ART SPOT: Sinjerli Variation
All Ages
30 mins

Learn about the work of Frank Stella and create a drawing inspired by his print *Sinjerli Variation Squared with Colored Ground III*.

**Supplies**
Cylinder, paper, cardstock, utility knife, pencil, any colorful dry media (markers, colored pencils, crayons, etc.)

**Frank Stella**
Born in 1936, Frank Stella is an influential painter, sculptor, and printmaker. In the late 1950s, he rejected the fast and expressive use of paint used by most painters of the abstract expressionist movement. Instead, he experimented with slower, flatter paintings, that used precise hard-edge shapes. He was interested in how a picture could be an object, rather than be a representation of something in the physical world, or even a representation of something intangible like the artist’s emotions. Starting with carefully controlled and deceptively simple and minimal paintings, his paintings evolved and changed dramatically over the decades, and eventually, Stella was creating densely layered and complex abstract paintings that combined elements of sculpture, printmaking, and drawing. Stella often creates prints as companions to his paintings, and *Sinjerli Variation* is one of several prints inspired by Stella’s *Protractor* series of paintings, a series begun in the 1960s that used psychedelic color and repeated overlapping protractor shapes.

**Lithographs**
While Stella has largely been known for his groundbreaking work in painting and sculpture, he is also celebrated for his achievements and innovation in printmaking. *Sinjerli Variation Squared with Colored Ground III* is a print, specifically a lithograph. What is a lithograph?

When printmaking was first invented, an artist could carve an image onto wooden or metal blocks, add ink to the block, and impress it on paper like a stamp to make copies. The problem with that kind of printing is that the artist has to *carve* their imagery. This usually creates a crisp mechanical kind of line which isn’t always appropriate for what the artist wants to do. Plus, carving is a skill very different from drawing or painting. **Stone lithography** was the first printmaking technology that allowed a traditional artist to make a print that was more like a drawing or a painting. How does it work? It’s actually a very complex process that requires a lot of preparation and skill, but basically:

1. The artist draws or paints on a flat stone with a greasy substance or a greasy lithography crayon/pencil.
2. The stone is moistened with water. The parts of the stone without the greasy paint on it soak up the water.
3. Oil-based ink is rolled onto the stone. Oil and water don’t mix, so the greasy parts of the stone hold the ink, while the wet parts don’t pick up any ink.
4. A piece of paper is pressed onto the stone, and the ink transfers from the stone to the paper.

If you want to use multiple colors, you’ll need to do the above process on a different stone for each color, printing each stone onto the same piece of paper in just the right spot.
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Sinjerli Variation Squared with Colored Ground III
The word Sinjerli is the artist’s reference to the name of an ancient Islamic city that had neighborhoods planned in a circular design. Stella’s design is also reminiscent of the complex geometric patterns found in Islamic palaces and mosques. Here Stella created a carefully printed composition, but when we realize how it was put together, we discover the near infinite visual possibilities that exist even when you’re limiting yourself to one shape, rotated, repeated, and colored in different ways.

Let’s Make A Drawing Like Frank Stella!

1. Drawing lightly with a pencil, trace your cylinder onto cardstock. Cut out your circle, and cut it in half.
2. Carefully draw a smaller version of that semicircle in the middle.
3. Draw a line in the center of the protractor shape to create another semicircle.
4. Cut out the semicircle, and cut along that remaining line to create two protractor stencils.
5. Use the large stencil to create a circle made out of 2 protractor shapes. Use the smaller stencil to draw protractors inside those larger protractor shapes.
6. Use your protractor shapes to create a complex overlapping design.
7. Erase some of your lines so that the bands overlap each other.
8. Color your design, being careful to leave a small gap around your outlines.

Further Explorations
To further challenge yourself, make another one using the same process, but try to make it as different as possible from your original. You can use different colors, more, or less overlapping shapes, or the same number arranged or oriented in new ways. Remember that erasing is an important part of creation in this project, and you can create new and unexpected shapes and relationships by freely erasing lines here and there while drawing your design.