

ARTFORUM

Julian Stanczak (1928–2017)

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Barbara Stanczak



Julian Stanczak, 2016. Photo: Barbara Stanczak.

JULIAN STANCZAK died in my arms on March 25, 2017. His body gave up fighting, but awareness of his unique spirit only keeps growing.

Living together for almost fifty-five years, Julian and I—and later our children, too—experienced many memorable adventures; we crossed the country by car from one national park to the next, from one unique experience to another. As I took in nature's formations and found myself enthralled by America's geology, Julian was registering everything within his mind's eye.

Julian never forgot anything but kept all impressions tucked away in his mind, ready to be re-experienced when needed. He could describe the sound and taste of the Siberian morning at -65 degrees, and he could paint for me the image of snow crystals shimmering, suspended in midair. Julian would revisit the smell and heavy atmosphere of the burning savannah in Uganda, almost making me taste the air and hear the distant sounds of escaping animals. Julian never forgot a sunrise or a sunset. At breakfast, he might recall enthusiastically the

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mesmerizing play of light and colors at 4 AM that same morning, as the first light pierced the clouds. His mind stored every visual observation with utmost detail.



The experiences of nature's grandeur became crystallized in Julian's paintings as impressions transformed into abstract images of color, light, and joy. The metamorphoses his works captured—from expression to impression, from taking in to pouring out, from personal feelings to universal responses—were unique. Looking at an empty canvas, Julian would internalize its dimensions, divide its graphic space, visualize a color spectrum and paint mixtures, and balance his desired emotional/psychological effect, all in his head. He had the ability to see his paintings in great detail in his mind's eye, and he would impatiently pursue giving form to this vision. Julian had a great heart and intellect, but above all, it was his mind's eye that—for me, as an artist—was the most amazing and incredible of gifts.

Julian communicated with nature—with animals and plants alike, as if he were one of them, breathing with the same breath. His empathy extended naturally also to people who crossed his path, and nobody crossed that path without receiving some personal, uplifting encouragement. He knew when an old friend would call or when an individual was in need. With his sense of empathy—almost telepathy—he was able to reach into time and space in a way that only a few artists, poets, or musicians are gifted to do.

Keep on painting sunset, Julian!

Barbara Stanczak is a sculptor and has taught at the Cleveland Institute of Art for thirty-seven years.