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Creating an identity with art [Review of "Works of the Schwartz Collection" at the Milwaukee Art Center, Milwaukee]

Curtis Carter

Marquette University, curtis.carter@marquette.edu

Creating an identity with art

By Curtis L. Carter

Frank Stella, an abstract painter whose works appear in the current painting and sculpture exhibit at the Milwaukee art center has said, "the idea in being a painter is to declare an identity. Not just my identity, an identity for me, but an identity big enough for everyone to share in."

The visual reality of Stella and others in this showing — Morris Lewis, Barnett Newman, Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, Jim Dine, Donald Judd, Ron Davis, and others — gives a highly formalized, abstract notion of identity.

Jackson Pollock cleared the way for the abstractionist view which

dominates these artists. By creating a new kind of pictorial space in which nothing is depicted and physical events do not appear, Pollock achieved a magnificent triumph over the limits of previous pictorial efforts.

The works of Stella, Lewis, Olitski, etc. are in every respect "Post-Pollock." They carry out the revolution in pictorial perspective that is only a suggestion in previous works.

Noland's "Coarse Shadow, 1967", an acrylic on canvas which measures 84 by 276 inches achieves a kind of vacuously decorative de-

sign that is solely lacking in any other kind of significance. It consists of eight series of thin strips of acrylic separated by wider strips of white. The piece is essentially flat and lifeless.

Opposed to the flat and essentially lifeless forms of Noland's works are Stella's "Hagmatana, 1967", "New Madrid, 1961", and "Valparaiso Flesh, 1964" "Hagmatana II" is a maze of interlaces, fans, or rainbows of vibrant colors. The arcs of color move from panel to panel finding their completion therein. What appears to be simple order is demanding when one attempts to trace the motifs through the field of colors and lines. Highly decorative, this piece exemplifies the possibilities for new forms of decoration.

More restful to view are Stella's other two works. "New Madrid" traced a single line through connected and expanding rectangles from the center to the outer edge of the

canvas. "Valparaiso Flesh" is a field of interlocking angles, two rows running vertically to the top of the canvas, with a third row leading upward. Each is masterfully unified through a simple but all encompassing principle of design.

This exhibit of works from the collection of Mr. & Mrs. Eugene Schwartz of New York runs concurrently with a fine showing of 46 Kandinsky water colors arranged by the New York Museum of Modern Art, through February at the Art Center. Both are important and should be seen. The selections from the Schwartz collection are principal works representative of major developments in American art in the past decade.

The Kandinsky exhibit, which will be reviewed in a later issue, affords the opportunity to study the development of the artist most responsible for the emergence of abstract art.