

FT Weekend

FT Money How much should you leave your children?

UK £3.00; Channel Islands £3.30; Republic of Ireland €3.50

SATURDAY 8 NOVEMBER / SUNDAY 9 NOVEMBER 2014

Frank Stella: Illustrations after El Lissitzky's 'Had Gadya'

Waddington Custot Galleries, London

During the civil war following the Bolshevik revolution, the art school of the small Belarusian town Vitebsk became an intense battleground. On one side was native Marc Chagall, creating figurative paintings drenched in allusions to Jewish life and myth. His challenger from Moscow was suprematist Kazimir Malevich, father of minimalist abstraction. El Lissitzky, initially loyal to Chagall, quickly betrayed him for Malevich. His 1919 gouaches illustrating the traditional Jewish Passover song "Had Gadya" (The Only Kid) in angular, fractured graphic forms meld both influences.

Six decades later, New Yorker Frank Stella saw Lissitzky's gouaches at the Tel Aviv Museum and, fascinated by their vibrancy and movement, produced his own print series illustrating each line of the song. Stella's rhythmic, dynamic compositions, developed using multiple methods - lithography, linoleum block, silkscreen, rubber relief, with collage elements and hand-colouring - were printed by



'Had Gadya:
a hungry
cat ate up
the goat'
(1985) by
Frank Stella

Waddington in 1984. Stella went on to make hand-coloured variants of each plate in brilliant hues. Rarely seen, these are the subject of Waddington's new show.

The story of "one small goat bought for two zuzim", eaten by a cat, bitten by a dog, beaten by a stick, burnt by fire, quenched by water and so on, affords Stella the opportunity for marvellously stylised yet evocative motifs that avoid both representation and pure geometry. Here is

abstraction revitalised, given body and volume, by a narrative foundation of nursery rhyme simplicity. Fresh and compelling, the calligraphic drawing and bold, fluid vocabulary of cones, pillars, waves, in Stella's "Had Gadya" determined his future aesthetic, notably the Moby-Dick series, but look back, too, to art history - in dialogue not just with Lissitzky but Malevich and Chagall. waddingtoncustot.com, 020 7851 2200, Thursday to December 13