



GEMINI G.E.L. AT JONI MOISANT WEYL

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By PEPE KARMEL

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Frank Stella Gemini G.E.L. at Joni Moisant Weyl 375 West Broadway (near Broome Street) SoHo through Sept. 8

In 1959, when he was 23, Frank Stella was arguably the most important artist in America. His black-and-white "pinstripe" canvases of that year, along with the notched aluminum paintings that succeeded them in 1960, provided an important model for the mathematical proportions, monochrome palette and industrial finish of Minimalism. But Mr. Stella's own path as a painter led him back toward compositional complexity, lush color and gestural brushwork, everything Minimalism had rejected.

Since 1966 his work has seemed increasingly baroque.

This exhibition of prints from 1967 through 1975 -- organized by the New York representative of the California printers Gemini G.E.L. (Graphics Editions Limited) -- offers what is in effect a mini-retrospective of Mr. Stella's early career.

The earliest prints in this show, a 1967 series of lithographs, recapitulate the compositions of his groundbreaking 1959 paintings.

The monumental scale of the original paintings is evoked by the surprising but successful device of shifting the printed image to the left side of a broad horizontal sheet, so that it gives the impression of a canvas placed off-center on a long wall.

At a remove of anywhere from 4 to 11 years from the canvases, the prints follow Mr. Stella's progress from interlocking V's to more irregular arrangements of "Eccentric Polygons," and from monochrome to combinations of as many as 41 different colors in a single print. Curiously, the monochrome compositions remain the most effective: the triangles and quadrilaterals thrusting their way into the overall rectangle of the 1970 "Black Stack" are far more dramatic than the identical forms of the contemporary "Pastel Stack."

A thought-provoking exhibition that deserves a sequel. PEPE KARMEL