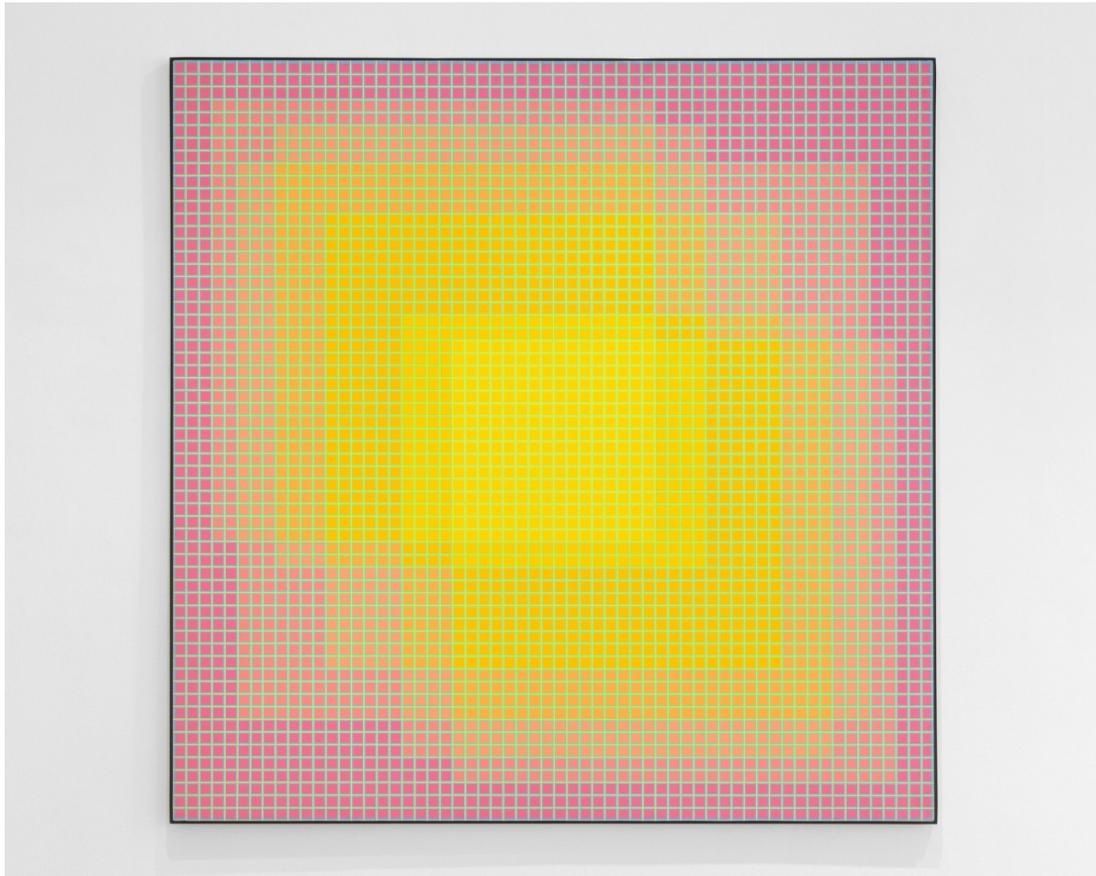


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**THE MAYOR GALLERY INTRODUCE OP ART EXTRAORDINAIRE
JULIAN STANCZAK TO LONDON**

BY CHRISTINA DONOGHUE ON 6 SEPTEMBER 2023



The Mayor Gallery courtesy of The Julian Stanczak Foundation

You know an exhibition is a success when its closing date is extended. Opening to the public at the beginning of summer, The Mayor Gallery's Beyond the Mirror introduced the lively paintings of Op art genius Julian Stanczak to London.

Bold, nostalgic, vivid and trance-like are just some of the words that fit the description of a Stanczak piece, and yet, once the eye meets the artist's canvases, all possible adjectives seem to fall relatively flat in comparison. Stanczak's artworks are much grander than optical illusions; they are invitations to see into his life and work in full, brewing with references from his youth spent in a Polish refugee camp in Uganda, where he evokes the memory of the country's colourfully magnetic landscape. Spilling with a kind of joy that the artist did not know when he was young (a young Stanczak was forced to escape from a Siberian labour camp with his family in 1942, where he joined the Polish army-in-exile in Persia). 'I did not want to be bombarded daily by the past', notes the exhibition's press release, attributing the quote to Stanczak himself. 'I looked for anonymity of actions through nonreferential abstract art.'

Unlike peers such as Bridget Riley - who cleverly played with perspective using monochrome tones - Stanczak entices the viewer to challenge classical notions and expectations of op art by using intense colour to ignite

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wonder, passion and sheer delight. The press release notes that 'Stanczak wanted to achieve an extreme sensory experience...shapes pulsate, colours glow, and colourful lines dance', which is undeniably valid. However, Stanczak's exceptional understanding and use of colour theory weren't by coincidence. In 1950, Stanczak relocated to Cleveland, USA, with the young artist enrolling himself at the Cleveland Institute of Art, later training under Bauhaus visionary Josef Albers, who taught him colour theory.

In 1965, Stanczak was featured in the Museum of Modern Art's seminal exhibition *The Responsive Eye*, showing work next to contemporaries Bridget Riley and the credited 'grandfather and leader of the Op', Victor Vasarely. Despite this, Stanczak's career never quite reached international fame like it did for his peers, at least not in Britain, which is why this exhibition's relevance permeates the contemporary art scene. *Beyond the Mirror* reminds us that Stanczak's work doesn't just live in the shadow of the 'greats'; he's undoubtedly one of them.



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