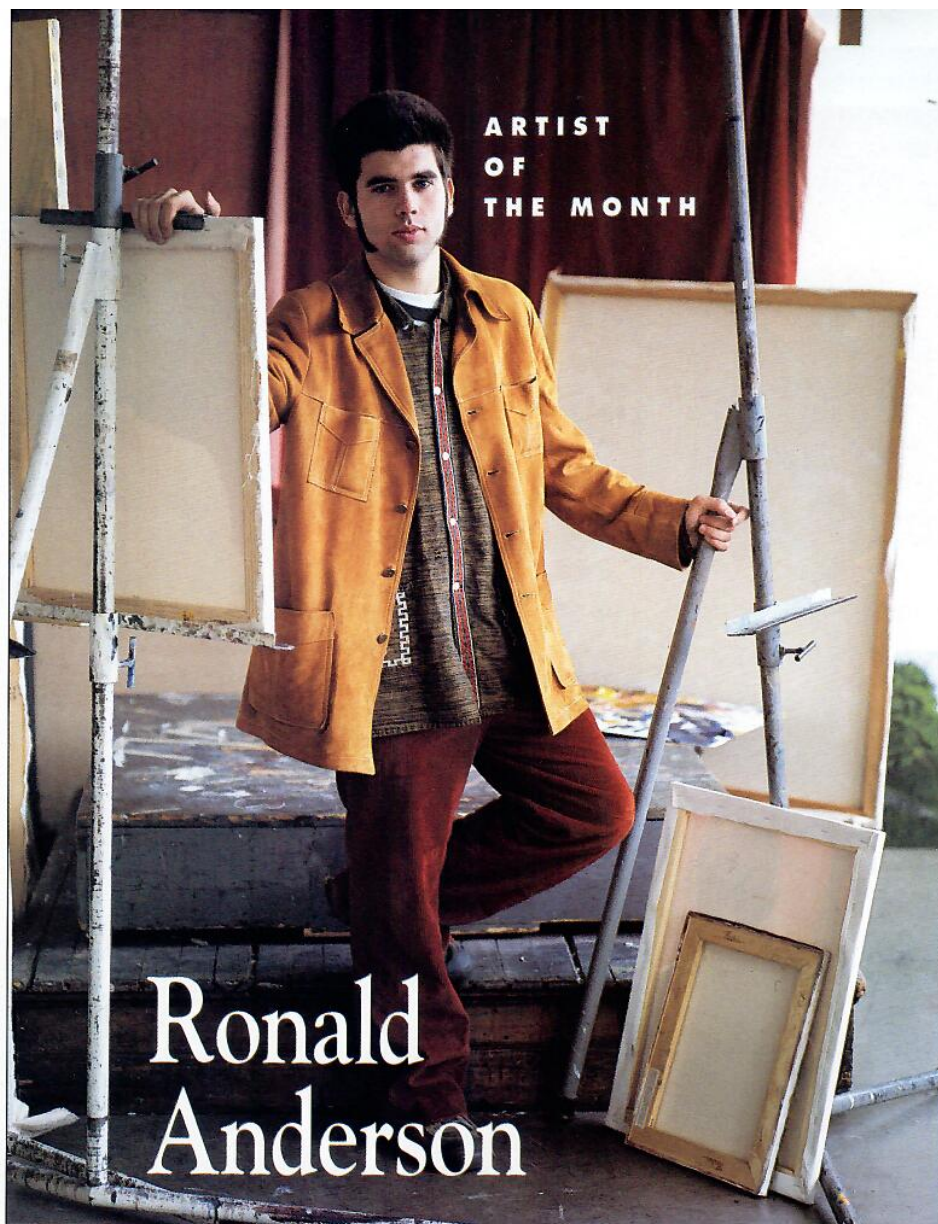
Today, a striking work like this quilt would be called fabric art and hung on a wall. In 1880, this quilt was created for warmth and was probably put right on a bed as soon as it was done. Quilt tops were almost always designed by one woman, and often proudly signed and dated. Since cloth was expensive, quilts were made by sewing bits of fabric together. This quilt is made of short strips of cloth sewn into **geometric, repeat patterns.**



These **textured strips contrast with other flat red pieces of fabric. The intensity of the red chosen by the artist causes the patterned “corners” to appear to float over a red background. This design resembles some of Frank Stella’s early hard-edge geometric abstractions, done nearly a century later.**

**Compare the nonobjective design above with paintings by Frank Stella.**

Pieced quilt, Log Cabin variation, New York State, 1880. Private Collection.



ARTIST  
OF  
THE MONTH

Ronald  
Anderson

# PAINTING ABSTRACT IMAGES

Eighteen-year-old Ronald Anderson likes to work abstractly because he can create “it out of my own head.” He painted *Nocturnal Combustion*, the Scholastic Art-Award-winning work above right, during his senior year at Fort Hayes School of Visual Arts in Columbus Ohio. Ronald is currently a freshman at the Cleveland Institute of Art.

He says, “Art has been in my life ever since I can remember. I’m not a big conversationalist, but I always got to know people through my artwork. After school, fine art will be my main focus, definitely, even if I have to work at something else to support myself.”

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## ■ How did you get started in art?

I’ve been drawing since I was three. My mom got me art supplies and really encouraged me. At school I got to be known as a class artist. I took art courses at Ohio State, then went to Fort Hayes—a special school for students interested in an art career.

## ■ How did you come to do this award-winning work?

I did this painting in a class I took with Mr. Phil Areana, who’s taught art for thirty years. He was teaching us how to create spontaneously. How to be “fresh and juicy”—his favorite words—in our art. The assignment was to do a self-portrait.

In order to understand a concept, I have to do it. I was feeling spontaneous when I started this painting. When Mr. Areana saw it, he told me not to go for the self-portrait but to keep working on this.

## ■ Do you like to work abstractly?

I do a lot of representational work, but working in an abstract way is nicer because it’s all out of your own head. It’s your own composition, your own color. Working abstractly is difficult. You need to know how to draw realistically before you can do abstract art. When you see a good abstract piece, usually it’s because the artist understands what he/she is trying to accomplish. There’s a reason for everything they do. They know why they put down a line, why they used a certain color. They’re not just copying from another artist.

When I paint, I try to understand how a color came

Photo: Robert Muller/Cleveland Institute of Art



*I painted whatever I was feeling inside.... There's a lot of things combined in this painting—contrasts and balances of mood, feeling and understanding.*



about. Why I put down a line. How it relates to a shape. The basics teach you this. If you understand what you're after, it's easier to be spontaneous.

■ **What were you trying to express in this painting?**

I've been asked that a lot of times and I've never explained it before. I guess it's about those bonding experiences we need to be happy—mother and child, men and women. When I did this work I was going out with a girl I liked. In fact, I gave her the painting when it was done. It's about night—that's when I was able to develop my relationships with other people. During the day, I was at school or working.

■ **What do the colors and shapes mean?**

It's basically a warm/cool color contrast painting, made up of

blues and oranges. I had no specific shapes in mind. I painted whatever I was feeling inside. I was trying to accomplish what my teacher was teaching me. Once you understand something, you never need to be taught it again.

There's a lot of things combined in this painting—contrasts and balances of mood, feeling and understanding. You have to balance out everything you do, but not necessarily in a symmetrical way. If you have 50 percent chaotic business on the canvas, you have to balance it with 50 percent serene.

■ **How did you do the painting?**

I spent three days off and on working on this painting. The composition wasn't thought

out—things just happened. Each element had to happen in terms of a conversation with something else. I knew I was done when nothing else was needed to make everything work. Every element of the painting had a reason for being there. One more thing and it would be overworked. It wouldn't have been "fresh and juicy" anymore.

■ **Where you satisfied with the painting when you were done?**

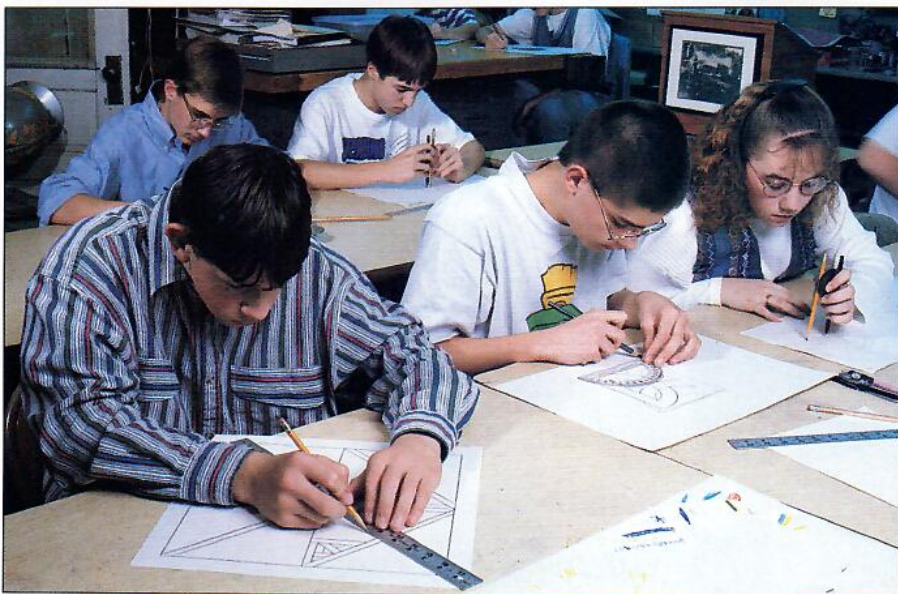
I was extremely happy. I didn't have any kind of drawing to work from or anything. As I said before, I think it's very hard to create a spontaneous painting out of your head. It's a challenge.

■ **Do you have any advice for other art students?**

You have to understand that your teachers have a lot of knowledge. Get a piece of it.

You can't just go right out and paint like the masters. You have to learn the basics. Right now, I'm an infant learning the language. I have to develop on my own, but it takes influence and teaching. I'm prepared for a lot of years of hard work.

**We select** our Artist of the Month from among Scholastic Art Award winners. To enter, ask your teacher to write to the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards, 555 Broadway, New York, NY 10012-3999 for entry deadlines and rules books. *Scholastic Art* magazine does not have a separate competition.



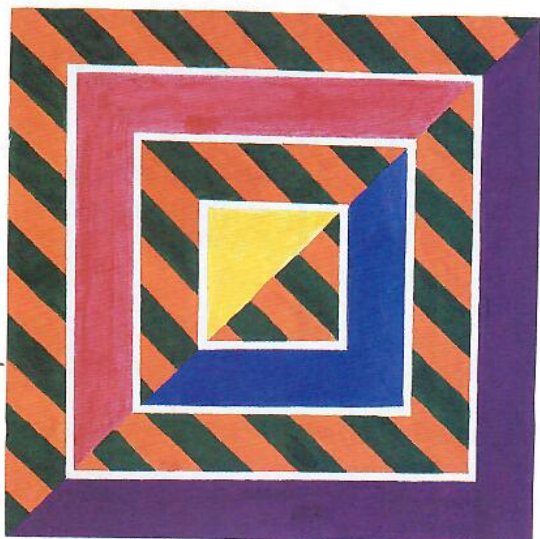
## SCHOLASTIC ART WORKSHOP



# CREATING ABSTRACT PATTERNS

*Turn geometric shapes into works of art.*

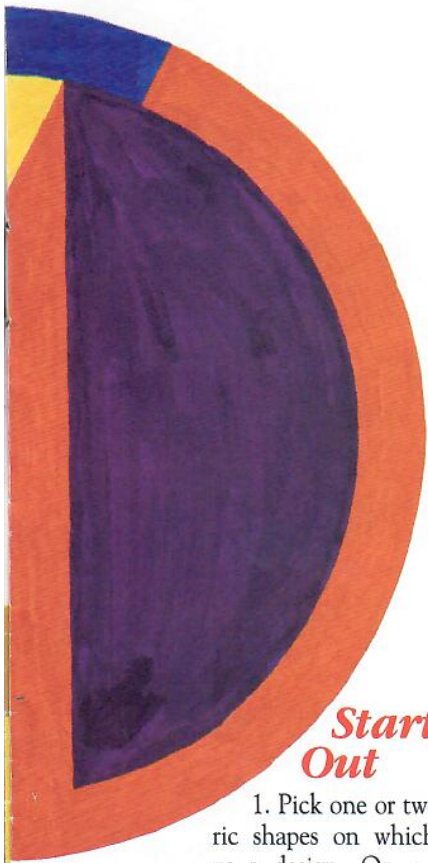
Frank Stella has based all his early paintings on very simple geometric shapes—circles, squares, rectangles, triangles, pentagons (five sides), hexagons, (six sides). Each painting is limited to one basic geometric form; the success of the design depends on the artist's inventive variations based on this form. In this workshop, you'll see how many designs you can create from one or two simple geometric shapes.



### Materials

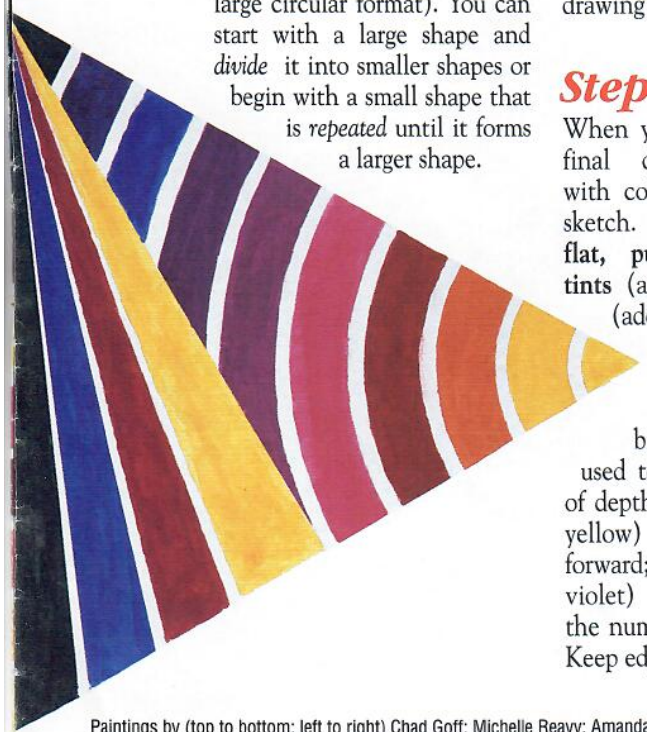
- Variety of scrap paper to sketch composition
- Compass
- C-Thru ruler
- Vinyl eraser
- No. 1, 3, 5 watercolor brushes
- Tempera paint; basic and fluorescent colors
- Water/paint containers
- Paper towels
- Masking tape
- Illustration board or oak tag, variety of sizes





## Starting Out

1. Pick one or two geometric shapes on which to base your design. On a piece of scrap paper, begin working out compositions that **vary** and **develop** your shape in an **orderly, structured way**. The shape of your **format** may **repeat** or **complement** the geometric shapes in the composition (for example, circular shapes may be contained in a large circular format). You can start with a large shape and **divide** it into smaller shapes or begin with a small shape that is **repeated** until it forms a larger shape.



## Some Solutions

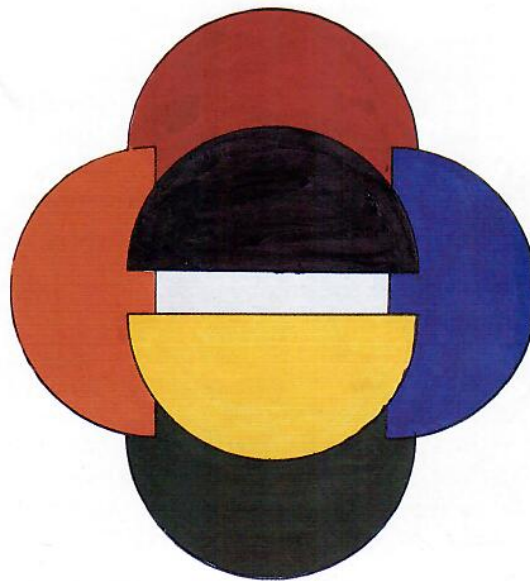
### Step 2.

Your design can be **flat**, or you can create a **three-dimensional effect** by changing the **scale** of your shapes. **Overlapping** suggests depth. After developing your composition, use a ruler and compass to make a very precise "hard edge" final drawing on illustration board.

### Step 3.

When you have finished the final drawing, experiment with color on an overlay or sketch. Keep color **bright, flat, pure**. Consider using **tints** (adding white), **shades** (adding black), **complementary** (opposites), **monochromatic** (one color) combinations. Color can be used to increase the feeling of depth. **Warm** (red, orange, yellow) colors seem to come forward; **cool** (green, blue, violet) colors recede. Limit the number of colors you use. Keep edges smooth and crisp.

All of the artists in the works shown here have developed designs based on the interplay between two simple geometric shapes. Which artist has used **circles** and **semi-circles**; which **squares** and **diagonal lines**; and which two have used **circles** and **triangles**, but in two very different ways? Which artists have used **repetition**; which **scale** (small repeated shapes fit within each other)? Which design contains **parallel lines**? Which lines are **wide, heavy, dark**; which **thin, narrow, light**? Can you find any **thin white spaces** between the lines; what effect does this produce in each painting?





## Painted Sculptures

What is the brightly-colored object shown in the middle of the road in the photo (left)? Created by African-American artist Daniel Larue Johnson, this nonobjective sculpture combines a **horizontal organic (round) shape** with a **vertical geometric one**. The artist usually works abstractly, basing his painted wood constructions on African motifs and American jazz rhythms. Johnson says, "I see changing patterns of color through the music of Charles Lloyd and Miles Davis." The brightly painted stripes **contrast** and **complement** the curved shapes, suggesting some kind of musical instrument.

The work was dedicated to the memory of a friend of the artist, a museum director and expert in multi-cultural art who died in an automobile accident. Perhaps this has something to do with the shape and size of the sculpture and the fact that it has been photographed in the center of a busy New York City street.

## Two unusual abstractions by contemporary American artists



### Sculptured Paintings

Compare the shaped abstract work (right) by contemporary artist Elizabeth Murray with the paintings of Frank Stella. Murray developed her unique style as a result of a series of personal crises. She decided to express the way she felt by breaking her paintings apart. She split her canvas into panels, reassembling them "to look like they had been thrown at the wall and stuck there."

In this work, the artist began with panels shaped like the numbers 1, 2, and 3. At first these figures seem to have been **stylized** and **distorted** into a totally abstract design. But, if you look carefully, can you pick out an object resembling a tiny head? As in Stella's work, read-

ing the title the artist has given her painting helps to clarify her image. Caught in a swirl of blue forms, a small green face appears to be calling out in a green cartoon-like balloon. In all her paintings, Murray combines the formal qualities of abstraction and contemporary cartoon images. She says, "All my ideas about art come from comic books." Like Frank Stella, Elizabeth Murray's aim is to humanize abstract images so they relate more to real life.

Compare the work above with Frank Stella's paintings.

Daniel Larue Johnson b. 1938.  
*Homage to René d'Harnoncourt*, 1968.  
 1'9" x 2'7" x 6'1" Private collection.



Why do you think Elizabeth Murray called the work on the left "Can You Hear Me?"

Elizabeth Murray, b. 1940.  
*Can You Hear Me?*, 1984.  
 Oil on four canvasses.  
 8'10" x 13'3" x 1'.  
 Dallas Museum of Art.