

Inward Eye: Original Serigraphs by Richard Anuszkiewicz and Words by William Blake

University of Wyoming Art Museum, 2006
Educational packet developed for grades K-12

Introduction

In this museum visit students will observe the work of Richard Anuszkiewicz (b. 1930) and the words of William Blake. Anuszkiewicz, one of the foremost Op Artists of the mid-twentieth century, is widely known for his vibrating color combinations and use of simple geometric and linear forms to explore the nature of color and visual perception.

Anuszkiewicz's work is carefully (almost scientifically) planned and executed. His compositions are symmetrical, uniform, and flat; they offer little in terms of physical depth and space. Technically superb, the work is impersonal and cool, focusing solely on color and its function as the subject of his images. *Inward Eye* offers a compilation of the diverse compositional approaches and color experiments that is typical of Anuszkiewicz's work in his early career.

Inward Eye was produced by the Aquarius Press and printed in Baltimore in 1970. It consists of 11 images, each with individual folios and words by William Blake. The complete set of images and folio pages are presented in this exhibition.

History

Op Art

A trend that gathered force in the mid-1950s was known as Op Art because of its concern with optics: the physical and psychological process of vision. Op Art has been devoted primarily to optical illusions. All representational art from the Old Stone Age onward has been involved with optical illusion in one sense or another. What is new about Op Art is that it is rigorously nonrepresentational. It evolved partly from hard-edge abstraction.

At the same time, it seeks to extend the realm of optical illusion in every possible way by taking advantage of the new materials and processes supplied by science, including laser technology. Much Op Art consists of constructions or "environments" that are dependent for their effect on light and motion and cannot be reproduced satisfactorily in a book.

Because of its reliance on science and technology, Op Art's possibilities appear to be unlimited. The movement nevertheless matured within a decade of its inception and developed little thereafter. The difficulty lies primarily with its subject. Op Art seems overly cerebral and systematic, more akin to the sciences than to the humanities. It often involves the viewer with the work of art in a truly novel, dynamic way. But although its effects are undeniably fascinating, they involve a relatively narrow range of interests that lie for the most part



Richard Anuszkiewicz (American, b. 1930),
Inward Eye, 1970, serigraph, 25-7/16 x 19-5/8
inches, University of Wyoming Art Museum
Collection, Friends of the UW Art Museum

outside the tradition of modern art. Only a handful of artists have enriched it with the variety and expressiveness necessary for great art.

Founder of Op Art

Josef Albers (1888-1976), who came to America after 1933, when Hitler closed the Bauhaus school at Dessau, became the founder of mainstream Op Art. He preferred to work in series, so that he could explore each theme fully before moving on to a new subject. Albers devoted the latter part of his career to color theory. *Homage to the Square*, his final series, is concerned with subtle color relations among simple geometric shapes, which he reduced to a few basic types. Within these limits, he was able to invent almost endless combinations based on rules he devised through ceaseless experimentation. Basically, Albers relied on color scales in which primary hues are desaturated in perceptually even gradations by giving them higher values (that is, by diluting them with white or gray). A step from one color scale can be substituted for the same step in another; these in turn can be combined by following the laws of color mixing, complementary colors, and so forth. This approach requires the utmost sensitivity to color, and even though the paint is taken directly from commercially available tubes, the colors bear a complex relation to one another. . . the artist creates a strong optical push-pull through the play of colors of contrasting value. The exact spatial effect is determined not only by the hue and the intensity of the pigments but by their sequence and the relative size of the (geometric shapes).



Richard Anuszkiewicz (American, b. 1930),
Inward Eye, 1970, serigraph, 25-7/16 x 19-5/8
inches, University of Wyoming Art Museum
Collection, Friends of the UW Art Museum

Anuszkiewicz (pronounced Anna- SKEV- ich)

Albers was an important teacher as well as theorist. His gifted pupil Richard Anuszkiewicz (b.1930) developed his art by relaxing Albers' self-imposed restrictions. Anuszkiewicz trained at the Yale University School of Art and Architecture under Josef Albers. During the 1950s, Albers, Victor Vasarely, and M.C. Escher were experimenting with Optical Art and using such visual devices as moiré patterns, vibrating color effects, confusing foreground-background relationships, and exaggerated perspective to create optical illusions. During 1959 to 1961 Anuszkiewicz began to produce abstract paintings, using either organic or geometric repeated forms. He then moved to rigidly structured arrangements, which incorporated geometrical networks of colored lines, thus exploring the phenomenon of optical mixtures. In the late 1960s he began to make sculpture, but throughout all his work, to the present day, his main concern continues to be with the perception of colors and with the exploration of a variety of effects.

By the 1970s, Anuszkiewicz along with Vasarely, Bridget Riley, and others, became known as Op Artists as their work furthered the explorations of optical effects.

The History of Art, editors;
H.W. Janson and Anthony F. Janson,
2001, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., sixth edition.

While in graduate school at Yale, Anuszkiewicz gradually turned away from realist painting as a direct result of being exposed to Albers' empirical teaching methods and emphasis on color relativity. By the late 1950s, representation had been completely eliminated from Anuszkiewicz's paintings in favor of complex networks of abstract geometric shapes carrying a range of complementary colors that

created confounding figure-ground relationships, offering contrasts between recessive and projective space. Although Anuszkiewicz's works were originally subsumed under the rubric Op, the subject of his work has never been optical illusion, per se, but the visual function of color. In Anuszkiewicz's paintings, optical illusion functions to structure the interaction of colors. Anuszkiewicz uses essentially three types of compositions to activate his colors: repeated, concentric geometric shapes, which the artist calls 'periodic structure,' a series of variously arranged or abbreviated periodic structure, which he calls 'interrupted systems'; and the use of rectilinear forms juxtaposing intensely contrasting colors, creating a powerful luminous effect which the artist calls 'irradiation' . . . for him light is an exceedingly complex phenomena that is as emotional as it is 'scientific' . . . "I'm interested in making something romantic out of a very, very mechanistic geometry. Geometry and color represent to me an idealized, classical place that's very clear and very pure." Michael Auping, Albright-Know Art Gallery, 1989.

William Blake

Blake's words are part of the Anuszkiewicz exhibit. William Blake (1757-1827), the visionary and imaginative poet and artist, whose only formal education was in art: at the age of ten he entered a drawing school and later studied for a time at the school of the Royal Academy of Arts. Blake, who, at age fourteen, served as apprentice for seven years to a well-known engraver, read widely in his free time, and began to try his hand at poetry. Blake gave drawing lessons, illustrated books, and engraved designs made by other artists.

Blake's first book of poems, *Poetical Sketches*, which he had printed when he was twenty-six years old, showed his dissatisfaction with the reigning poetic tradition and his restless quest for new forms and techniques. This he had in common with the Op Artists.

Anuszkiewicz uses Blake's words, "I must Create a System or be enslaved by another Man's," next to serigraph number four.

Anuszkiewicz begins the entire exhibit with another quote from Blake: "the Sky is an immortal Tent built by the Sons of Los."

Blake used the persona of Los to speak for all imaginative artists. At the time of his death Blake was little known as an artist and almost entirely unknown as a poet. Since the mid 1920s, Blake has finally come into his own, both in poetry and painting, as one of the most dedicated, intellectually challenging, and astonishingly original of artists.

Blake maintained that we achieve redemption by liberating and intensifying the bodily senses—as he said, by "an improvement of sensual enjoyment"—and by attaining and sustaining that mode of vision that does not cancel the fallen world, but transfigures it, by revealing the lineaments of its eternal imaginative form.

As you read the words side by side with the serigraphs, hopefully, you will see how they are integral to the entire Anuszkiewicz exhibit. Blake says:

*Nature has no outline
But imagination has.*

Imagination is the divine body in every man.

The Eye sees more than the heart knows.

I must create a system

or be enslav'd by another Man's.

*To see the world in a grain of sand
and heaven in a wildflower.
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
and eternity in an hour.*

*What is a man?
The sun's light when he unfolds it
Depends on the organ that beholds it.*

*We are led to believe a lie
When we see not through the eye.*

*Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?*

*God is not a Mathematical design.
God is not a Mathematical design.*

*Without minuteness of execution the
Sublime cannot exist.
Grandeur of ideas is founded on
precision of ideas.*

You might see why Anuszkiewicz used these words when Blake says, "I must create a system or be enslav'd by another man's." And, "The eye sees more than the heart knows," and "Imagination is the divine body in every man."

The human imagination is most potently operative in the prophetic poet and in the vision of the artist. What is of interest in this exhibit is how Blake worked creatively against the theories of the Rationalists of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, and yet, we see in the 20th century the Op Artists stressed the relationship of form and function within a framework of analysis and rationality. Although, the connections can be seen with the Op Artists because their art is a perceptual experience related to how vision functions which relates directly to many of Blake's words on vision, perception and the "Inward Eye".

Artist Statement

Richard Anuszkiewicz said: *I'm interested in making something romantic out of a very, very mechanistic geometry. Geometry and color represent to me an idealized, classical place that's very clear and very pure.*

Lesson Overview

Students will learn about the work of Op Artist Richard Anuszkiewicz (b.1930 in Erie, Pennsylvania) and techniques used by him and the Op Artists of the 1950s and today. They will learn how Anuszkiewicz used and uses simple geometric and linear forms with vibrating color combinations to

explore the nature of color and visual perception. Students will learn about the work, life, and words of William Blake. (1757-1827) Students will observe, sketch, and take notes in the Boyle Gallery on the serigraphs of Richard Anuszkiewicz and the words of William Blake. They will contemplate how the work of Anuszkiewicz and the words complement, contrast and enhance the work of Anuszkiewicz.

Students and teachers will consider the concepts behind the art work. They will discuss the Op Artists theories of art and how they used simple geometric and linear forms with vibrating color combinations to explore the nature of color and visual perception.

In the Shelton Studio students will be given the opportunity to try their skills at drawing and coloring similar styles of work. Students will be given the opportunity to experiment by writing words or poems to go with these works of color and lines. Students and teachers will start conversations about the theory behind these works and will be given future opportunities to discuss them in their home classrooms and schools.

Students and teachers may research and engage in conversations about Anuszkiewicz's work before arriving at the art museum, using study guides (available on-line) to explore ideas. While here they will spend time in the galleries closely observing the work, discussing it, writing about it and even sketching it. They will begin conversations about the theories behind the work which will lay the groundwork for future opportunities to pursue these ideas in their home classrooms and schools.



Richard Anuszkiewicz (American, b. 1930), *Inward Eye*, 1970, serigraph, 25-7/16 x 19-5/8 inches, University of Wyoming Art Museum Collection, Friends of the UW Art Museum

Essential questions

- Can art look completely scientific, and yet, illicit emotion from the viewer?
- Can we know anything about an artist whose works are so highly structured and scientific in composition?
- Does color added to lines change our perceptions about the geometric designs?
- Can the art of an Op Artist give us intellectual ideas? What kinds of ideas do you get from these serigraphs?
- How does the viewer's perception change when looking at the art up close, and then, from farther away from the serigraphs?
- How can words paired with art change our perceptions about the specific work of art?

Art Questions to Consider

- What do the optical works represent in reality?
- Why does the artist call his works serigraphs?
- What is concrete about the serigraphs?
- What is abstract about the serigraphs?
- What is the visual function of color in the serigraphs?
- What geometric shapes do you see?
- What contrasting colors do you see?
- How do the colors make you feel?
- How do the lines make you feel? Together?

- What do the colors make you think?
- What do the lines make you think? Together?
- What do the colors make you see?
- What do the lines make you see? Together?
- How do the colors and lines interact?
- What do you think the artist was trying to do with the colors and the lines?
- Are the works scientific or emotional? Or both? How so?
- Why did the artist include the words of William Blake?
- How do the words change the serigraphs?
- What does the text on the wall before the serigraphs make you feel or think or both?

Pre-visit Activities

In order to prepare students for their museum visit and extend learning possibilities, we suggest that teachers and students consider the following activities.

- Students will read all museum literature discussing Op Artists and the work of Richard Anuskiewicz.
- Students will read about the life and work of William Blake in the museum literature.
- Students will read about Color Theory from the museum handouts.

Museum Activities

Part 1 – Time frame: 45 minutes

Location: Boyle Gallery

- Students will closely observe the serigraphs of Richard Anuskiewicz.
- Students will read the text and the words of William Blake.
- Students will take notes given by the museum curator or assistant teacher on Op Artists and their techniques.
- Students will take notes given by the museum curator or assistant teacher on William Blake and his words.
- Students will record observations on museum worksheet.
- Students will answer questions on museum worksheet.
- Students will sketch any part of the exhibit they are drawn to.
- Students will write words or a poem that might describe one of Anuskiewicz's serigraphs.
- Students will engage in discussions over their observations, answers, sketches and poems/ words on their worksheets with one another and with the teachers.

Part 2 – Time frame: 45 minutes (minimum) Location: Shelton Studio

The following projects may be considered individually, or combined, or museum staff will work with teachers to develop specific projects which support ongoing classroom work.

- Students will draw geometric shapes and rectilinear lines on paper.
- Students will draw more than one of these types of drawings on paper (if time allows).
- Students will add color to their drawings.
- Students will experiment with complementary and contrasting colors.
- Students will add words or poems to their drawings or this activity could continue in the home classrooms and schools.

Post-visit Activities

We have found that students achieve maximum benefit from a museum visit when time is scheduled for post-visit activities. Here are some suggestions:

- Students experiment with the creating of more than one serigraph in their home schools in similar highly structured compositions as Anuszkiewicz's.
- Students continue to revise and finish the serigraphs that they started in the Shelton Studio.
- Students work on words/poem to accompany their finished serigraphs.
- Students read and research more on Op Artists and their work and on the work of William Blake.

Prerequisite skills/knowledge

Museum staff will work with teachers to ensure that all projects are age and skills appropriate. At the very minimum:

- Students should have familiarity with sketching activities.
- Students should have discussed Op Art techniques.

Suggested use in the curriculum

The study and practice of using Op Art techniques, theories, and the history of Op Artists, associated with the study of William Blake's life and works will connect with multiple curricular areas, including art, history, writing, reading, philosophy, and multiple cultures. This particular lesson places an emphasis on art, writing, history and philosophy.

Some recommended resources

These are just a few of the many resources available. We welcome other suggestions that teachers and students find helpful which can be added to this list.

- UW Art Museum website: www.uwyo.edu/artmuseum
- Exhibition descriptive materials (contact the museum education program for more information)
- The exhibit: *Inward Eye: Original Serigraphs by Richard Anuszkiewicz and Words by William Blake*
- *The History of Art* by Janson and Janson, sixth edition.
- *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* by M.H. Abrams on William Blake
- Internet resources on Richard Anuszkiewicz and William Blake
- Articles from Wikipedia: *Op Art* and *Theory of Color*

Materials to be supplied to each student

Materials for selected Shelton Studio projects are provided by the art museum.

Assessments and documentation of museum tour and studio experiences

In order to ensure that our museum tour program is meeting the needs of teachers and students, we ask that participants complete evaluation surveys. Surveys will be distributed to teachers and students, but they are also available on-line as a *pdf* file to be downloaded, or they may be requested via e-mail (wbredehoft@uwyo.edu).

1. Students will self-assess using a quick survey that asks them to consider their response to the gallery discussions and research, and their studio experience.
2. Teachers will assess the overall visit by completing a quick survey that asks for their observation and assessment of students' experiences, as well as assessment of the overall process of the museum visit.
3. Museum staff and artists/teachers will record their observations and assessments.
4. When studio time permits, we will ask students to briefly discuss their art work completed in the Shelton Studio visit.
5. Museum staff may take photographs of students and teachers to document the learning taking place and the work produced during a museum visit. These are available upon written request to teachers who would like to use them as art of teaching and student portfolios.