

FRANK STELLA'S NFT COLLECTION: GEOMETRIES

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ABSTRACT

NFT (Non-Fungible Tokens) artworks are artistic works that are cryptographically recorded in the blockchain, with limited copy numbers. In the field of art, which has always been closely intertwined with socio-cultural, economic, and technological developments, blockchain technology is now being widely used through NFT artworks. This study aims to examine the NFT collection titled "Geometries" by American artist Frank Stella. The collection consists of 22 pieces and is available on Open Sea, one of the most popular NFT art markets. The evaluation of Frank Stella's NFT collection "Geometries" will focus on its form and content, as well as its relationship with the traditional art world. Frank Stella's art career offers one of the most original examples to evaluate the relationship that Modern and Postmodern art will establish with NFT technology. With this aspect, the artist has transferred the ongoing perspective from minimalism to his contemporary works. Although subjectivity is avoided in the collection, there is a unity of ideas and styles. Utopian-dystopian universes, urban phenomenon, biomorphic forms, space-space relationship come to the fore. In the "Geometries" series, form and form precede the subject in the studies. Studies on NFT artworks in the literature generally focus on the art market area. There is a lack of research that examines the content of NFT artworks or focuses on their relationship with art history. For this reason, it is thought that the study will contribute to the literature.

Key Words: Minimalism, NFT, Blokchain, Frank Stella, Postdigital Art

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Introduction

In the world of blockchain, tokens are tools that represent various digital assets. Each token in this ecosystem has a value, and rights or properties on the blockchain are also represented by these tokens (Çağlayan Aksoy, 2021: p.73). In a report prepared by the Blockchain Turkey Platform (BCTR) under the umbrella of the Turkish Informatics Foundation (TBV), we see that the concept of Non-Fungible Tokens (NFT), also known as unique tokens, is translated into Turkish as "Nitelikli Fikri Tapu" (Qualified Intellectual Property) (Gökoyun, 2022).

Blockchain technology is built on four principles: permanence, decentralization, verifiability, and anonymity (Gururaj et al., 2020). As stated by the World Economic Forum, this technology is based on certain value propositions: enabling smart contracts, facilitating transparent peer-to-peer transactions, creating a trustworthy system, and enabling dynamic and efficient pricing (World Economic Forum, 2018). The main advantages of using blockchain technology in line with these values are transparency, anonymity, permanence, transaction speed, and security (Clohessy et al., 2020).

Dursun's study titled "NFT / Crypto Art and Animated Graphics Relationship" examines the fundamental values underlying NFT works defined as crypto art, including their production system, methods, and platforms (2021). It also explains the economic aspect of how artwork or representative assets attached to standard contracts and account codes that generate unique value, such as ERC-721 and ERC-1155 on the Ethereum blockchain, gain value and provide new opportunities for artists. The study examines the general structure of blockchain technology and NFT, as well as their technical details. It focuses on the decentralization of data through the IPFS protocol instead of the HTTP protocol and explores collective digital art production forms.

Saygın and Fındıklı's study titled "From Canvas to Keyboard: The Role of NFTs in the Digital Transformation of the Art Market" establishes the chronology of the components of the art market (2021). In an area where aesthetics and subjectivity are prominent, the study evaluates the transformations brought about by digitization from the perspectives of the audience, collector, and art producer. According to this study, artists can increase their earnings and gain significant achievements regarding copyright through NFTs, which allow them to bypass intermediaries. Art viewers and collectors, on the other hand, can obtain ownership through "digital ownership certificates" in decentralized environments, facilitated by passwords. In this context, it can be concluded that the digital galleries and markets shaped by the virtual economy and crypto-based markets also affect the art market. According to the perspective of the study, this situation democratizes the marketing environment in the art market. Additionally, the importance of advertising, guidance, and corporate identity in digital art should be reconsidered.

The research questions were formulated by questioning the motivations behind the emergence of NFT artworks and the values associated with these works. The research is limited to OpenSea, the most widely used NFT marketplace. The available library resources were utilized to review both domestic and foreign literature. Foreign literature on the subject focuses not only on the economic aspect of blockchain technology but also on its effective and innovative use in cultural areas and daily life practices. In the literature review, it is evident that due to NFT being a relatively new technology, a detailed examination of the content of NFT products has not been conducted yet. This study, which examines Frank Stella's NFT collection, is expected to contribute to the literature in this sense.

Frank Stella

Frank Stella was born on May 12, 1936, in Malden, Massachusetts. After attending Phillips Academy for high school, he went on to study at Princeton University. During his time there, he was influenced by the abstract expressionist works of Jackson Pollock and Franz Kline, which inspired him to create his own paintings (Akbulak, 2019, p. 30). In later years, he became known for his minimalist and impactful works. After graduating from college in 1958, he moved to New York. During this period, he began creating flat surfaces on canvas, reminiscent of Barnett Newman's work. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Frank Stella argued through his works that painting carried its own purpose rather than expressing any specific object or emotion. According to him, a painting was nothing more than a flat field with paint on it. He often avoided sketching and instead applied paint in a simple manner. He created a series of works called the "Black Paintings," where he used symmetrical bands in proportion to the canvas dimensions on a black background. In the 1960s, he went beyond the conventional canvas sizes and worked on canvases of different geometric shapes instead of squares and rectangles (Akbulak, 2019, p. 30-31). At a young age, Stella rapidly climbed the career ladder, and in the 1960s, many of his works started to be exhibited in important museums and galleries. During this period, Stella created works on large, flat, and monochromatic canvases, featuring parallel lines, diagonals, or repeated frames (Liam, 2003). He expanded his color range and started working on canvases in different forms such as L, N, U, and T shapes. In his static and repetitive works, Stella aimed to deceive the viewer's perception of depth, mass, and three-dimensionality inherent in two-dimensional surfaces. He worked on shaped canvases to completely eliminate the visual contradictions that arise from the rectangular frame of the canvas, either by eliminating the illusion of depth and object representation or by using reduced forms within skewed geometrical frames (Çokokumuş, 2013, p. 27). Later, he focused on geometric works such as the "Irregular Polygon Series" and "Protactor Series." These series were influenced by the circular layout of cities in the Middle East, which greatly fascinated the artist. In the mid-1960s, Stella turned his attention to graphic

design and original printmaking techniques, such as lithography, screen printing, intaglio printing, and offset lithography, to create abstract graphic works. By the 1970s, Stella adopted a three-dimensional artistic approach that he called "maximalist." This new artistic style, unlike his previous works that lacked depth and consisted solely of painted surfaces, was composed of large metal pieces, reminiscent of sculpture. In the 1970s and 1980s, Stella's works became more exuberant. Cones, columns, waves, and decorative architectural elements took center stage in his paintings and sculptures. During this period, Stella's color palette transitioned from monochromatic to almost polychromatic, and his paintings became increasingly sculptural. His canvases evolved from squares and rectangles to L-shapes, cross shapes, and ultimately blurred the lines between painting and sculpture through organic biomorphic assemblages. Stella's progression towards increasingly complex geometries aligned with the rapid advancements in computer-aided design (CAD), digital production, and 3D printing. In the early 1990s, Stella began utilizing computers to design his intricate forms.

Open Sea: Geometries

The Geometries collection comprises a total of 22 newly created artworks by Frank Stella, all of which exist in three-dimensional form. Although the research covered an analysis of all these works, the text focuses on five of them due to page limitations. The findings related to the remaining examinations have been shared in the results section, aiming to offer a more comprehensive perspective for the research. Each NFT within this collection has been crafted as a three-dimensional representation. Accessing the collection is possible by searching the artist's name on the Open Sea marketplace. Additionally, the creation of the Geometries collection involved a collaboration with the ARSNL-Studio platform, which offers guidance to artists in the realm of NFTs. The artworks can be viewed in video format on the marketplace and are available for purchase using Ethereum. Upon purchasing NFTs, collectors receive the associated file formats for augmented reality and 3D printing.

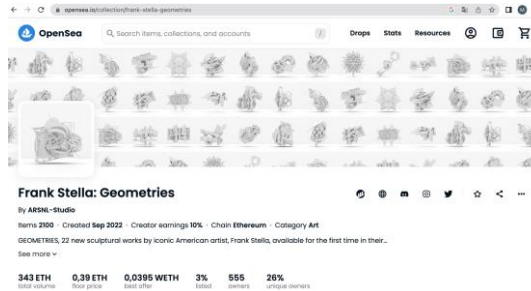


Image 1. Frank Stella, 2022, Geometry Interface View, Accessed on 10.02.2023. <https://opensea.io/collection/frank-stella-geometries>

All of the works (Image 1.) are three-dimensional models reminiscent of panchromatic digital sculptures that are not covered with texture. These models consist of white and gray tones with a simplicity inspired by minimalism. Although the works are uniform in terms of color, they vary in form. The elements that make up this diversity are the geometric forms that give the collection its name.

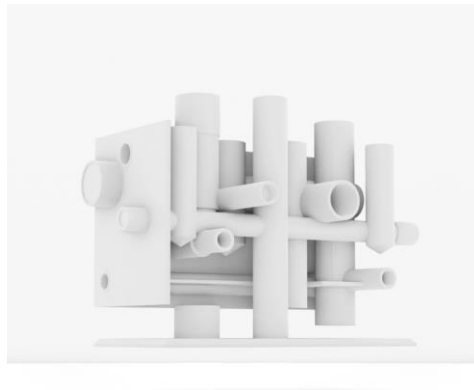


Image 2. Frank Stella, 2022, Geometri XVII / Geometry XVII. Accessed on: 10.02.2023. <https://opensea.io/collection/frank-stella-geometries>

In this artwork, the components designed in various dimensions, resembling tube shapes (Image 2.), are composed in relation to rectangular plates. Despite the absence of a textured covering, the artist demonstrates the rigid nature of the material

used in the study, such as iron or metal, by employing form. The artwork, constructed with a deconstructivist approach, conveys the impression that all the constituent parts are modular.

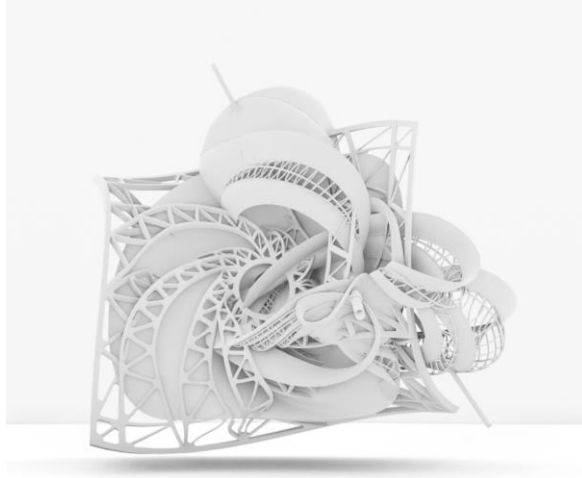


Image 3. Frank Stella, 2022, Geometri XX / Geometry XX, Accessed on: 10.02.2023. <https://opensea.io/collection/frank-stella-geometries>

In contrast to the previous artwork (Image 3), the form used by the artist in this piece exhibits smoother transitions. The works, which showcase the modeling in video format, reveal different frames as they revolve around. It is crucial that each pause creates a balanced composition, serving as a significant detail. This artwork transforms into a representation of biomorphic architecture and utopian-dystopian urban planning. However, it is possible to say that the conveyed proposition to the viewer, following Frank Stella's artistic approach, takes a secondary role. Therefore, the artwork merely presents intertwined geometric forms to the viewer without any explicit interpretation.



Image 4. Frank Stella, 2022, Geometri X / Geometry X, Accessed on: 10.02.2023. <https://opensea.io/collection/frank-stella-geometries>

This work, expressed in an architectural approach influenced by nature, can be interpreted as a recurring star or snowflake (Image 4). In contrast to other examples, this work features interlocking forms that create a similar image from different frames while rotating around. The design in this work utilizes elements of rhythm and balance.



Image 5. Frank Stella, 2022, Geometri XX / Geometry XX, Accessed on: 10.02.2023. <https://opensea.io/collection/frank-stella-geometries>

Another artwork (Image 5.) consists of the dualism of hard and soft forms. The repetitive star form is balanced this time with an asymmetrical structure. Angular and round forms are connected to each other by sheet-shaped forms.



Image 6. Frank Stella, 2022, Geometri XX / Geometry XX Accessed on: 10.02.2023. <https://opensea.io/collection/frank-stella-geometries>

Finally (Figure 6.), the study examined presents a geometric composition to the audience through forms that evoke associations such as a megaphone, speaker, or ear. By bending and twisting parts, the work creates biomorphic structures resulting in tension within the context of language and art.

In the 1990s, Frank Stella began using computers to design forms and shapes that could be difficult to depict with analog tools. The "Geometries" series that the artist currently designs is exhibited as a product of an experience that started in the 90s with this foresight. The aesthetic understanding and perfect harmony of technology in these works draw attention to this experience.

Conclusion

Frank Stella, an American artist and one of the leading figures of minimalism, is known for his paintings, engravings, and three-dimensional works. Transformations in Stella's career have been directly related to the socio-cultural-economic conditions of the time. As one of the pioneers of minimalism in the 1960s, the artist moved closer to a postmodern approach in the 1970s and 80s, producing various works with large dimensions and hybrid materials. Today, the artist carries the dynamics of modern and postmodern art to NFT technology, creating post-digital works with his artistic knowledge and experience. The fact that these works can be "purchased" by the middle and upper-middle class through the Open Sea NFT marketplace is a striking development for the art market. Furthermore, it is possible to say that the artist operates with a deconstructive understanding philosophically. Deconstruction questions and reevaluates the traditional approach in art and brings a new critical approach to art. The concept of "being and representation," which is criticized by deconstruction, has been one of the most important problems in both philosophy and postmodern art. Artists have moved beyond the traditional use of the canvas to search for different objects while questioning the concept of representation (Karkın, 2009, p.31). In Geometries, this

understanding, along with division and fragmentation, creates a disturbing tension. Additionally, in the "Geometries" series, form and shape take precedence over the subject matter in the works. In this regard, the artist has transferred his perspective inherited from minimalism to his contemporary works. Although the collection avoids subjectivity, there is an idea and stylistic coherence. Utopian-dystopian universes, the concept of the city, biomorphic forms, and the relationship between space and place come to the forefront. The works draw on disciplines such as architecture, engineering, and biology. Stella's artistic works are notable for transforming his practice on the canvas into a philosophical inquiry. Throughout his artistic career, Frank Stella explores the dimensions of visual perception in his artworks. "Geometries" is like a synthesis of the artist's artistic life.

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Image References:

Image 1. Frank Stella, 2022, Geometry Interface View. Source: Accessed on 10.02.2023. <https://opensea.io/collection/frank-stella-geometries>

Image 2. Frank Stella, 2022, Geometry XVII. Source: Accessed on 10.02.2023. <https://opensea.io/collection/frank-stella-geometries>

Image 3. Frank Stella, 2022, Geometry XX. Source: Accessed on 10.02.2023. <https://opensea.io/collection/frank-stella-geometries>

Image 4. Frank Stella, 2022, Geometry X. Source: Accessed on 10.02.2023. <https://opensea.io/collection/frank-stella-geometries>

Image 5. Frank Stella, 2022, Geometry XX. Source: Accessed on 10.02.2023

FRANK STELLA'NIN NFT KOLEKSİYONU: GEOMETRİLER

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ÖZ

NFT (Non-Fungible Tokens) sanat eserleri blok-zincir içinde kriptografik olarak kaydedilen ve kopya sayısı sınırlandırılabilen sanatsal çalışmalardır. Geçmişten günümüze değin sosyo-kültürel, ekonomik ve teknolojik gelişmelerle sıkı bir ilişki içinde olan sanat disiplininde, blok zincir teknolojisi, NFT sanat eserleri yoluyla - yaygın olarak - kullanılmaya başlamıştır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, Amerikalı sanatçı Frank Stella'nın "Geometriler" adlı NFT koleksiyonunu incelemektir. Stella'nın 22 parçadan oluşan koleksiyonu, en popüler NFT sanat marketlerinden biri olan *Open Sea* üzerinden satışa sunulmaktadır. Araştırma Frank Stella'nın NFT koleksiyonu "Geometriler" biçim ve içerik açısından nasıl değerlendirilir? sorusu üzerinden NFT sanat çalışmalarının geleneksel sanat dünyası ile kurduğu ilişkiyi açıklamaya çalışmaktadır. Frank Stella'nın sanat kariyeri, Modern ve Postmodern sanatın NFT teknolojisi ile kuracağı ilişkiyi değerlendirmek için en özgün örneklerden birini sunmaktadır. Bu yönüyle sanatçı minimalizmden süregelen bakış açısını çağdaş işlerine aktarmıştır. Koleksiyonda konusallıktan uzak durulsa da; bir fikir ve üslup birliği bulunmaktadır. Ütopik-distopik evrenler, kent olgusu, biomorfik formlar, mekân uzam ilişkisi ön plana çıkmaktadır. "Geometriler" serisinde form ve biçim, çalışmalardaki konudan önce gelmektedir. Literatürde NFT sanat çalışmaları ile ilgili yapılmış çalışmalar genellikle sanat piyasası alanına odaklanmaktadır. NFT sanat çalışmalarının içeriğini inceleyen ya da onların sanat tarihi ile arasındaki ilişkiye odaklanan araştırmaların eksikliği göze çarpmaktadır. Bu nedenle çalışmanın literatüre katkı sağlayacağı düşünülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Minimalizm, NFT, Blokzincir, Frank Stella, Postdijital Sanat