



Image: Ted Stamm, DGR-44 (Dodger)

## Honoring a Painter of Vision

By Phyllis Braff

A GIFTED artist has the ability to see the world in an original way. The late Ted Stamm is a fine example, and his ideas inspired scores of students at the School of Visual Arts in New York City and Hofstra University and the C. W. Post Center on Long Island.

The Hillwood Gallery at Post is now honoring the career of the former faculty member, who was only 39 years old when he died in 1984. The gallery has installed a handsome, rather cogent exhibition that makes a solid argument for Mr. Stamm's streamlined abstraction.

These are large, bold paintings that recall Frank Stella in their exploration of the shaped canvas, Ad Reinhardt in their dominant use of black, Barnett Newman in their tautness and Ellsworth Kelly in their reliance on a large area of single color for impact.

Still, it would be a mistake to link Mr. Stamm too closely with the purity of Minimalist abstraction, for specific subject sources from life have a key role in his work. Street observations - cars, buildings, pavement - or the character of a baseball diamond are among the starting points for his pared-down compositions. The "Dodger" series, based on the former Brooklyn team, is one of his most important groups.

In a Stamm work the concentration is on the way a curve and an angle meet, or on the way two lines cross, interact and divide space. He sees such intersections as part of a language of dynamics that can be a strong subject for art. The idea is to work with forces of gravity and the pulls and pushes of restless angles to suggest disequilibrium, and also to set up an ambiguity about space, depth and the connection between powerful

geometric forms and life. The visual excitement of Suprematism is present in spirit, and one thinks of innovative predecessors like Kasimir Malevich.

Mr. Stamm's own innovations have not gone unnoticed. There have been more than a dozen exhibitions in this country and Europe, and scores of invitations to participate in group showings around the world. This exhibition is, in a sense, an update of a survey mounted at the Clocktower in New York in 1981. Per Jensen, the writer, critic and the painter's close friend, served as curator in both instances. Mr. Stamm, who grew up in Freeport and attended Hofstra, also received Guggenheim and National Endowment for the Arts fellowships.

Massive size is definitely an important factor in the impact here. At 15 feet in width, the tapering, overlapping silver wings of "CDD-002" make this a credible synthesis of the Concorde in flight. Such scale easily gives it the power to disorient a viewer. The abbreviated title is still more evidence of the artist's interest in condensed experience, for the initials refer to a merger of his "Concorde" and "Dodger" series.

Nearby, the same piece executed in black has a totally different look - one reminiscent of the magnified drawing strokes used as a subject theme in Abstract Expressionism.

Selections here give a fairly good indication of Mr. Stamm's theories and the way they evolved. One of his huge "cancel" paintings from the early 70's, "Her Neck Is Important," uses black to densely criss-cross a luminous, multicolored, ruggedly brushed abstraction. Dabs of color visible through separations in the dark paint screen lure and dazzle the eye, even though movement and weight are understood to be central themes. The fascinating, evocative effect borders on the hallucinatory, and is thoroughly satisfying.

Treating movement a decade later, in the "Zephyr" series - based on a high-speed train - the look is trim and more controlled.

What Mr. Stamm seems to have wanted most was to evolve a kind of painting that turned from established conventions, particularly rectangular formats and specific illusions, and could somehow be understood as a way of expressing the experiences of advanced technology. Certainly his inventively shaped canvases contribute substantially to a new imagery, for they give special importance to the perimeter of a surface, and make the contour a major part of the statement.

The tendency is to see these works more as objects than as paintings. Mr. Stamm was apparently looking for just this quality, for he preferred to install his art low on the wall, perhaps a foot above the floor, as we see it in the Hillwood Gallery. Implications of weight and gravity also help to achieve the intended effect of something physical. All in all, it is a show that offers a number of useful insights.

The exhibition will be on view through Feb. 28. Hours are 10 A.M. to 5 P.M. Monday through Friday and 1 P.M. to 5 P.M. Sunday; closed Feb. 17. An illustrated catalogue with an essay by the art historian Tiffany Bell is available.

<https://www.nytimes.com/1986/02/16/nyregion/art-honoring-a-painter-of-vision.html>