**Full Spectrum: Paintings, Drawings, and Prints of Julian Stanczak; Wood and Stone Sculptures of Barbara Stanczak**

*August 17-November 24, 2019*

This exhibition is a retrospective of the work of Julian Stanczak and Barbara Stanczak. A retrospective is a look back on events that took place, or works that were produced, in the past. In art specifically, a retrospective exhibition presents works from an extended period of an artists’ activity, in this case, Julian Stanczak’s entire artistic career, from African landscapes to pure geometric abstractions. It’s a “Greatest Hits” album for the artist, but instead of on a playlist it’s hung on a wall.

**About the Artists:**

**Julian Stanczak (1928-2017)**

Born in Poland in 1928, Julian Stanczak would face a gulag (Soviet labor camp) where he would lose the use of his right arm to paralysis; travel through modern day Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India to a Polish refugee camp in Masindi, Uganda where he would begin painting landscapes; relocate to Chekendon Camp outside London, England; and finally settle in the United States, first in Cincinnati, OH and then in Cleveland, OH.

His early work of the 1950s and 1960s, inspired by the African landscape and drum music he experienced in Uganda, is realistic and descriptive. In these paintings you can see the shapes that suggest people and places through his use of lines and blending colors. This eventually gave way to complete geometric abstraction under the tutelage of Josef Albers and Conrad Marca-Relli at Yale University. Given the name Optical (Op) art by gallery owner Martha Jackson, Stanczak preferred Perceptual art to describe his use of fundamental art elements like line, shape, color, and texture to create abstract geometric paintings that confuse the eye. His art, described as non-exclusive and proletarian, requires no background in art history to enjoy. Open to a broad audience, color is a universal language that irritates the eyes of every viewer, challenging their perception of a 2D painting that appears to jump 3D off the canvas. Tricking the viewer in multiple ways: perceiving a color that is not actually there, a 3D texture that is not possible, or utilizing the brain to fill in shapes he hasn’t finished; Stanczak gives us a visual work out.

This symphony of color, reflecting his synesthesia, reveals no information about the artist. Devoid of allusions to his life, he instead creates perceptual scores on his visual composition.

**Barbara Stanczak (b. 1941)**

Born in Germany in 1941 as Barbara Meerpohl, she emigrated to Cincinnati, OH to assist her grandfather in ecclesiastical decoration. Attending the Art Academy of Cincinnati, where she studied painting, sculpture, interior design, graphic design, and printmaking; she met Julian, a professor at the Academy. The student married the teacher in 1963, and Barbara put her career on hold to promote Julian’s, mirroring her contemporaries Lee Krasner and Jackson Pollock. Despite managing her husband’s growing career and caring for their children, Barbara still found time for her art. It wasn’t until later in life, however, that she went back to creating full time.

Focusing on non-objective art as Julian does, meaning the artwork is not autobiographical of the artist, she seeks to “make visible” the pieces she works with, calling herself a “doer” while Julian was a “thinker”. Favoring natural materials like wood and stone, Barbara sculpts her visions out, relying on feel and touch to create her 3D works. For her, the materials she chooses pulse with an “inner life” that she responds too, and a successful sculpture is one in which she pulls that life force out for the viewer to see. The give and take of her work, as she responds to growth patterns, fault lines, and other anomalies that both inhibit and advance her vision, is what draws her to sculpt. Intermixed with Julian’s works, they form a continual dialogue of nature and visual awareness that push the viewer to interact.
Medium and Technique

What is Optical art?

Optical art, or Op art, is a style of visual art that employs optical illusions, using geometric shapes in either black and white or contrasting colors, that give the viewer the impression of movement, hidden images, flashing and vibrating patterns, swelling, or warping. Meaning “of or relating to visuals”, Op art pieces were created as early as the 1930s, at the transition between Surrealism and Color Field painting. It found its name in the 1960s with Julian Stanczak’s solo exhibit, Julian Stanczak: Optical Paintings. Objecting to the name because everyone has “optics”, Stanczak preferred the term Perceptual art. To him, the illusion doesn’t happen in the eyes of the viewer, but in the mind because the viewers perception is trying to equate two competing ideas at the same time. This struggle makes the viewer look more closely and interact more thoroughly with the paintings. In fact, some images create “after images”, what viewers experience under their eyelids when blinking, as if they are absorbing the painting into their own bodies.

There are three types of contrasts an artist can work with to create an illusion using color: simultaneous contrast, successive contrast, and assimilation contrast (see next page). Simultaneous contrast is when the colors of two different objects affect each other. Successive contrast occurs when viewing a shape in one color for a while changes how you perceive the color of the next viewed shape. Assimilation contrast is when colors are layered in a way to create another color without actually using the third color. What your eyes perceive confuses the brain, whether you have a background in art history or not. A purely democratic artistic movement, Op art utilizes the fundamental elements of art, particularly line, to achieve its outcome.

His process was fairly simple: he began with a sketch or drawing in pencil. Then, using paint strips, the prevailing color is chosen for the color scheme. Acrylic paint is used, his own color mixture and formula, to ensure the exact shade and hues remain. If the colors change, as they can with other types of paint, the perception is lost to the viewer, so it was extremely important to Stanczak to have a paint that would stay as vibrant long into the future as the day he painted it. Following this, he laid the tape in equal, measured distances depending on the illusion he wished to create. Once the painting is fully dry, he removed the tape and his work was complete!

Paintings and Sculptures in Conversation

Where the Optical art and the natural sculptures overlap is in the conversation and interaction they have with the viewer. Julian’s paintings make the viewer pause and consider, walk back and forth in front of the painting, and move their head from side to side. Barbara’s works also engage with the viewer as 3D works, they can walk around them, experiencing the whole work in a way one cannot with paintings.

Working closely in the same studio for over 50 years, both artists are inspired by the natural world: it’s materials for the sculptor and its natural geometry for the painter. Both work within their structures, Barbara with the natural structures of her material as she sculpts to release the vision from the wood or stone and Julian with the mathematical geometry he employed to bring forth the visual illusion.

Both artists are completely hands-on in their work. Julian mixes his own pigments and creates his own colors without an assistant. His works were painted only by him as he did not like to be separated from the work during any part of the process; he was fully responsible for his work. Barbara sculpts mainly with hand tools, an extremely time consuming process that keeps her continuously in physical contact with the work. Despite this physical closeness, neither includes autobiographical information in their finished products. The viewer is to take away only how they themselves experience the world and how that is put upon the artwork. Both artists pull a physical reaction from the viewer, Julian’s in the need to walk back and forth for the illusion, and Barbara’s in the need to walk around for the complete view.
Selected Images/Tour Script

A selection of these works will be discussed during a docent-led school tour. A PowerPoint presentation featuring larger versions of the images for classroom use may be found at fwmoa.org/PreK-12/

Drawings, prints, and paintings are by Julian; wood and stone sculptures are by Barbara.

Themes: Op art, retrospective, perception, illusion, color wheel, shapes, texture

Essential questions: (choose 2-3): What criteria are considered when selecting work for presentation, a portfolio, or a collection? How do life experiences influence the way you relate to art? How can the viewer “read” a work of art as text? How is personal preference different from an evaluation? How does art help us understand the lives of people of different times, places, and cultures? (VA: Pr5.1.4a; VA: Re.7.1.3a; VA: Re.7.1.5a; VA: R38.1.4a; VA: R39.a.3a; VA: Cn11.1.P; VA: Cn11.1.4a)

Ideas to consider and look for throughout the exhibit

- **What is a retrospective exhibition?** A retrospective exhibition is when we look at an artists’ work during a specific time in their life or throughout their whole life. It is important to remember that artists don’t always start with the materials they are known for! Sometimes it takes them awhile to find their vision.

- **Why does my head hurt?** It can be difficult for some people to look at these types of artworks for extended periods of time. Please remind your group that if they are beginning to feel nauseous or have a headache, they can turn away or close their eyes (if seated).

- **That’s a lot of color!** We will have color wheels and color mixing lenses for students to explore color with while in the galleries. To create these perceptions, Stanczak had to be familiar with the color wheel! Engage students in discussions of primary, secondary, tertiary, and complementary colors as well as tint, shade, and hue.

- **Let’s move around!** Be sure to observe works up close, from far away, and from different angles to see how the shapes, colors, and forms change. If possible, have students walk around the sculptures. How does this change their perception of them? How can you tell which side is “front” and which side is “back” in a painting versus a sculpture?

- **In conversation.** As you move through the galleries, have students pay attention to the paintings and sculptures. Are there any that they think are conversing?

- **Look for gallery resources!** We will have color mixing lenses and color wheels next to certain artworks to show how the colors change and to facilitate dialogue about how to mix colors. We will also have sculptural materials for students to touch.

**Color Illusions**

Simultaneous Contrast  
Successive Contrast  
Assimilation Contrast
**Note to Docents:** *Full Spectrum* is laid out in Galleries 1-4. When touring, you may not begin at the “beginning” in Gallery 4. The following works are laid out chronologically as if you were walking through the galleries in numbered order.

**Gallery 1**

*Tactile See Through*, acrylic on canvas, 1974

What does tactile mean? Why do you think he called it *Tactile See Through*? Does it look 3D?

How is it “see through”?

How do you think Stanczak painted this?

How many colors do you see? Does this change when you look from different views?

Where is the focal point?

What shapes do you see?

What is the mood of this painting?

*Square Dance*, ink on paper, 1972

Why do you think he titled this *Square Dance*? What title would you give it?

Look for the pencil lines! What does it tell us about how the artist worked?

Where is the focal point?

What *illusion* does this artwork create? Is it moving?

What do you think this would be like in color? Would it have the same effect?

*Undulation*, ink on plastic, 1972

What is an undulation? What else undulates? Waves

Can you describe what your eyes are doing when you look at this?

Do you see any shapes? Does it look 3D? Is it moving?

Why do you think the artist created this work?

Point out the artist signature. Do you sign your artworks? Why do we sign and date our work?
Barbara: *Stages of the Moon, Crescent*, Italian alabaster, 2015


Julian and Barbara have spoken about how their art communicates. How do these three things relate? Circles, moon, sun; contrast of light and dark

Compare and contrast the three works: medium, shapes, lines (silkscreens—one is horizontal and the other is diagonal); placement; lighting

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**Sunday Promenade**, Italian translucent alabaster, 1998

What is a promenade? What just opened in Fort Wayne that has promenade in its name?

Why do you think she called the sculpture promenade?

Why do you think the artist chose stone instead of wood?

What is the texture?

Do you think Barbara picked them out purposefully for their imperfections or in spite of it? Why use stone rather than another material?

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**Totemic Seedpods**, cedar and ash, 2009

What do you think these are? What do you think the artist was inspired by?

Texture: Smooth or rough? Hard or soft? Cold or warm?

Each piece stands on its own and also works together. Which one do you like most? Why? How do they all work together?

What would be different if we could walk around this sculpture?

How do you think she decided the sculpture was finished?
**Gallery 3**

*Tiptoe through my Garden*, wood, 2001

What do you think these shapes are?

What does the sculpture make you think of?

How would it be different if we could walk around it?

Texture: Smooth or rough? Hard or soft? Cold or warm?

Balance: What if these were upside down?

*Spring*, mixed media, 1958

How is this piece different from other paintings we’ve looked at?

Do you think artists make the same type of art their whole career? Do you always make the same type of artworks?

Julian lived in Africa when he was younger. Discuss how the work reflects the African landscape.

Technique: Still playing with color mixing, mix of abstract and realism, Pointilism

*Roofs*, mixed media, 1951

What do we think is the subject of this painting? Hint: the title is *Roofs*.

What time of day is it? Do you think it is rural (country) or urban (city)?

Technique: Color mixing, Cubism (Picasso)

Do we like this technique or do we like the abstract, geometric paintings more? Why did he make paintings like this? To prove he could.
**Gallery 4**

*Intercepting*, acrylic on canvas, 1990

What do your eyes do when you look at this work? Is there a focal point? Is it moving? How do you think the artist accomplished this? Perception

What colors do you see? Be sure to look up close and far away!

Do you think this would change if it was in black & white? If it was smaller or larger?

Would you want to hang this in your house?

What do you think the title, *Intercepting*, means?

*Environmental*, acrylic on canvas, 1987

What shapes do you see? Are they complete, or is your mind completing them? Perception

How would this painting change if the colors changed?

How is this painting different from others we’ve looked at?

Do you think it is easier to look at the painting at this size (scale), or if it was smaller or larger?

Color mixing: What colors do you see up close versus far away?

*Distribution in the Dark*, acrylic on canvas, 1987

Compare and contrast the four works.

- Can they stand alone as solo works?
- Which solo work do you like best?
- How many colors do you see?
- How are they different together?
- How does each one effect your eyes?
- Different colors?
- What illusion do they create?
- What would change if we changed the order of the paintings?
Based on the painting, what do you think intercession means? Why do you think he called it Intercession?

What illusion does this painting create?

How do you think he painted this? Would you have the patience to paint like this?

What colors would you choose for your composition?

Do you see any specific shapes?

The artist titled this a garden. Do you see a garden? I see organs!

Texture: Smooth or rough? Hard or soft? Cold or warm? Point out the lighting: dark, light, pieces that “glitter”

Walk around the sculpture. How do the piece change shape from front to back? How do we know which side is “front” and which is “back”? How do we tell when we look at a painting?

How do you think Barbara decides she has enough pieces to be done? How do they work together? Which one do you like the most?

What is a continuum? Why do you think is called Continuum?

Does it all look like paint? I think the silver looks like tape, but it’s all paint!

What shapes do you see? Are they finished or did your mind (perception) fill them in?

Why do you think he chose these colors?

How does this compare to other works? More/less geometric; more/less hard to look at; more/less colorful

Is the weather nice? Have students look at the sculpture Continuum. Compare and contrast.
**Suggested Classroom Activities:** to be used in conjunction with a visit to the museum and/or an in-class discussion of selected artworks

**Art Projects and Discussion Starters**

- **Create differently.** Julian Stanczak was paralyzed in his right arm, originally his dominant arm. Have students try painting with their less dominant hand or another imposition. How much do you think Stanczak had to practice?

- **Mix up your materials.** Julian Stanczak used tape to create the exact lines on his paintings. Have students choose a base color and then use taped lines to create an abstract work of art.

- **Play with color.** Provide students with a color wheel and have them experiment with complementary, secondary, and tertiary colors. How do you choose colors to make your artwork?

- **Larger than life.** Have students choose their own material to make something 3D inspired by organic forms. Like the wire sculptures found here: [https://lundgrenart.weebly.com/abstract-wire-nylon-sculpture.html](https://lundgrenart.weebly.com/abstract-wire-nylon-sculpture.html). The only rule is the end product must be 3D. Discuss how being able to walk around a sculpture makes it different from a 2D painting or print.

- **Seeing double.** Have students experiment with printmaking like Julian Stanczak did. Kitchen Lithography How To: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UuBULEt6vWw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UuBULEt6vWw).

- **Go Old School.** Julian Stanczak often started with a pencil drawing. Have students create an abstract work with a simple medium: pencil or pen.

- See our *Further Reading and Resources* for links to online lesson plans.

**Extensions**

- **Math:** Julian Stanczak uses precise measurements when he creates his optical artworks. He even created and patented a machine for it! Using mathematical tools like protractors, compasses, and calculators have students practice creating exact shapes and lines.

- **Science:** Many artists, Julian Stanczak included, create their own paints and colors, like Klein Blue and Titian Red. Have students experiment with different natural substances to create their own pigments. What can they add to create texture? Darker or lighter hues? Tone?

- **Science:** Barbara Stanczak experimented with various materials before settling on wood and stone. Investigate wood and stone in comparison to other natural materials, what makes their properties best for sculpting?

- **Music:** Julian Stanczak referred to his paintings as “Perceptual Scores” in which color notation enables the complex perceptual processes to “play” his paintings. Have students create a musical score inspired by one or more of his artworks or choose some paintings to have students pair to existing songs.

- **Music:** Julian Stanczak spoke about “seeing” music, a characteristic of synesthesia. Discuss synesthesia with students while looking at his artworks. Compare and contrast his works with other known synesthetic artists like Joan Mitchell and Vassily Kandinsky. What do they share in common? How are they different?

- **History:** Julian Stanczak was deported from Poland to a Soviet Union labor camp, or gulag, in February 1940. While there, he underwent forced labor, suffered from starvation, and became paralyzed in his right arm. Have students research and prepare presentations on World War II. Discuss the ramifications of refugee camps, work camps, and concentration camps through social, economic, and political lenses.
Further reading and resources

- Lesson plan on Optical art. Download from fwmoa.org/education/resources
- Book: Julian Stanczak: Op Art and the Dynamics of Perception by Marta Smolinkska
- Barbara Stanczak’s website: Articles & Interviews http://barbarastanczak.com/links.html
- Barbara Stanczak’s website: Videos http://barbarastanczak.com/videos.html
- Julian Stanczak: Great Colorist of the 21st Century https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_1-xCtt6G0Q
- Julian Stanczak: The Perceptive Eye https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=icZSqvFv7e4
- The Master Series: Julian Stanczak https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Iz3aZW0ahAU
- Studio Visit with Julian Stanczak https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ybb-OZJOWeA