

**JULIAN STANCZAK**

March 25 – September 13, 2019

## Julian Stanczak

Like his Polish compatriot, the poet Czeslaw Milosz, the painter Julian Stanczak witnessed and survived the atrocities inflicted upon eastern Europe during the Second World War. When still a boy, Stanczak was removed from his native city of Przemyśl by the Russian army. He sustained permanent injuries while enduring forced labor in Siberia. Later in the war he escaped, and after a long trek southward, Stanczak found himself in Uganda, where he began to paint pictures.

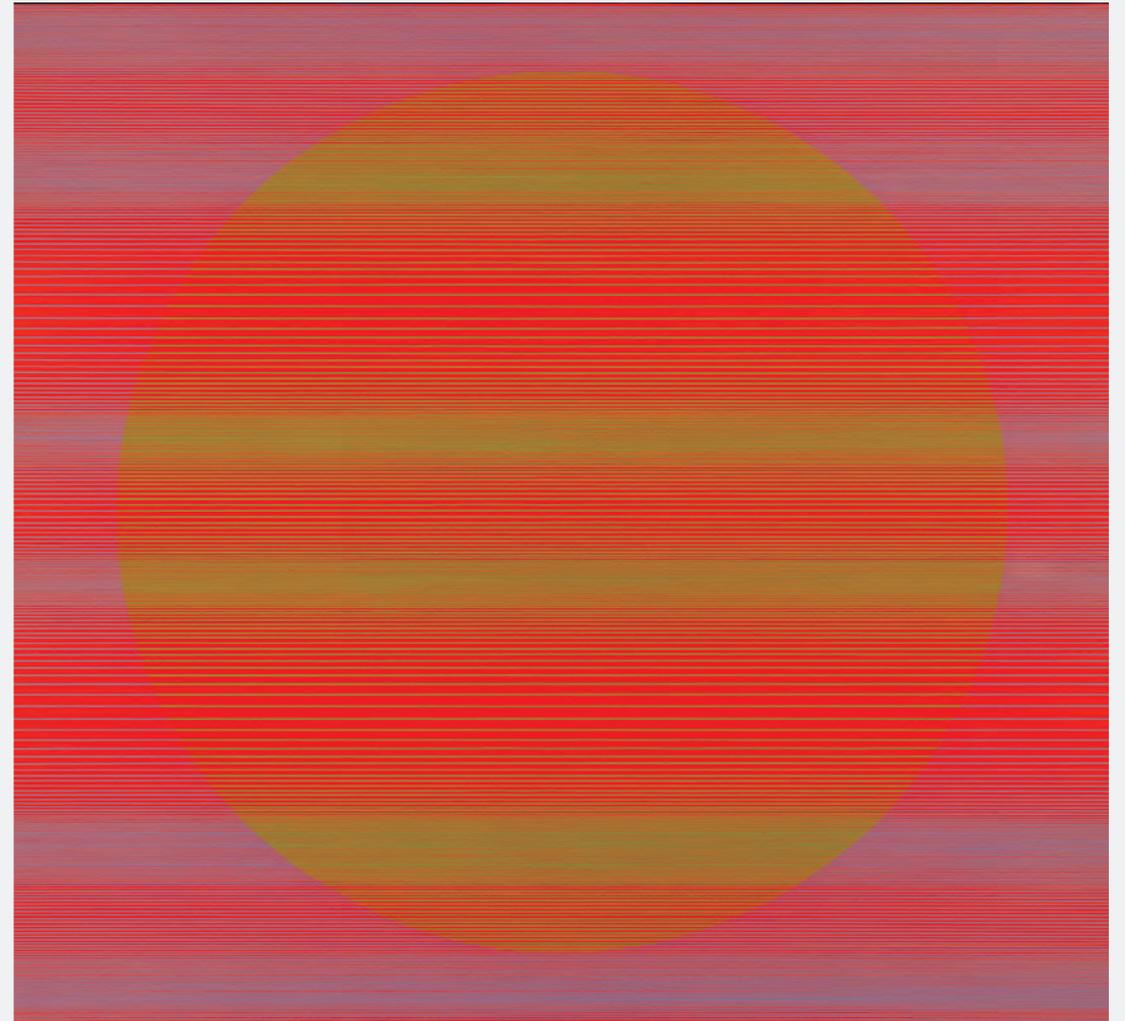
Milosz came to believe that poetry could not directly convey the reality of suffering. Stanczak, from his beginnings as an artist, felt that he must rely on the autonomy, that is, the independent language and inherent structures of pictorial art to convey experience, perception and authentic human feeling.

Stanczak eventually came to America where he sought a wider education in art. His principal influence was his teacher at Yale, painter Josef Albers, who specialized in the formal elements of line, shape and color. Albers believed that “all art was an act of condensation,” but admitted that “in the end, I am concerned with emotion in spite of everything.”

Albers’s well-known series *Homage to the Square* superimposes three and sometimes four blocks of color over one another. This motif provided endless variations of color relationships. Stanczak, as he departed from Albers’s tutelage, began devising ways to break down color, putting it under the stresses of extreme divisions and regimentations.

Stanczak’s art presents Expressionism turned on its head: passion emanating from precise visual engineering. “Color is abstract, universal,” Stanczak once said, “yet personal and private in experience. It primarily affects us emotionally, not logically, as do tangible things.” The art historian T.J. Clark observed that “A Picasso or a Mondrian always exists as a problem for the space around it. The pictures somehow indict their surroundings.” This applies to Stanczak’s work in that one cannot be in proximity of it without in some way coming to terms with the force-field of its compressed power.

Surveying the present installation, one is first confronted by the retinal vibration emanating from each picture. As they become more familiar, the paintings seem to open, addressing all the senses, going beyond the visual. Whether we are witnessing a scent, a sound or a signal to our sense of touch depends on the viewer. But there is no doubt this is one of the painter’s intentions.



*Referential Circle*, 1968, Acrylic on canvas, 72 1/8 x 77 1/8 inches

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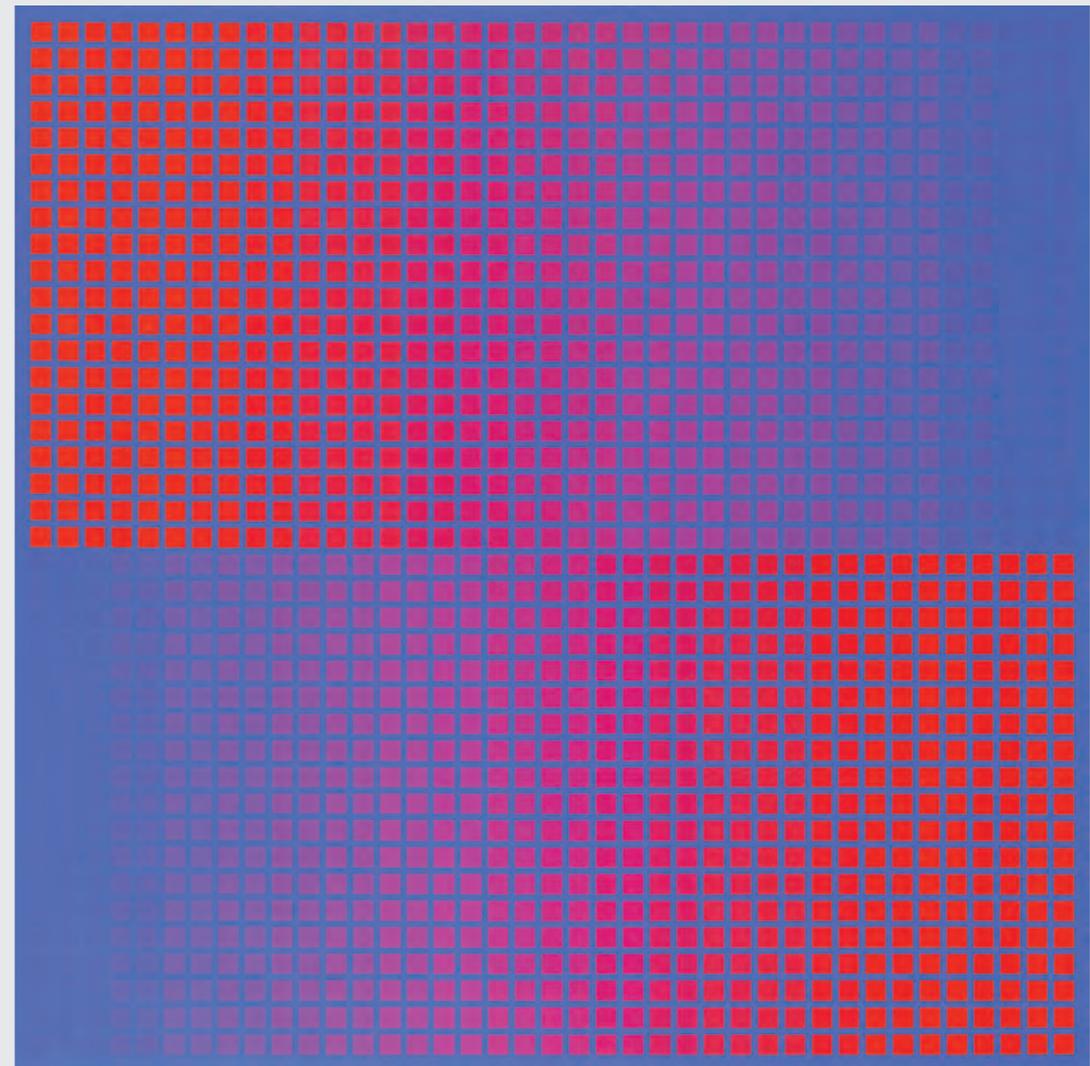
*Trespassing Light*, for example, is made from three colors: green, red and blue. The red is actually the foreground color, formed in thin stripes. The painting is divided into three vertical sections. In the middle, the red stripes get narrower as they move outward, causing a cylindrical effect. The green bands break up the blue when they appear. Another perspectival illusion has the red stripes narrowing in the outside columns to the sides. Looking closely at this simple composition of green, red and blue, one is astounded at the secretions of purple, magenta and yellow that have been produced. Like some foods, like fish and vegetables, that transform their texture and compositional makeup by being thinly sliced, Stanczak's repetitive cuts within the picture plane allow strange new flavors to emanate using only three well-known colors.

In *Departing Red*, the square format is evenly tessellated, like a mosaic floor, with red tile-like square planes that incrementally change color as they seem to submerge into the blue background. The canvas is bisected horizontally, so that the opposing planes seem to slide off into pool-like depths on opposite sides. But upon more careful examination, all is not how it immediately appears: a precise amount of blue has been added to the tiles as they progress, moving their hue from orange to cherry as they become more saturated with blue—a different blue from the unchanging background. One realizes that the final bluish tiles are in fact violet and subtly contradict the blue of the background.

*Green Light* also has a slightly raised surface and is also covered with tile-like squares, but it moves very differently from the plummy pinks on the outer edges to the center green-yellow. Here Stanczak pinstripes the spaces between the interior squares with yellow lines throughout. It shares this softer glowing presence with the grisaille *Soft Sound* from 1998.

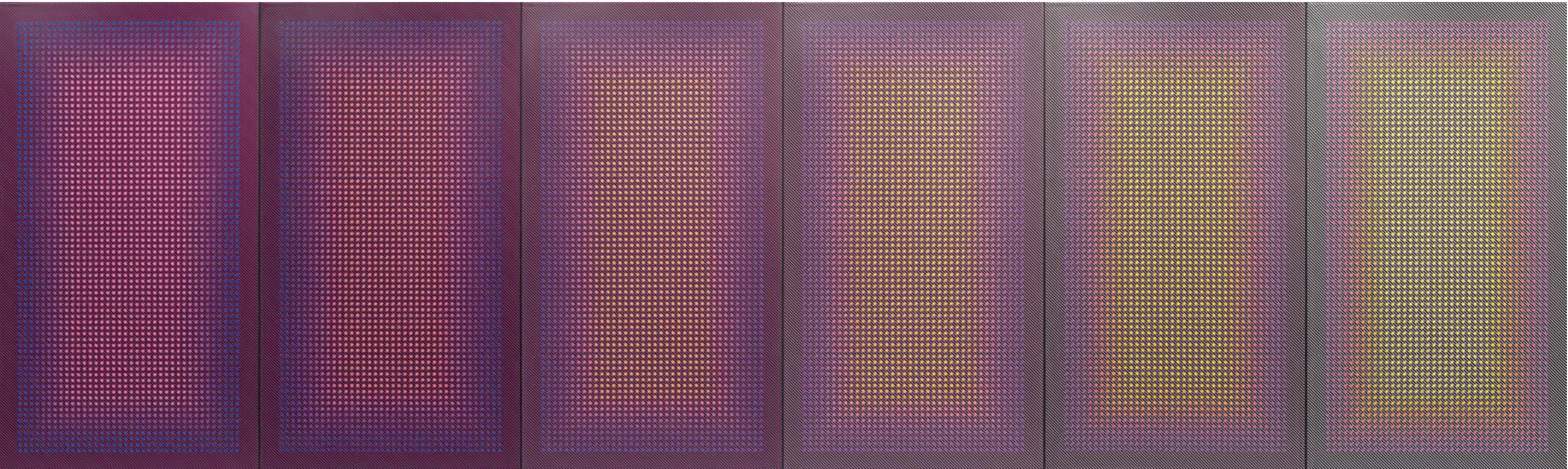
Looking at these works, I thought of the unusual, indescribable power of Native Australian paintings, except that Stanczak's surface is completely uninflected. One can appreciate that its ineffable smoothness is a product of attendant skillfulness. Stanczak is the least mystical of artists. Rather than mystery, his work intentions are those of providing a verifiable experience in a world that offers very few of them. Patiently looking at what seem at first to be baffling pictures gives way over time to a complete understanding of their sophisticated methodology. It is a gift of transparency in an increasingly opaque world.

Joe Fyfe, 2019



*Departing Red*, 1974-75, Acrylic on canvas, 60 x 60 inches

**Julian Stanczak**



*Change With Light*, 1989 Acrylic on canvas, six panels each: 80 x 44 inches, total: 80 x 264 inches

Cover: *Green Light*, 1973, Acrylic on canvas, 60 ¼ x 60 ½ inches

**499** PARK AVENUE / The Lobby Gallery

Park Avenue and 59th Street, New York, NY 10022

Gallery hours: Monday - Friday, 8:00am - 6:00pm

### **Acknowledgements**

499 Park Avenue, through its exhibition program, actively contributes to the cultural community as an expression of ongoing commitment to excellence in the visual arts and architecture.

We thank The Estate of Julian Stanczak, courtesy of Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York for the loan of these paintings. For more information about this work please contact Robert Grossman, Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 534 West 26th Street, New York, NY 10001, (T): 212.744.7400.

CURATORS        Jay Grimm, Jay Grimm Art Advisory; Lenore Goldberg, Hines

ESSAY            Joe Fyfe

### **About Joe Fyfe**

Joe Fyfe, a painter and writer, had a recent solo exhibition in New York at Nathalie Karg Gallery and a duo exhibition with Claude Viallat in Saint-Étienne with Galerie Ceysson & Bénétière. He received an *Artadia Award* in 2015 and the American Academy of Arts and Letters *Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Award* in 2017. Fyfe has written reviews and essays for numerous publications including *Artforum* and *Art in America*.

### **About Jay Grimm Art Advisory**

Jay Grimm is an independent arts professional with more than 25 years of experience in the New York gallery world. For more information about this program, please contact [Jay@jaygrimm.com](mailto:Jay@jaygrimm.com), (T): 917.690.0035.



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