



LOS ANGELES

Julian Stanczak
at Diane Rosenstein

The history of Op Art is somewhat paradoxical, as the movement was adopted eagerly by popular culture before it could achieve real respectability in the art world. The term itself was coined in a 1964 review by Donald Judd of a show by Julian Stanczak at New York's Martha Jackson Gallery, after the gallerist titled the show "Optical Paintings." Yet, despite the carping of critics—and countless Vasarely posters in college dorm rooms over the ensuing decade—the best Op Art was about the tactile presence of the artwork, prompting not just a perceptual experience, but an aesthetic one. Two of Op's most skilled practitioners, Julian Stanczak and Richard Anuszkiewicz, had in fact been roommates at Yale in the 1950s, where they both studied under Josef Albers. Looking back on it today, it's much easier to see the direct lineage from Albers' color experiments and precise geometries to the more elaborate work of Stanczak and his kin.

Amazingly, this solo show of works by Julian Stanczak at Diane Rosenstein marked the artist's first gallery show in Los Angeles in over 40 years. Featuring 18 works made from 1968-2009, it offered a fairly dazzling display of the diverse output that has emerged from Stanczak's toolbox over the decades. Among the stand-outs is *Unashamed of Change, I, II and III* (1968), a triptych of vertical panels depicting off-kilter square forms rotating so as to come into alignment in the third panel. Rendered entirely in horizontal strips, in shades of gray, the work demonstrates the eye-popping effects attainable in a muted palette. The colors get palpably brighter in the 1970s, while remaining focused in their way, as in the columns of sunshine yellow circles seen in *Synchronized VII* (1970), or the juxtaposition of straight and wavy red and gray columns in *Baroque* (1979). Numerous of the

works, such as 1982's trippy *Duality in System*, employ overlapping colored shapes, almost like lighting gels. *Low Asteroid M* (1983), is nearly jaw dropping, with its grid of tiny multi-colored squares on black building to a kind of receding-advancing pinwheel effect: an homage to the square that is uniquely, and thrillingly, his own.

Born in Poland and a survivor of numerous traumas surrounding WWII, Stanczak began making art as a teenaged refugee in East Africa after the war, moved by the stunning light and colors that he saw. Seen in that context, his embrace of the perceptual imperatives of Op Art can be viewed as more than a celebration of aesthetic experience but, perhaps, a form of transcendence.

—GEORGE MELROD

"DUALITY IN SYSTEM," 1982, Julian Stanczak

ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 72" X 144"

PHOTO: COURTESY THE ARTIST AND DIANE ROSENSTEIN