



K.125, 2007, stainless steel tubing, nylon RPT,
155 x 76 x 25 cm. Courtesy Paul Kasmin Gallery, New York

FIRST TO ARRIVE: FRANK STELLA

'Late work' is a concept in desperate need of theoretical attention, especially for a figure such as Frank Stella. For many art historians still in thrall to the upheavals of formalist criticism in the 1960s, the bulk of Stella's art is 'late'. After *16 Americans* at MoMA (1959), after the Black Paintings - perhaps even after the shaped canvases, and the irregular polygons, but definitely after the striped canvases - the deed was done. Stella's contribution arrived early and aggressively; it drank the booze, insulted the host and dropped its cigarette in your martini on the way to the door, but it was undeniable: art would be different, but it would leave Stella's art behind.

Enter the hangover of the 1970s, 80s and 90s: "What is he doing?" "Look at all that garish colour!" "Is that... relief?" In retrospect, however, I think that hangover will be seen as our own. Intoxicated with his innovations of the 1960s, we were unable to acknowledge the rigorous formal aesthetic *thinking* that Stella's work has continuously put on display. It helps, too, that his most recent work has either synthesised those previous decades' achievements, or broken with them. Beginning in 2002 Stella took to a far more curvilinear, free-form but pared down kind of three-dimensional work which, though quickly identifiable as sculptural, continued to exhibit certain strictly pictorial elements, such as the fluid trusses which served to structure many of these newer pieces.

New materials made their entrance as well: carbon fibre, fibreglass and, in the most recent work on view this month at Kasmin, nylon and foam. Perhaps there is something of the younger, materialist "I tried to keep the paint as good as it was in the can" Stella staging a return here - a return that would seem to state that the 'late work' is yet to come.

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FRANK STELLA, 11 MAY - 6 JULY
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