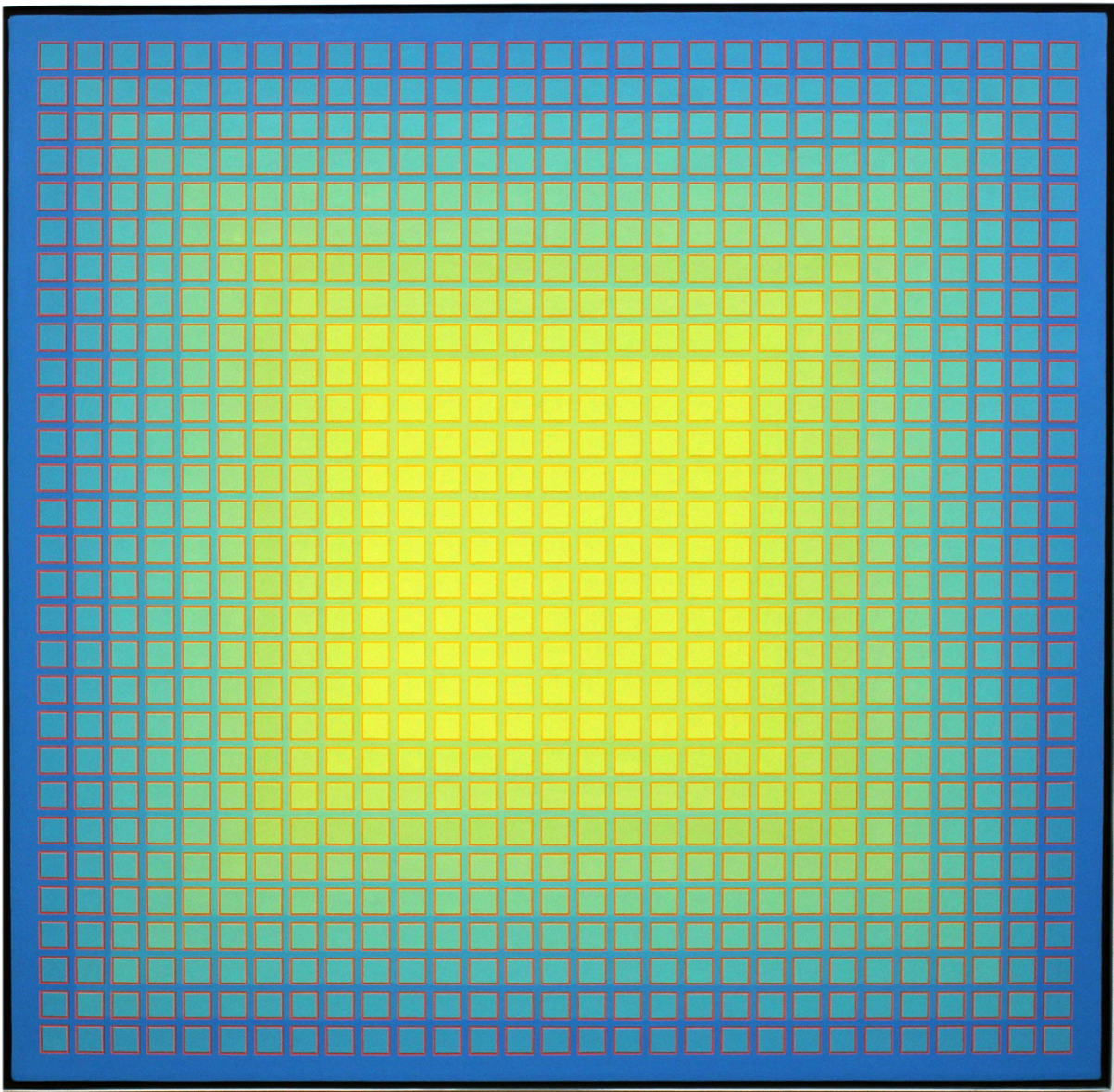


Julian Stanczak, *Succession*, 1980–2013, 38 x 38 inches



Succession, 1980–2013

Succession has hung by my worktable for years. I love it and will probably never put a different painting in its place.

My favorite color is blue, and this painting has a lot of blue. However, at the same time, it radiates yellow and has red twinkles throughout. How does Stanczak arrange these colors, and what is the effect?

Looking very carefully, I see 30 total colors in the painting. The ground layer consists of a sequence of 10 colors of light yellow-green to medium blue-green. The top layer are squares consisting of 10 color progressions from a bleached yellow to a bright Thalo Blue. Sandwiched between these two layers is—in the form of a $1/16^{\text{th}}$ of an inch line around each square—a progression of 10 mixtures from yellow orange to Cadmium Red Medium.

All 30 colors are arranged in an orderly fashion, as would be expected in a Stanczak work. Stanczak painted 841 squares on this 38 x 38 inch canvas: 29 squares horizontally by 29 squares vertically. These equal-sized squares serve as a beat, a rhythm, a system. The orderliness of the arrangement enhances each color's visual power. The exact number of squares means nothing, though; the resultant, triumphant effect of the "color melt-down" is everything!

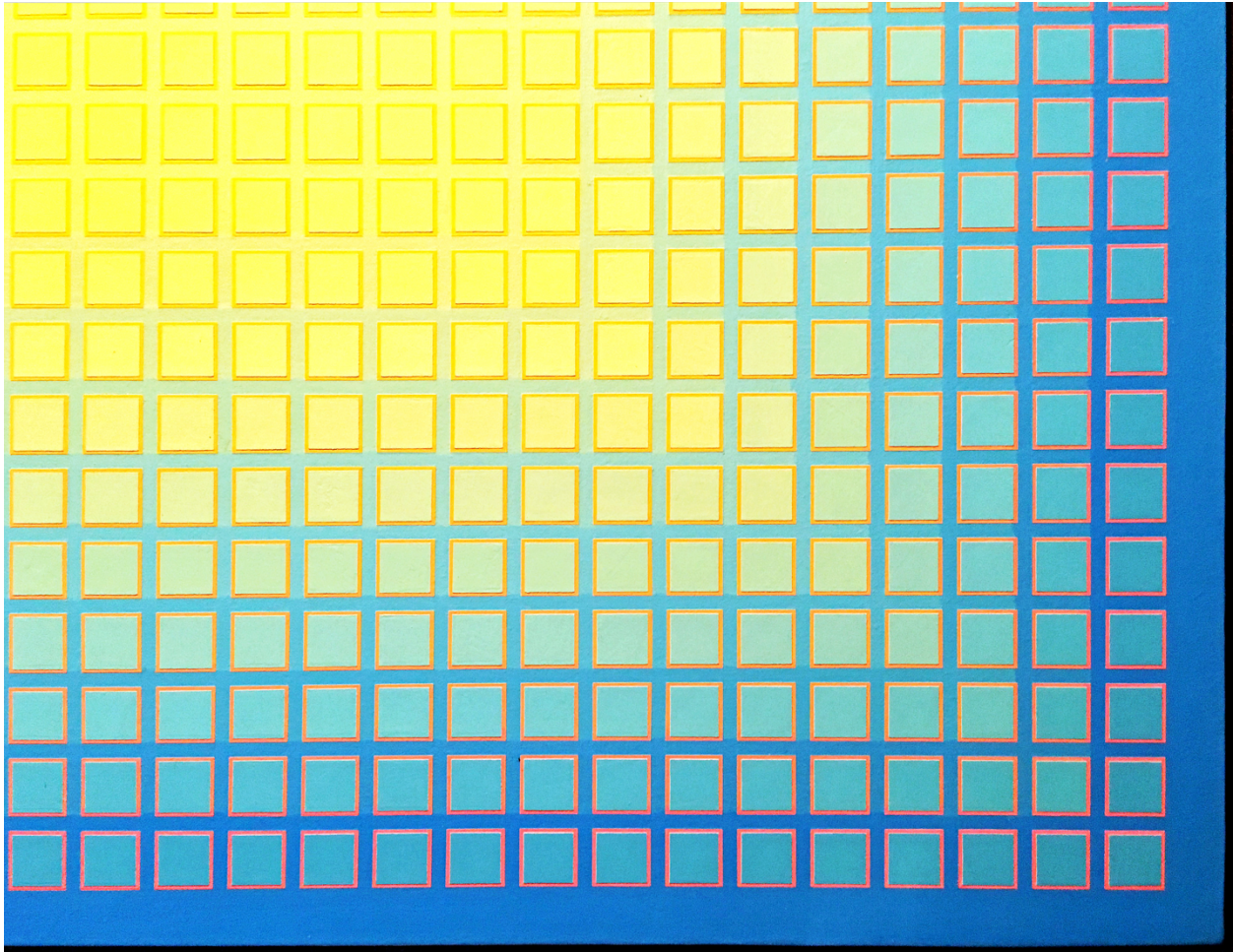
"Color melt-down" was one of two terms Julian used most frequently when discussing his work. It describes the effect of one color giving itself up—of no longer being able to be seen as a separate and distinct hue because of interactions with the colors around it. The physical fact of what the constituent colors *are* becomes secondary to what we *perceive* them as being.

If color melt-down is a controlled visual phenomenon, based in visual perception, "metamorphosis" (the other term Julian used most often) is an inspired act that touches the soul.

In my mind, "metamorphosis" describes the event when materials, or relationships, become something other than their individual constitution and become "art"—a vision. The object is no longer just paint on canvas. When this transformation succeeds, the object becomes an experience, an emotive, personal revelation.

This painting just oozes the sensation of light and life. It does not depict or illustrate any specific light source or life-reminiscent forms, yet it is as if the sun itself were bouncing over the repeated squares. The light is emerging from the center of the canvas, where 121 one-inch squares glow with mixtures of warm and cool yellows. That large yellowish center spills out into the rich cool-greens/Thalo color, intensified by tiny lines of red.

For Julian, proportion was of great significance when it came to achieving either color melt-down or metamorphosis, since it controlled the power of each element. Stanczak gave most of the space in this painting to the yellow. Each of the central squares is one inch in size, compared with $1/16^{\text{th}}$ of an inch for the red line around each yellow square, and $1/4^{\text{th}}$ of an inch for the ground color between the squares. No wonder, then, that the yellow floods over everything, transforming itself into the green before becoming blue.



Succession corner detail

The tiny red outline is there for the sparkle—for opposition and for heightening the viewer's color receptors through contrast. The color receptors switch their location on the retina, subconsciously but insistently. The small size of the red line prevents the eye from feeling bombarded. I think of it as being Julian's twinkle of the eye, his tease to make the viewer look again, to check if he really saw what he thought he saw.

The yellow- to Cadmium-mixtures are adjacent, neighboring colors on the color wheel, while the yellow- to Thalo-mixtures and yellow- to Cerulean blue-mixtures are complementary (having opposing wavelengths). These colors oppose and at the same time complement each other, providing a wholeness of experience.

Rudolf Arnheim, perhaps the person (through his writings and friendship) from whom Julian learned the most about Gestalt Theory, wrote:

[Complementary colors] ... show completeness as the balance of opposites. They exhibit the particular forces that constitute the whole. The stillness of achievement appears as an integration of antagonistic tendencies. A painting built on a theme of complementaries may attain animated repose. It may do so by a composition based on a pair of extreme opposites, a dramatic contrast, whose tension is felt in the balance of the whole.

The eye spontaneously seeks out complementary colors....

—Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye*, pages 297–298)

Julian explored and expounded frequently on the use of polar opposites and color extremes in order to give the viewer this wholeness of experience, this peace, this feeling of tranquility in the midst of visual action. *Succession* not only gives out so much light in high-value yellows, but it also provides experiential association through the greens of refreshed life. Working together, these elements provide the viewer psychological peace and wholeness of experience, the sensation Arnheim called “animated repose.” Perhaps that is why I love the painting so much and why I have it hanging above my workspace—its visual action gives me repose.

—Barbara Stanczak
September 2023