

# Julian Stańczak

## Beyond the Mirror

6 June - 28 July 2023

Exhibition event: Screening of 'Julian Stańczak, To Catch the Light',  
Award winning documentary by Tomaz Magierski  
26 June, The Polish Hearth Club, South Kensington



A leading artist of Op Art, Julian Stańczak (b. 1928 Borownica, Poland – d. 2017 Ohio, United States) created from the 1960s a dynamic and joyous oeuvre. The term Op Art itself was coined by Time magazine after his first major show, Julian Stańczak: Optical Paintings, held at the Martha Jackson Gallery in New York in 1964 where his paintings, full of colour and optimism, gave nothing of his traumatic childhood.

In 1940 Stańczak and his family were forced into a Siberian labour camp, where he permanently lost the use of his right arm. In 1942, aged thirteen, Stańczak escaped to join the Polish army-in-exile in Persia. After deserting from the army, he spent his teenage years in a Polish refugee camp in Uganda. It was there, in Africa, that he learned to write and paint with his left-hand, he was profoundly affected by the African light, the intensely coloured sunsets and what he called "the immense visual energy" of the fauna and flora and the colourful patterned Ugandan textiles worn by the local women.

In 1950 the family relocated to Cleveland USA via London, England. He studied at the Cleveland Institute of Art and later trained under Josef Albers at Yale University where he received his Master of Fine Arts in 1956 and became a US citizen in 1957. Influenced by his teacher Josef Albers, Russian Suprematism and Constructivism, Stańczak wanted to achieve an extreme sensory experience for the viewer. His abstract compositions are full of vibrating colours and optical illusion. Shapes pulsate, colours glow, and vertical lines dance across his intensely energetic canvases.

Stańczak was interested in the emotions that colour can evoke, which are personal and unique to each viewer, hoping to provide an ultimately uplifting experience. He once said that his style was an attempt to forget about his war traumas. "I did not want to be bombarded daily by the past," he said. "I looked for anonymity of actions through nonreferential abstract art."

In 1965 Stańczak pushed this further by using tape to control the application of paint, distancing himself from the canvas and removing any evidence of his own hand. Stańczak felt that this way the viewer is completely free to impose their own meaning and emotional response to the work, to reflect inwardly and see themselves in the painting, much like a mirror.

Stańczak took part to the Museum of Modern Art's seminal 1965 exhibition The Responsive Eye. In 60 years of painting, Stańczak has proven to be a leading colourist of the 20th Century. His paintings are included in numerous public and private collections, including more than 100 museums.

Image: Julian Stańczak, *Orange Twist*, 2007, Acrylic on panel, 40.6 x 40.6 cm, 16 x 16 inches  
High-res images available on request

Opening times: Monday – Friday, 10 am – 5.30 pm

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