

## BIJUTSUSHI

*Journal of Japan Art History Society*

186 Vol. 68 No. 2 pp. 362–376

### **TAGI, Yusuke. Frank Stella's Interest in Gravitational Forces around 1966: Focusing on the *Irregular Polygons* Series**

Around 1965, the key postwar American abstract painter Frank Stella began his *Irregular Polygons* series, which differed greatly in style from the monochrome stripe paintings he had been making up to that point. The series was displayed in a succession of exhibits starting the following year, precisely when minimalism, which rejected painterly illusions, and op art, which pursued optical effects, were gaining attention. As a result, Stella's series quickly became a topic for debate about flatness and painterly illusions that suggested depth. Later research has taken these early debates into consideration and interpreted the *Irregular Polygons* series as a return to the use of three-dimensional illusions and optical effects, as well as a departure from the stripe paintings and a rejection of illusion shared by a subset of minimalist artists (James Meyer, 2001). There is little question that the point at issue in this previous research—including the most recent, by Michael Auping (2016), which positions the series stylistically between Malevich and El Lissitzky—has always been Stella's use of illusions and optical effects.

These studies have tended to focus on a limited number of pieces within the series, while neglecting to analyze other pieces or to consider the drawings. This paper addresses these previously omitted aspects of the series. An overview of the initial reception of the series is provided, and then, through an examination of drawings that include references to works by Matisse and Judd that have been neglected in past research, Stella's interest during this period in gravitational forces and the dynamics between joined forms is analyzed. Additionally, by examining Stella's sets and costume designs for Merce Cunningham's dance piece *Scramble*, which Stella undertook as he was completing *Irregular Polygons*, I demonstrate that his interest when creating the series lay not in flatness and depth, as previous research has claimed, but rather in probing the dynamics of balance, repulsion, and antagonism of various forces that arise between multiple geometric forms or human bodies. Finally, by considering the meaning of the series' reception in the context of the inequality that characterized American society at the time, I raise questions about the predominant image of Stella as a modernist artist engaged solely in artistic experiments and cut off from social practice.

THE JAPAN ART HISTORY SOCIETY

March 2019

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