

PREVIEWING UPCOMING EXHIBITIONS, EVENTS, SALES AND AUCTIONS OF HISTORIC FINE ART

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What You See Is What You Think You See

David Richard Gallery explores the continuing relevance of op art

May 29-July 6

David Richard Gallery

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by John O'Hern

In 1965, the Museum of Modern Art opened *The Responsive Eye*, an exhibition of what most people refer to as op art.

The works abandoned all association with nature, such as a horizontal line that could suggest a landscape, as well as the gestural painterly-ness of the abstract expressionists. The new work brought scientific and psychological studies of perception into the world of art. Rather than “telling” the brain what the eye is seeing, it allows the eye to see what it sees, and the brain to interpret what is there. The exhibition’s curator, William Seitz, said the title of the exhibition was chosen “to indicate an activity, not a kind of art.”

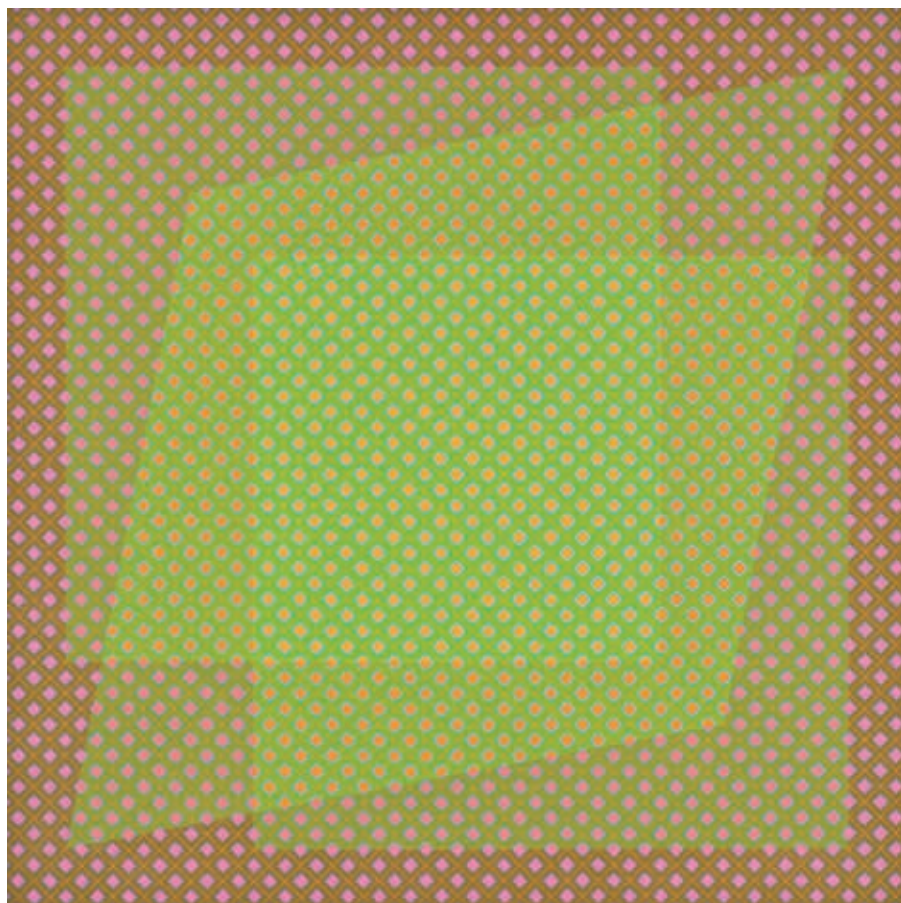
He asked, “Can such works, that refer

to nothing outside themselves, replace with psychic effectiveness the content that has been abandoned? What are the potentialities of a visual art capable of affecting perception so physically and directly? Can an advanced understanding and application of functional images open a new path from retinal excitation to emotions and ideas?”

In recognition of the 50th anniversary of the exhibition, David Richard Gallery in Santa Fe, New Mexico, is mounting a series of exhibitions curated by David Eichholtz and Peter Frank. The first was *Post-Op: ‘The Responsive Eye’ Fifty Years After*, February 24 through April 11. The second, *Op Infinitum: ‘The Responsive Eye’ Fifty Years After*, opens May 29 and continues through July 6. *Post-Op* explored the “roster” of artists from the MoMA exhibition and examined the artists’ work “during and after the op art ‘craze’ of the mid-1960s.”

Op Infinitum further explores artists from *The Responsive Eye*, as well as work from the '60s by other artists working in the same vein but not included in that exhibition. Subsequent exhibitions in the David Richard Gallery series will “feature artwork by contemporary artists who continue to push art into the perceptual realm with new materials and technologies that create visual sensations, immersive experiences and viewer-active engagement,” as well as later-career and contemporary work by artists from *The Responsive Eye*. The final installment of this series will turn to the international artists from Europe and Latin America who were an important part of the MoMA exhibition.

In his essay for the first of the exhibitions, art historian and curator

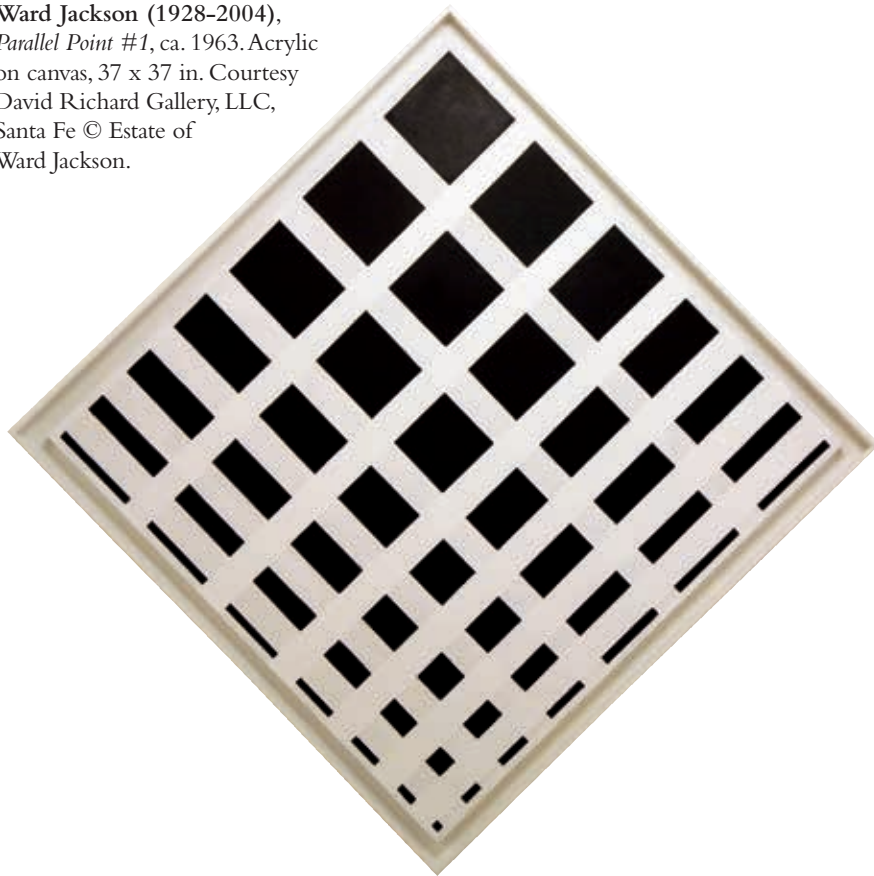


Julian Stanczak (b. 1928), *Tactile See-Through*, 1974. Acrylic on canvas, 36 x 36 in.
Courtesy David Richard Gallery, LLC, Santa Fe © Julian Stanczak.



Oli Sihvonen (1921–1991), *Untitled (230)*, 1968. Oil on canvas, 87 x 58 in. Courtesy David Richard Gallery, LLC, Santa Fe © The Oli Sihvonen Trust.

Ward Jackson (1928–2004),
Parallel Point #1, ca. 1963. Acrylic
 on canvas, 37 x 37 in. Courtesy
 David Richard Gallery, LLC,
 Santa Fe © Estate of
 Ward Jackson.



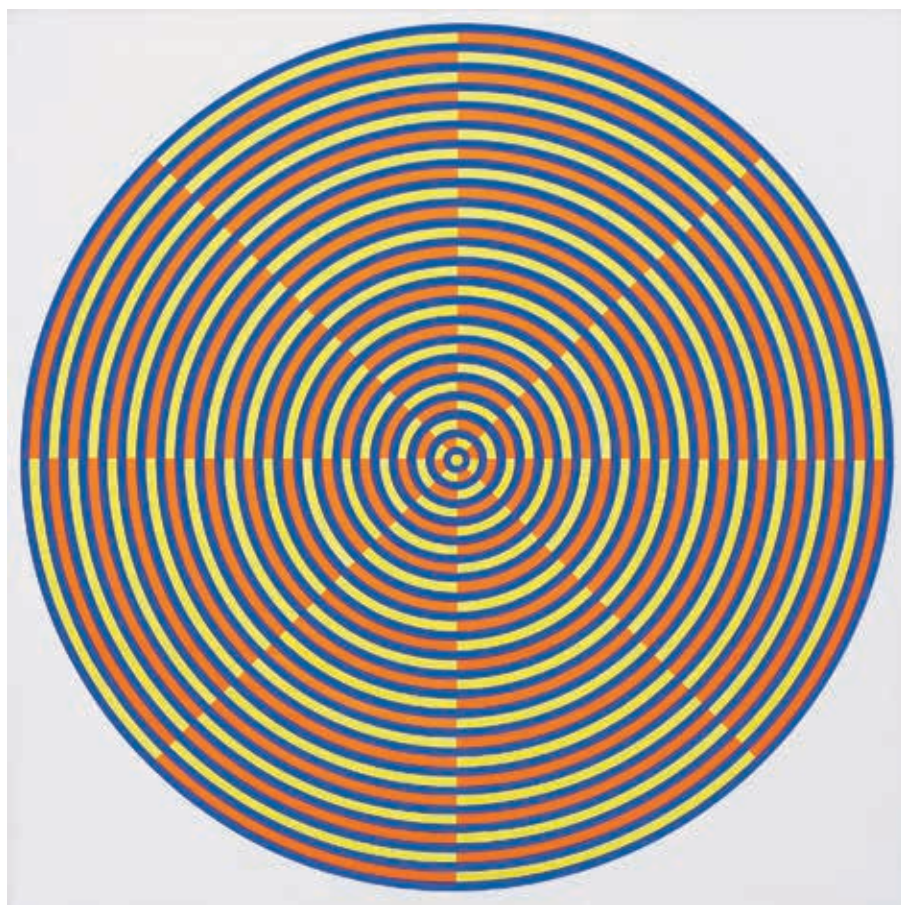
Frank observes the artists associated with op art remained true to the principles that inspired them 50 years ago.

“Their sensibilities,” he writes, “oriented toward systematic investigation and the evolution of coherent form, maintained throughout their careers whether or not their latest practice diverged from op art or even from geometric abstraction in general. Some went back to the exploration of perceptual stimulation after working in other (if related) styles... And succeeding generations of artists—notably but not exclusively painters, and notably but not exclusively Americans—have referred to op mannerisms or even returned to op practices, interested all over again in what can be done to stimulate the eye beyond the expected, beyond the quotidian, beyond the prosaic. Op art stays stubbornly fresh, as long as the human eye stays gullible and enchantable.”

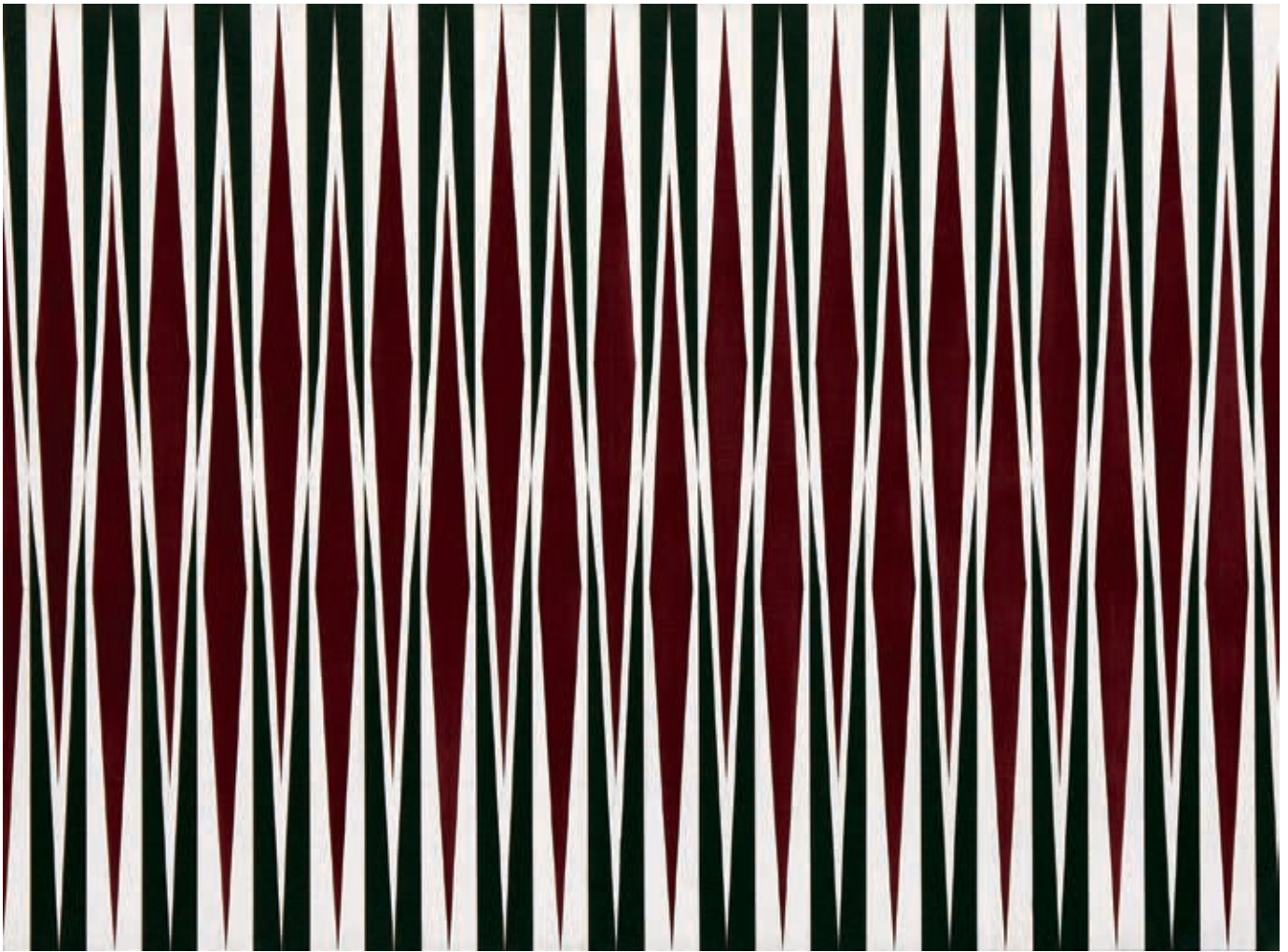
I began my own museum career toward the end of the op art “craze” and was amazed, walking through *Post-Op*, at how fresh the paintings and constructions still are. Fifty years later, science may know a little more about how the sensations occur, but their visceral impact is still surprising.

Julian Stanczak (born 1928) was training to be a musician in Poland when he lost the use of his right arm in a Siberian labor camp during World War II. He learned to paint left-handed and studied with Josef Albers at Yale. His first exhibition in New York was *Julian Stanczak Optical Paintings*, held at the Martha Jackson Gallery the year before *The Responsive Eye* at MoMA. The shifting, transparent forms, planes and colors of *Tactile See-Through*, 1974, continue to engage and amaze.

Oli Sihvonen (1921–1991) also studied under Albers, but at Black Mountain College. He came to Taos, New Mexico, in the late 1940s with a group of Black Mountain students and returned later as a full-time resident for more than a decade. *Untitled (230)*, 1968, has areas of pure color that are affected by the colors around them.



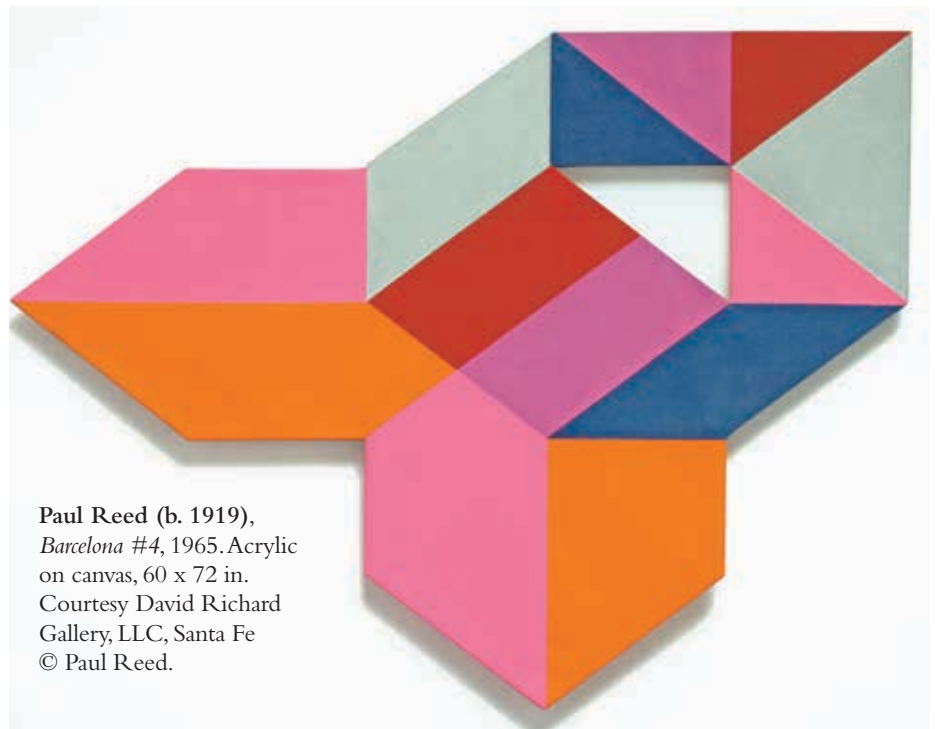
Tadasky (b. 1935), *C188*, 1965. Acrylic on canvas, 57 x 57 in. Courtesy David Richard Gallery, LLC, Santa Fe © Tadasky (Tadasuke Kuwayama).



Francis Celentano (b. 1928), *Poniard Series*, 1965. Acrylic on Masonite, 34 x 42 in.
 Courtesy David Richard Gallery, LLC, Santa Fe © Francis Celentano.

In his essay for *The Responsive Eye*, Seitz wrote about black-and-white works. “Almost everything that can be stated generally about optical painting in color is also true of black and white, and the opposite is also the case. The primary aim from which both result is beauty of form, tasteful relationships, nor equilibrium in the old sense but the activation of vision. And color is unnecessary for perceptual ambiguity, variability and movement.” Ward Jackson’s (1928–2004) *Parallel Point #1* illustrates his point as we “see” movement and changes in tone where there are none.

Frank quotes Frank Stella, who said, “What you see is what you see.” Frank then notes that op artists would say, “What you see is what you think you see.” ■



Paul Reed (b. 1919), *Barcelona #4*, 1965. Acrylic on canvas, 60 x 72 in.
 Courtesy David Richard Gallery, LLC, Santa Fe
 © Paul Reed.