

CONTEMPORARY ART
from the
ROBERT B. MAYER COLLECTION

THE DAVID AND ALFRED SMART GALLERY
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

The Robert B. Mayer Memorial Loan of Contemporary Art

The David and Alfred Smart Gallery is honored to present, in this exhibition of major works of contemporary art, a memorial to the late Robert B. Mayer, one of the great friends of the University and one of the most dynamic figures in the world of contemporary art. What Robert B. Mayer meant to The University of Chicago is already indicated to some degree in the establishment by his family and friends of the Robert B. Mayer Visiting Professorship in Contemporary Art in the University's Department of Art. Now, through the generosity of his wife, Beatrice C. Mayer, herself a great friend of the University and the Smart Gallery, a small part of his collection will be placed on long-term loan to the Smart Gallery. The expenses of the loan were defrayed by a generous gift from Dr. and Mrs. Henry T. Ricketts as well as by University funds. Thus, it is now possible for the Smart Gallery to present together at this time a group of works from the Mayer Collection, one of a number of long-term loans being made to art galleries and museums in this country and Canada. The works shown here were all chosen by members of the Department of Art and the Gallery staff as being particularly fine examples of their kind and eminently useful in the teaching programs of the Department. Following this exhibition from January 21 through March 15, 1976 they will, moreover, be displayed with the permanent collection of the Gallery for a period of approximately two years.

All those who will benefit from the presence of this "memorial loan collection"—the faculty and students of the University, and the Gallery's public at large—will join, I am sure, in welcoming here this signal enrichment of the life of the University. Our indebtedness to Mrs. Mayer is very great, indeed, and we hope that seeing these works of art displayed here and thus utilized in a meaningful way, may be in some small measure a source of pride to her in its commemoration of her husband's achievements, and as a continuation of what he felt should be done with his collections, for even during his lifetime he had always made them easily available to anyone interested in the art of our time.

EDWARD A. MASER
Director

January, 1976

RICHARD DIEBENKORN

"His still-lives never seem arranged: it is as if reality the artist needs or trusts exists within a range of five feet of where he happens to be painting." Thus Leider, the managing editor of *Artforum*, described the paintings and drawings of Richard Diebenkorn in 1964. *Table*, one of a series of paintings of objects in the studio, shows the result when a talented painter trained in an abstract expressionist style turns his skills to the representation of objects. The handling of paint and lack of illusion create a work in which the object is less the subject of painting than the occasion for the painting.

Diebenkorn was born in Portland, Oregon, in 1922 as a child and later studied art at Stanford University. From 1943 to 1945, he served with the U.S. Marines as a war artist. While in the Marines, he had the good fortune to be stationed for a time near Washington, D.C., where he became familiar with the paintings of the Phillips Collection. Diebenkorn thus had the chance to study the great French artists, especially Matisse, who was later to exert a great influence on him. During this period, he was unaware of the abstract expressionist movement until he happened to see one of the surrealist magazine *Dyn*, which contained pictures by Motherwell and Pollock. Diebenkorn had of course done figurative works as a military artist, but the impact of the abstract expressionist style made him decide that his painting would be abstract. He felt that it was absurd to try to do anything in painting; figurative art was, as he said, "dead."

In 1946 Diebenkorn entered the California School of Art in San Francisco as a student. By the school year 1947-48 he was teaching there. Clyfford Still, who was on the faculty, had a great influence on Diebenkorn, as was Mark Rothko, who was at the summer as a visiting professor. The major influence on Diebenkorn at this time, however, was the advice and encouragement of three faculty members his own age---David Park, Hassel Elmer Bischoff. The four friends got together weekly to look at and discuss each other's work.

In 1950 Diebenkorn went to the University of New Mexico, obtaining his M.A. in 1951 and remaining for another year. His paintings of this period have been called "desert landscapes" and have the colors---ochre, yellow, orange, and white---of the New Mexican desert. Diebenkorn went to the University of Illinois at Champaign/Urbana for the 1952-53. Finding the Illinois countryside and light unsuitable to his needs, he returned to Berkeley the following year. In Illinois, however, Diebenkorn took part in several art shows and had a one-man show at the Allan Frumkin Gallery in Chicago in 1954.

Back in California, Diebenkorn found himself in a creative rut. He began to mistrust his paintings, finding them "hyper-emotional". Seeking a new balance,

RICHARD DIEBENKORN

"His still-lives never seem arranged: it is as if all the reality the artist needs or trusts exists within a radius of five feet of where he happens to be painting."¹ Thus Philip Leider, the managing editor of Artforum, described the figurative paintings and drawings of Richard Diebenkorn in 1964. Round Table, one of a series of paintings of objects in the artist's studio, shows the result when a talented painter trained in the abstract expressionist style turns his skills to the representation of objects. The handling of paint and lack of illusionism create a work in which the object is less the subject of the painting than the occasion for the painting.

Diebenkorn was born in Portland, Oregon, in 1922. He painted as a child and later studied art at Stanford University and Berkeley. From 1943 to 1945, he served with the U.S. Marines, training as a war artist. While in the Marines, he had the good fortune to be stationed for a time near Washington, D.C., where he soon became familiar with the paintings of the Phillips Collection. Diebenkorn thus had the chance to study the great French modern artists, especially Matisse, who was later to exert an important influence on him. During this period, he was unaware of the abstract expressionist movement until he happened to see an issue of the surrealist magazine Dyn, which contained pictures of works by Motherwell and Pollock. Diebenkorn had of course been doing figurative works as a military artist, but the impact of the abstract expressionist style made him decide that his private work would be abstract. He felt that it was absurd to try and represent anything in painting; figurative art was, as he said, "square".

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In 1950 Diebenkorn went to the University of New Mexico, obtaining his M.A. in 1951 and remaining for another year of painting. His paintings of this period have been called "abstract landscapes" and have the colors---ochre, yellow, orange, gray, and white---of the New Mexican desert. Diebenkorn went to teach at the University of Illinois at Champaign/Urbana for the school year 1952-53. Finding the Illinois countryside and light uncongenial to his needs, he returned to Berkeley the following year. While in Illinois, however, Diebenkorn took part in several midwestern shows and had a one-man show at the Allan Frumkin Gallery in Chicago in 1954.

Back in California, Diebenkorn found himself in what he felt to be a nonproductive rut. He began to mistrust his abstract paintings, finding them "hyper-emotional". Seeking a new basis for his

work, Diebenkorn began to investigate the possibilities of representational painting, encouraged by his friend and former teacher David Park. By 1957 the move was complete, yet the new works owed as much to his previous style as to a study of the object. Hilton Kramer, art critic for the New York Times, recognized this point in 1963:

Everything essential to his style remained abstract, even Abstract Expressionist, in commitment and practice; only the inessential was given over to some rather summary transcriptions of observed motifs. None of the representational elements in Diebenkorn's pictures of the late fifties was allowed to modify the abstract grammar of his style.²

Diebenkorn's retention of the grammar of Abstract Expressionism was in part a solution to the problem of how to create a lively representational painting without resorting to the cliches of illusionistic art. Philip Leider commented on this aspect of Diebenkorn's work:

His use of abstract-expressionist techniques is consistently purposeful: parts of his surfaces which would otherwise be dead . . . are enlivened by the most judicious use of paint as pure material, carrying its own emotional values. The paint splatter, or drip, is consistently used to draw the viewer away from illusionism, to define the existence of the picture-plane as a tangible, two-dimensional reality, and to insist that although the painting has representational subject matter it is not a "picture" of that subject matter.³

Leider's statement may be of some value in interpreting a work such as Round Table. Such works were never the result of a pat representation of an object, but instead were manipulated through numerous stages, usually arriving at a finished painting which Diebenkorn could not have predicted during the beginning stages or from his original model. In an interview given in 1957, Diebenkorn discussed the role of discovery in his painting:

Personal discoveries often are made in what appears to be a chance way when changes are made in the picture. I can grasp and predict only a few of them---perhaps only the main consequences of altering the relationships of a painting. The unforeseen consequences that occur, when they are in favor of the main idea of the painting, often seem to quicken my perceptions and produce insights and a deeper involvement. The most "real" look for me in painting is where one of the most interesting aspects of my own seeing is represented---the way things are endlessly out of place---sometimes delightfully, sometimes tragically.⁴

Coming after several successful years of abstract painting, Diebenkorn's figurative works, such as Round Table, were the source of some debate among critics. Hilton Kramer felt that Diebenkorn's earlier abstract works were more authentic, both in conception and realization.⁵ Gerald Nordland, who wrote the foreword to the catalog of a major Diebenkorn retrospective at the Washington Gallery of Modern Art in 1964, felt that Diebenkorn had become increasingly independent of his abstract expressionist beginnings.⁶ The well-known critic Clement Greenberg praised Diebenkorn for both styles in an article written in 1963:

His development so far is what one might say the development of Abstract Expressionism as a whole should have been. Earlier on he was the only abstract painter, as far as I know, to do something substantially independent with de Kooning's touch. . . . More recently, he has let the logic of that touch carry him back (with Matisse's help) to representational art, and one might say that this consistency of logic is partly responsible for his becoming at least as good a representational as he was an abstract painter. That de Kooning's touch remains as unmistakable as before in his art does not diminish the success of his change.⁷

One thing that even his most adverse critics must admit about Diebenkorn is his indifference to the fashionable in art. Indeed, Diebenkorn is not as well-known as he should be, simply because he cannot be easily labeled. His work as a whole does not fit into any group, school, or regional style. Diebenkorn moved to representational painting at a time when abstract expressionism was at the height of its fame. Having gained some note as a representational painter, he opened a new phase in his career at the end of the last decade, when he returned to a fully abstract style. His Ocean Park series, of which the Art Institute of Chicago has a fine example, has won him new applause and reaffirmed his reputation as an important contemporary American painter.

Leon R. Upshaw

Notes

¹Philip Leider, "Diebenkorn Drawings at Stanford," Artforum, 2, No. 11 (May 1964), p. 41.

²Hilton Kramer, "Pure and Impure Diebenkorn," Arts Magazine, 38, No. 3 (December 1963), p. 48.

³Philip Leider, "California After the Figure," Art in America, 51, No. 5 (October 1963), p. 76.

⁴Herschel B. Chipp, "Diebenkorn Paints a Picture," Art News, 56, No. 3 (May 1957), pp. 45-46.

⁵Kramer, op. cit., p. 48.

⁶Gerald Nordland, "Richard Diebenkorn: a fifteen year retrospective is organized by the Washington Gallery of Modern Art," Artforum, 3, No. 4 (January 1965), p. 25.

⁷Clement Greenberg, "After Abstract Expressionism," Art International, 6, No. 8 (October 25, 1962), p. 25.

For further reading, see the articles mentioned above, plus the following:

Ashton, Dore. "An Eastern View of the San Francisco School." Evergreen Review, 1, 148-59.

Giesen, Sara. "Richard Diebenkorn: Before and Behind the Eye." Arts Magazine, 49, No. 10 (June 1975), 79-81.

Van Der Marck, Jan. "The Californians." Art International, 7, No. 5 (May 25, 1963), 28-31.

Wight, Frederick. "Diebenkorn, Woelffer, Mullican: A Discussion." Artforum, 1, No. 10 (April 1963), 24-28.

CHUCK CLOSE

At first glance, John by Chuck Close appears to be an extremely realistic painting, but further viewing and an awareness of the intentions of the artist reveal the painting to be an attempt to question the very nature of our perception in an age dominated by the photographic image.

Close was born in Monroe, Washington, in 1940. He studied art at the University of Washington in Seattle, at Yale, and at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. His first works were abstractions that drew praise from his teachers, but Close was dissatisfied with what he felt to be the too-easy facility with which he produced these paintings. Feeling the need for more discipline, he turned to a study of the human figure as interpreted by photography.

His first attempt at a painting of this sort was Big Nude. Close began one version of this painting in 1966, using brushes and a full palette. Finding the difficulties greater than he had anticipated, Close abandoned the first version, beginning a second in 1967. The second Big Nude, finished in 1968 and measuring 254 by 117 inches, was a testing ground for Close's new technique. He discarded the use of brushes and limited his palette to black paint alone, using the canvas itself for the white tones. Close used sponges, rags, spray guns, razor blades, and erasers to handle the paint. Most important, his work on Big Nude led Close to adopt the airbrush for its precision and its lack of textured brushwork. With the experience he had gained from Big Nude, Close set to work in November, 1967, on a series of eight large black and white paintings of heads that was to occupy him until April, 1970.

Close chose photographs of heads as a subject in an effort to subject himself to the maximum discipline. Using the human head required him to be exact, since any deviation from the "real" would be immediately apparent. A further challenge was the fact that the face is generally considered an emotional subject, and the attempt to make it appear as something else would be difficult. The use of photographs of Close's friends separates his works from Andy Warhol's silkscreens of celebrities. In an interview given in 1972, Close said, "I don't want to make Pop posters of famous people. I think it would be harder for people to get into my painting if they could recognize the subject."¹

The 8 by 10 inch photographs Close worked from were as impersonal as a mug shot, making the subject more like an object than a human being. The use of the camera might be supposed to eliminate the hierarchical composition common in Western painting, emphasizing instead an overall composition. As Close said, "The camera is not aware of what it is looking at. It just gets it all down."² Yet Close did not feel bound by a single photograph, often working instead from two or more photographs to achieve the desired texture, field of depth, and so on. Once he had the right image, Close would lay it on the canvas by means of a grid, using an air brush, erasers, and razor blades. The paintings thus produced were extremely flat, a rejection of the painterly technique of Abstract Expressionism.

The use of the photograph is the major factor separating these

paintings from "realistic" works. Close commented on this fact:

I am trying to make it very clear that I am making paintings from photographs and that this is not the way the human eye sees it. If I stare at this it's sharp, and if I stare at that it's sharp, too. The eye is very flexible, but the camera is a one-eye view of the world, and I think we know what a blur looks like only because of photography. It really nailed down blur. It's this elusive thing, and the camera gives you information that was too difficult to deal with otherwise.³

Yet the viewer often fails to notice that obvious fact that the images Close presents are completely different from those we experience in reality. William Dyckes, perhaps the most perceptive critic to discuss Close's art to date, has mentioned this disparity between what we see and what we think we are seeing:

The fact that so many persist in seeing these paintings as highly factual representations of people rather than as photographic representations of people is proof of the total assimilation of photographic syntax as visual fact. It is an easy enough matter to bypass the sensation of distortion in a family snapshot or a newsphoto, but it requires a lifetime of training to screen so much out of a nine-foot-high painting.

Unlike so many other forms of realism, which tend to celebrate the visible world and the remarkable abilities of the painter's eye, Photo-Realism is essentially critical. It raises questions about the way we see and reminds us of the many physical and psychological factors that alter, compensate, or diminish the things we look at. These artists do not present photographs as a more truthful way of seeing, but as a means of understanding more about what we do see. Photo-Realism is not only unconcerned with realism, it is actively involved with artificiality.⁴

The focused and out-of-focus areas, which only the camera can reveal, are thus of great interest in Close's paintings. After some experimentation, Close hit upon the "sandwich technique" of having the area of focus at the cheeks, while both the plane of the ears and that of the tip of the nose are out of focus. In this way, Close was able to circumvent the traditional way of reading an image. In his paintings, areas that are similarly out of focus are pictorially on the same level in space, while our reason tells us that in reality the areas are on different planes. This tension between pictorial reality and our everyday experience is another of the continually rewarding aspects of Close's work.

The giant scale of these paintings is another important matter, as it makes the surface information of the paintings both completely available and unavoidable. Dyckes points out, "In approaching these works one is first aware only of the head itself, but upon moving in--drawn by the promise of a vast amount of unusual additional information--one is forced to relinquish this image and deal only with the real

content of the painting: how the details of the face as recorded by a camera have been translated by the artist into colors and shapes."⁵

John, a portrait of Close's friend John Roy painted in 1972, is one of a series of only four large works done in color. Close began this series in January, 1971, after having spent a year experimenting with colored pencils and watercolor paints. He felt that he had overcome the difficulties posed by the black and white paintings and was looking for a new set of problems. Color seemed the logical next step, but Close was wary of reverting to what he considered the too-facile use of learned color systems in his works as a student. He wanted a way to use color without a palette, where the color was literally mixed on the canvas. By using the dye-transfer, a commercial photographic process, Close found the method he desired. The Photographic image was broken down into its three component colors--red, blue, and yellow--and their intermediate compositions. Using these one-toned and two-toned plates as models, Close then painted the picture, colored layer by colored layer, including even the backgrounds, which turned out a fairly uniform gray. Having to use all three colors without preferring one to another, Close found the discipline and the limitations imposed by this system of painting to be quite liberating.

Since painting the color series of large portraits, Close has gone on to further experiments, making changes in scale, technique and medium. The continual challenges which he sets for his talent and his unceasing questioning of the way in which we perceive reality make Chuck Close one of the most rewarding American artists to have emerged in recent years.

Leon R. Upshaw

Notes

¹Linda Chase, Nancy Foote, and Ted McBurnett, "The Photo-Realists: 12 Interviews", Art in America, 60, No. 6 (November-December 1972), 76.

²Cindy Nemser, "Presenting Charles Close", Art in America, 58, No. 1 (January-February 1970), 98.

³Chase, et al., op. cit., p. 76.

⁴William Dyckes, "The Photo as Subject. The Paintings and Drawings of Chuck Close", Arts Magazine, 48, No. 5 (February 1974), 29-30.

⁵Ibid, p. 29.

Suggestions for further reading

Chase, Linda: Foote, Nancy: and McBurnett, Ted. "The Photo-Realists: 12 Interviews." Art in America, 60, No. 6 (November-December 1972), 73-89.

Dyckes, William. "The Photo as Subject. The Paintings and Drawings of Chuck Close." Arts Magazine, 48, No. 5 (February 1974), 28-33.

Nemser, Cindy. "Presenting Charles Close." Art in America, 58, No. 1 (January-February 1970), 98-101.

Rose, Barbara. Readings in American Art, 1900-1975. New York: Praeger, 1975.

Spear, Athena. "Reflections on Close, Cooper, and Jenney: 'Three Young Americans' at Oberlin." Arts Magazine, 44, No. 7 (May 1970) 44-47.

ELLSWORTH KELLY

Although Ellsworth Kelly is most often described as a hard-edged painter, his work is not easily categorized. A painting such as "Red, Blue, Green, Yellow" can be seen as related to several major art movements of the 1960s, including hard-edge abstraction, pop art, and minimalism. Kelly's methods of working even bear some resemblance to later, more conceptual approaches to art.

Of all the artists who are usually identified with hard-edge painting, Ellsworth Kelly was probably the first to make use of pure, unmarked color surfaces and shaped canvases. As early as 1952 he painted a series of joined vertical canvas panels in separate flat hues, with no trace of surface details or irregularities. Although Kelly was working in Paris at the time, and felt himself to be under the strong influence of Arp and Matisse, these paintings have much in common with the work of several New York artists who were deliberately attempting to break away from the recently canonized painterly spontaneity and free inventiveness of abstract expressionism. Such American artists as Frank Stella, Kenneth Noland, and Al Held felt an immediate affinity with the paintings Kelly brought back from Paris when he returned to New York in 1954. "Red, Blue, Green, Yellow" can thus be seen as a continuation of the cool and restrained "post-painterly" color tradition with which Kelly was only coincidentally connected in theory, but to which his paintings do bear a strong resemblance.

Although Kelly's motivation for making flat, highly colored undetailed paintings was not a reaction against Abstract Expressionism, it was not unrelated to the American painters' ideals of rational purity and discipline, hence the visual similarities with their work. Kelly's interest in hard-edge color painting, by his own account, comes from a careful study of the late works of Matisse (especially the colored paper cutouts), in which solid areas of intense color interact optically with each other to create an illusion of space and depth. This illusion is an important part of the effect that "Red, Blue, Green, Yellow" has on us, the viewers. The edges where the red meets the blue and the blue meets the green do not seem to be static, but appear to vibrate and/or recede into depth on prolonged viewing.

In "Red, Blue, Green, Yellow" Kelly has also included a panel that is actually, physically, three-dimensional. The yellow panel which lies flat on the floor is not only a large color field for optical play, but also an almost sculptural barrier between the viewer and the vertical painting on the wall. Even though both panels are flat, stretched, rectangular canvases, like paintings, they occupy and define a three-dimensional space that is more like sculpture. Since each panel is also roughly scaled to the human figure, the work has much the same effect on the viewer as do many minimal works which confront us with their awkward bulk; this work is too large to be an easel painting hanging decoratively on the wall, and too small to be considered environmental. It is because of this quality in his work that Kelly

is sometimes grouped with minimal artists, although his interest in color relationships actually distinguishes him from these artists.

It has also been suggested¹ that there are Pop elements in Kelly's work. Although he certainly is not a Pop artist, it must be remembered that he was working during the mid-1960s and was not unaware of what other New York artists were doing. His juxtaposition of high-keyed, close-valued "traffic signal" colors, for example, and the smooth, regularized edges of the forms he painted, are indications of his awareness of Pop art.

Although Kelly is not easy to categorize in terms of style, it is possible that he was a true painter of the 1960s and that his style is related to several traits from that time: minimalism, hard-edged painting, and Pop. "Red, Yellow, Blue, Green" contains elements of each of these styles.

Naomi Gilman

Note

¹Elizabeth C. Baker, "The Subtleties of Ellsworth Kelly," *Art News*, 72, No. 9 (November 1973), pp. 30-33.

For further reading, see the article mentioned above, plus the following:

J.B. "In the Galleries---Ellsworth Kelly." *Arts Magazine*, 39, no. 9 (May-June 1965), 58-59.

Banon, Stephanie. "Matisse and Contemporary Art." *Arts Magazine*, 49, no. 9 (May 1975), 66-67.

Coplans, John. *Ellsworth Kelly*. New York: Abrams, 1973.

Goosen, E.C. *Ellsworth Kelly*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1973.

Kramer, Hilton. "Episode from the Sixties." *Art in America*, 58, no. 1 (January 1970), 56-61.

Levin, Kim. "Ellsworth Kelly." *Art News*, 64, no. 3 (May 1965), 10.

Lippard, Lucy R. "Homage to the Square." *Art in America*, 55, no. 4 (July-August 1967), 50-51.

Mandelbaum, Ellen. "Isolable Units, Unity and Difficulty." Art Journal, 27, no. 3 (Spring 1968), 256-261.

Masheck, Joseph. "Ellsworth Kelly at the Modern." Artforum, 12, no. 3 (November 1973), 54-57.

Rubin, William. "Ellsworth Kelly: The Big Form." Art News, 62, no. 7 (November 1963), 32 ff.

Tuchman, Phyllis. "Ellsworth Kelly's Photographs." Art in America, 62, no. 1 (January 1974), 55-61.

Waldman, Diane. "Kelly Color." Art News, 67, no. 6 (October 1968), 40-41.

Reproduced:

Sidney Janis Gallery, An Exhibition of Recent Paintings by Ellsworth Kelly (April 5-May 1, 1965), no. 12.

Sam Hunter, American Art of the 20th Century. New York: Henry N. Abrams, Inc. (1973) no. 704, 361.

FRANK STELLA

Damascus Gate, Variation II is the type of painting which made Frank Stella famous, having a design consisting of repeated geometrical patterns, a deep stretcher which echoes the pattern of the design, and a vibrant palette, often including fluorescent colors. Such a painting might seem at first to have much in common with the so-called Op Art of the 1960s. It may therefore come as a surprise to learn that Stella feels little kinship with Op Art or geometrical painting, considering his work instead as coming out of Abstract Expressionism.

Stella was born May 12, 1936, in Malden, Massachusetts. He studied painting at the Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts, and later at Princeton, where he majored in history. Studying art in the mid-1950s, when Abstract Expressionism was at its peak, Stella was influenced by such painters as Jackson Pollock, but found himself reacting negatively to what he considered the excessive emotionalism of Abstract Expressionism: "I began to feel very strongly about finding a way that wasn't so wrapped up in the hullabaloo, or a way of working that you couldn't write about . . . something that was stable in a sense, something that wasn't constantly a record of your sensibility, a record of flux."¹

Thus Stella, like several of the other artists included in the Robert B. Mayer Memorial Loan, was influenced in the course of his painting by a reaction to the image created by the popular press of the abstract expressionist artist as a bohemian genius whose paintings were a testimony to his inner struggle. Stella was interested in the painting as an object, not as a graph of his sensibility. He did, however, like the openness of gesture and the directness of attack of Abstract Expressionism, as well as the artistic possibilities it had revealed in paintings of large size.²

When Stella graduated from Princeton in 1958, he moved to New York and set up a studio, supporting himself by working three or four days a week as a house painter. The deep stretcher, a Stella trademark, was originally an economy measure: lacking the money for professionally-made stretchers, Stella simply tacked 1 by 3" boards together. He found the effect pleasing, in keeping with what he was attempting to do in paint. By raising the surface of the painting off the wall, the deep stretcher helped to deny the illusion common in Western painting since the Renaissance that a painting was a window looking into another space. Stella's stretchers " . . . lifted the pictures off the wall surface so that they didn't fade into it as much. They created a bit of shadow and you knew that the painting was another surface. It seemed to me to actually accentuate the surface quality---to enhance the two-dimensionality---of the painting."³

Stella's first works in New York were a series of paintings which consisted simply of commercial black enamel on canvas. The paintings were geometrical patterns made of straight stripes of paint, with the unpainted spaces between the stripes providing the only contrast. Stella has said of these works, "I wanted some-

thing that was direct---right to your eye . . . something that you didn't have to look around---you got the whole thing right away."⁴ Though the brushwork in these paintings was more obvious than in his later work, Stella was not concerned with a "well-painted" picture in the technical sense: " . . . I do think that a good pictorial idea is worth more than a lot of manual dexterity. Not that I necessarily have either one of those---it's that I think that is the easiest way to look at a painting. At least, that's the conclusion I've drawn from looking at the painting that I liked."⁵

The black paintings were not well received by critics accustomed to abstract expressionist works, but Stella continued to work on his own concerns. Primary to his art was a problem-solving technique of working. The question he asked himself as an artist was not "How do I feel, and how should I express it?" but rather, "Given this color and this shape, how can I make an aesthetically interesting painting?" When he began a series of color paintings, Stella used commercial house paints in colors which had gone out of fashion, partly because he could buy them at a discount, but also because they imposed upon him limitations within which he was forced to work, since he could obtain only certain colors. The idea of establishing certain givens to challenge himself and then working within them is characteristic of Stella and his art. Also central to Stella's aesthetic is his insistence that a painting is only an object made of paint and canvas; it is not part of the artist or an expression of some other concern:

I always get into arguments with people who want to retain the "old values" in painting---the "humanistic" values that they always find on the canvas. If you pin them down, they always end up asserting that there is something there besides the paint on the canvas. My painting is based on the fact that only what can be seen there is there . . . What you see is what you see.⁶

During the first half of the 1960s, Stella painted several different series of paintings, experimenting with copper and aluminum paints, alkyd, acrylic, and metal powder in polymer emulsion. He used stretchers made in both regular and irregular polygonal shapes. In 1961 he went to Europe and North Africa, being especially interested in the designs of mosques and gardens in Southern Spain and Morocco. The geometric nature of much Moorish decoration seemed to Stella to parallel many of his own concerns, and while in Spain he made sketches which were to prove fruitful for much of his later work.

In the summer of 1967, Stella began his "protractor series", a number of paintings based on the circle and its components. He created stretchers of various shapes, giving each shape the name of a gate in Near Eastern cities, such as Damascus Gate. Four stretchers were made of each shape, allowing Stella to experiment

with various color patterns within the shape. The color patterns he used can be divided into three areas: some are concentric circles of color like rainbows, some have wedges of color like the parts of a fan, and in others arcs of color are interlaced.

Damascus Gate, Variation II is, as the title implies, the second painting on a variation of the original Damascus Gate shape, which consisted of three interlocking half circles with their flat sides down. In the Damascus Gate variation, the central half circle is inverted. Damascus Gate, Variation II's color patterns are rainbow shaped, rather than fan shaped or interlaced. If our analysis seems limited to a simple discussion of a pattern of lines and colors, this is a testimony to Stella's success in achieving his intentions. There are no obvious brushstrokes, no intimate details to puzzle the eye; the idea is direct, making an immediate visual appeal.

Yet Stella is not merely a maker of pretty designs. He is a serious artist who sees himself planted firmly in an earlier tradition. In an interview given in 1969, the same year that Damascus Gate, Variation II was painted, Stella talked about his work, its tradition, and its future:

My main interest has been to make what is popularly called decorative painting truly viable in unequivocal abstract terms. Decorative, that is, in the good sense, in the sense that it is applied to Matisse. What I mean is that I would like to combine the abandon and indulgence of Matisse's Dance [painted in 1909/10] with the over-all strength and sheer formal inspiration of a picture like his Moroccans [1916]. Matisse himself seems to have tried it in the Bathers by a River [1916], and that's as close as he seems to me to have come. Maybe this is beyond abstract painting. I don't know, but that's where I'd like my painting to go.⁷

Leon R. Upshaw

Notes

¹William S. Rubin, Frank Stella (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1970), p. 13.

²Ibid., pp. 9-10.

³Ibid., p. 15.

⁴Ibid., p. 30.

⁵Ibid., p. 32.

⁶Ibid., pp. 41-42.

⁷Ibid., p. 149.

⁴Herschel B. Chipp, "Diebenkorn Paints a Picture," Art News, 56, No. 3 (May 1957), pp. 45-46.

⁵Kramer, op. cit., p. 48.

⁶Gerald Nordland, "Richard Diebenkorn: a fifteen year retrospective is organized by the Washington Gallery of Modern Art," Artforum, 3, No. 4 (January 1965), p. 25.

⁷Clement Greenberg, "After Abstract Expressionism," Art International, 6, No. 8 (October 25, 1962), p. 25.

For further reading, see the articles mentioned above, plus the following:

Ashton, Dore. "An Eastern View of the San Francisco School." Evergreen Review, 1, 148-59.

Giesen, Sara. "Richard Diebenkorn: Before and Behind the Eye." Arts Magazine, 49, No. 10 (June 1975), 79-81.

Van Der Marck, Jan. "The Californians." Art International, 7, No. 5 (May 25, 1963), 28-31.

Wight, Frederick. "Diebenkorn, Woelffer, Mullican: A Discussion." Artforum, 1, No. 10 (April 1963), 24-28.

Further entries on individual pieces will be
available as they are prepared by students.

The Robert B. Mayer Memorial Loan of Contemporary Art

The David and Alfred Smart Gallery is honored to present, in this exhibition of major works of contemporary art, a memorial to the late Robert B. Mayer, one of the great friends of the University and one of the most dynamic figures in the world of contemporary art. What Robert B. Mayer meant to The University of Chicago is already indicated to some degree in the establishment by his family and friends of the Robert B. Mayer Visiting Professorship in Contemporary Art in the University's Department of Art. Now, through the generosity of his wife, Beatrice C. Mayer, herself a great friend of the University and the Smart Gallery, a small part of his collection will be placed on long-term loan to the Smart Gallery. The expenses of the loan were defrayed by a generous gift from Dr. and Mrs. Henry T. Ricketts as well as by University funds. Thus, it is now possible for the Smart Gallery to present together at this time a group of works from the Mayer Collection, one of a number of long-term loans being made to art galleries and museums in this country and Canada. The works shown here were all chosen by members of the Department of Art and the Gallery staff as being particularly fine examples of their kind and eminently useful in the teaching programs of the Department. Following this exhibition from January 21 through March 15, 1976 they will, moreover, be displayed with the permanent collection of the Gallery for a period of approximately two years.

All those who will benefit from the presence of this "memorial loan collection"—the faculty and students of the University, and the Gallery's public at large—will join, I am sure, in welcoming here this signal enrichment of the life of the University. Our indebtedness to Mrs. Mayer is very great, indeed, and we hope that seeing these works of art displayed here and thus utilized in a meaningful way, may be in some small measure a source of pride to her in its commemoration of her husband's achievements, and as a continuation of what he felt should be done with his collections, for even during his lifetime he had always made them easily available to anyone interested in the art of our time.

EDWARD A. MASER
Director

January, 1976

Check List

1. Robert Bechtle
Born 1932, San Francisco, California, lives in San Francisco
Max Piggy Back, 1967
Oil on canvas, 26 x 40 inches
2. Chuck Close
Born 1940, Monroe, Washington, lives in New York City
John, 1972
Acrylic on canvas, 100 x 90 inches
3. George Deem
Born 1932, Vincennes, Indiana,
Max Schmidt in a Single Skull, 1964
Acrylic on canvas, 45 x 36 inches
4. Willem De Kooning
Born 1904, Rotterdam, The Netherlands, came to United States, 1926, lives in The Springs, Long Island, New York
Study of a Woman, 1952
Charcoal on paper, 36½ x 23½ inches
5. Richard Diebenkorn
Born 1922, Portland, Oregon, lives in California
Round Table, 1962
Oil on canvas, 70 x 64 inches
6. Sam Gilliam
Born 1933, Tupelo, Mississippi, lives in Washington, D.C.
Rim, 1970
Oil and epoxy on canvas, 60 x 80 inches
7. Ellsworth Kelly
Born 1923, Newburgh, New York, lives in New York City
Red, Blue, Green, Yellow, 1965
Oil on canvas, 86 x 53¼ x 86 inches
8. Henry Moore
Born 1898, Castleford, Yorkshire, England
lives in Much Haddam, Hertfordshire, England
Reclining Figure, 1956
Bronze, 36 x 96 x 36 inches
9. Arnaldo Pomodoro
Born 1926, Italy
Grande Radar, 1963
Bronze, 100 x 74 x 38 inches
10. Lucas Samaras
Born 1936, Macedonia, lives in New York City
The Chair, 1965
Mixed media, 36 x 27 x 17 inches
11. Richard Serra
Born 1934 in San Francisco, lives in New York City
Prop, 1968, edition of seven
Lead antimony, plate 60 x 60 inches, tube 96 inches
12. Frank Stella
Born 1936, Malden, Massachusetts, lives in New York City
Damascus Gate, Variation II, 1966
Acrylic on canvas, 60 x 240 inches

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