

MIT List Center

Frank Stella Loohooloo

This is Loohooloo, created by Frank Stella in 1994. One of the most influential artists of the 20th century, in the 1960s, he garnered attention for his black paintings, featuring coats of black house paint on canvas, and paved the way for minimalism. Former List public art curator Patricia Fuller--

Then later in the 70s, he began making reliefs, these exuberant assemblages of forms and colors bursting off the wall. The painted surfaces and the continuous curving and undulating surface of Loohooloo conveys sensations to some people of crashing waves, continuous motion, and this mysterious dark space.

In fact, Stella took the title for his work from a fictitious lookout in Herman Melville's novel Omoo, a place where fishermen throw spears into foaming seas. The beveled surface has an equally unusual origin.

Stella is a big cigar smoker. [LAUGHS] The shapes on the fiberglass armature were originally derived from photographs of smoke rings blown by the artist in his studio, then manipulated by computer, and then applied to the armature of sprayed foam. The fact that the armature bellies out almost in the shape of a wave creates a very dynamic surface.

Loohooloo came to MIT in the mid-'90s through the generosity of Sloan School alumnus Eliot Wolk. It was lifted by crane into the conference room at the School of Architecture and Planning, which was undergoing renovations at the time.

I've been told it's the most subscribed conference room on campus.

Commentary about Stella's other work at MIT is available on the List website.