

The image features a complex geometric pattern of nested squares. The pattern is divided into two main vertical sections. The left section consists of a series of nested squares that transition in color from a vibrant teal at the top to a deep blue at the bottom. The right section consists of nested squares that transition from a bright magenta at the top to a deep blue at the bottom. The squares are arranged in a way that creates a sense of depth and perspective, with the lines of the squares appearing to converge towards a central point. The overall effect is a vibrant, multi-colored geometric design.

RICHARD ANUSZKIEWICZ

KNOTS AND CONCATENATIONS 1986-2020

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June 2 – August 15, 2022

LORETTA HOWARD
GALLERY

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RICHARD ANUSZKIEWICZ: Interconnections 1986-2020

Richard Anuszkiewicz in his studio 2020 with preliminary layout for Untitled (Knot No. 1120).



Among the last paintings that Richard Anuszkiewicz (1930-2020) worked on, which were in his studio at the time of his death, is a group of five that use a distinctive technique. They deploy three principal colors in a dense composition that can be read either as flat “L” and “U” shapes nestled together or as squares and rectangles intertwined with each other. In the first reading, the paintings are perfect examples of illusionism-shattering flatness. In the second, the third dimension is present, but in an ambiguous, even paradoxical fashion. The squares and rectangles are made up of strips that overlap, going over and under each other in a way that suggests weaving. This texture posits a shallow depth, while at the same time avoiding any clear distinction between foreground and background.

These five paintings are essentially reprises of a body of work Anuszkiewicz created during 1986 and 1987, the “Knots” series. It is worth asking why, after more than 30 years and at the end of a very long career, this particular approach continued to fascinate him. Ever since his breakthrough into abstraction in the late 1950s, Anuszkiewicz had been exploring ways to create depth and dynamism from color and shape alone. His earliest experiments in so-called Op Art leveraged the viewer’s natural optical response to make two complementary colors seem to oscillate back and forth, each appearing to be in front for a moment and then recede to allow the other to come forward for an equally fleeting time.

This tension not only revealed the vibratory power inherent in color; it also showed how color can define space. As has often been noted, Anuszkiewicz found a novel way to advance the modernist project of subverting the traditional figure-ground dichotomy. Throughout his oeuvre, almost any given “figure” can also be seen as the ground, or part of the ground, for another figure. The original “Knots” of the 1980s and their 21st-century reincarnations make this subversion more explicit by means of the overlapping



technique. They dare to be at least somewhat literal about three-dimensional space, while still challenging the viewer to experience space in a totally different way from that of ordinary life.

The “Knots” were not Anuszkiewicz’s first departure from pure color abstraction. During a visit to Egypt in 1981, he was deeply impressed by the ruins of the Valley of the Kings and soon thereafter began a series of “Temple” paintings. In these, tall, thin rectangles surrounded by radiating lines suggest the columns and portals of Pharaonic temples, and the colors within them evoke the light of the sun that shines through these portals at certain times of day. The overall mood of the series is, true to its name, contemplative, even spiritual and otherworldly. These works also show Anuszkiewicz painting like an architect,

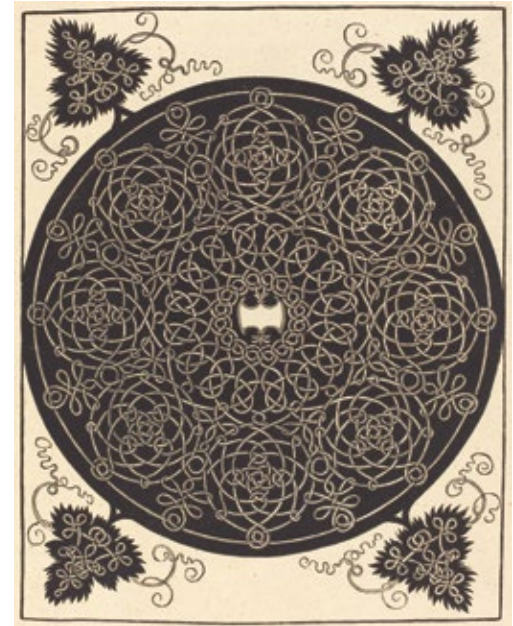
and indeed the mathematically precise approach to art that he learned from Josef Albers during his studies at Yale had led him to speak of himself as the “architect” of his paintings long before he constructed his “Temples.” In the “Knots,” the artist appears again as a sort of builder, a maker of constructions in space.

From the “Knots,” Anuszkiewicz proceeded to a series that went even farther into the third dimension, the “Translumina” works. The series includes acrylic paintings (some of which are on shaped canvases), as well as painted-wood or enamel-on-wood constructions. With the “Translumina” works, what was implicit in the “Knots” becomes explicit—the dimension of depth or thickness is now visible and tangible. Like the “Knots,” the “Translumina” works use finely incised lines—either in black, white, or a complementary color—to give contour to the strips of color that make up the compositions and to define them spatially. The “Translumina” series departs from the “Knots” by increasing the number of crossovers between the vertical and horizontal strips, so as to make the overall effect even more like the warp and weft of a textile. The “Translumina” works, in their turn, pointed Anuszkiewicz toward full engagement with sculpture; during the 1990s, he made many freestanding three-dimensional pieces out of painted metal tubing, in which the density of his paintings gives way to a light and airy openness.

Richard
Anuszkiewicz,
at this one man
show The Erie
Art Museum
2012

Albrecht Dürer
The Fifth Knot

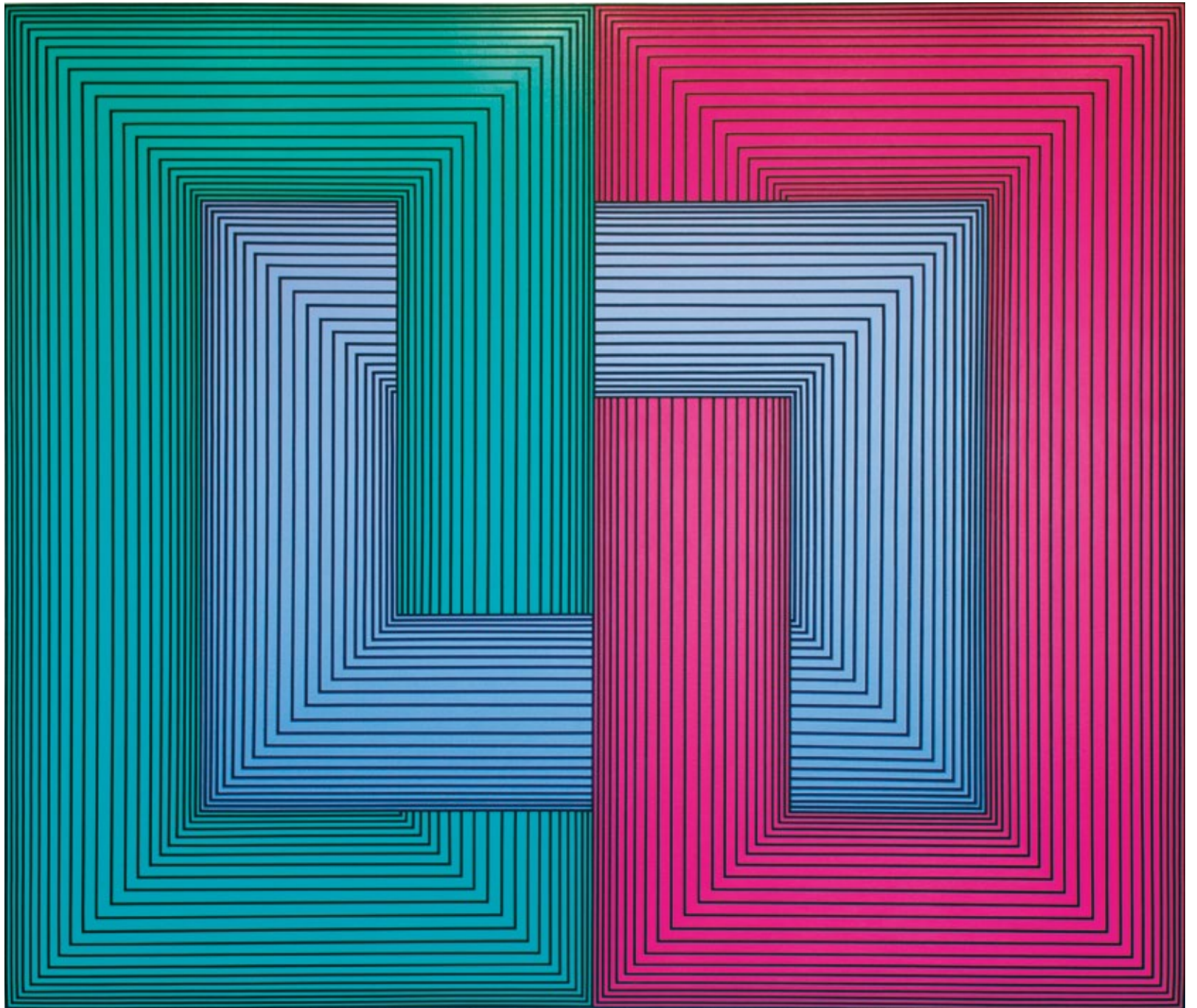
Anuszkiewicz's "Knots" pointed the way forward for him, but they also invite us to look five centuries backward, to Albrecht Dürer's famous "Knots." This series of six engravings are variations on a design attributed to Leonardo da Vinci, known as the "Concatenation." In these atypical and enigmatic works, the two Renaissance masters evidently delighted in creating abstractions, intricate patterns in which white lines interlace and curl upon each other against a black background, in seemingly endless ramifications. While the engravings give an overall impression of flatness, each line is finely shaded to impart a slight thickness, and when one line crosses another, we can see clearly which is on top. In short, like Anuszkiewicz's "Knots," Dürer's "Knots" have a topology to them. They exist in space, albeit a very shallow space. Scholars have long wondered about the meaning and purpose of Leonardo and Dürer's knot compositions. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, wrote a seminal article on them in 1944 in which he opined that they are representations of labyrinths and that the eye-boggling lines conceal a path to the center. And since labyrinths once functioned as cosmic diagrams, the "Knots" could be seen as objects for mystical contemplation.



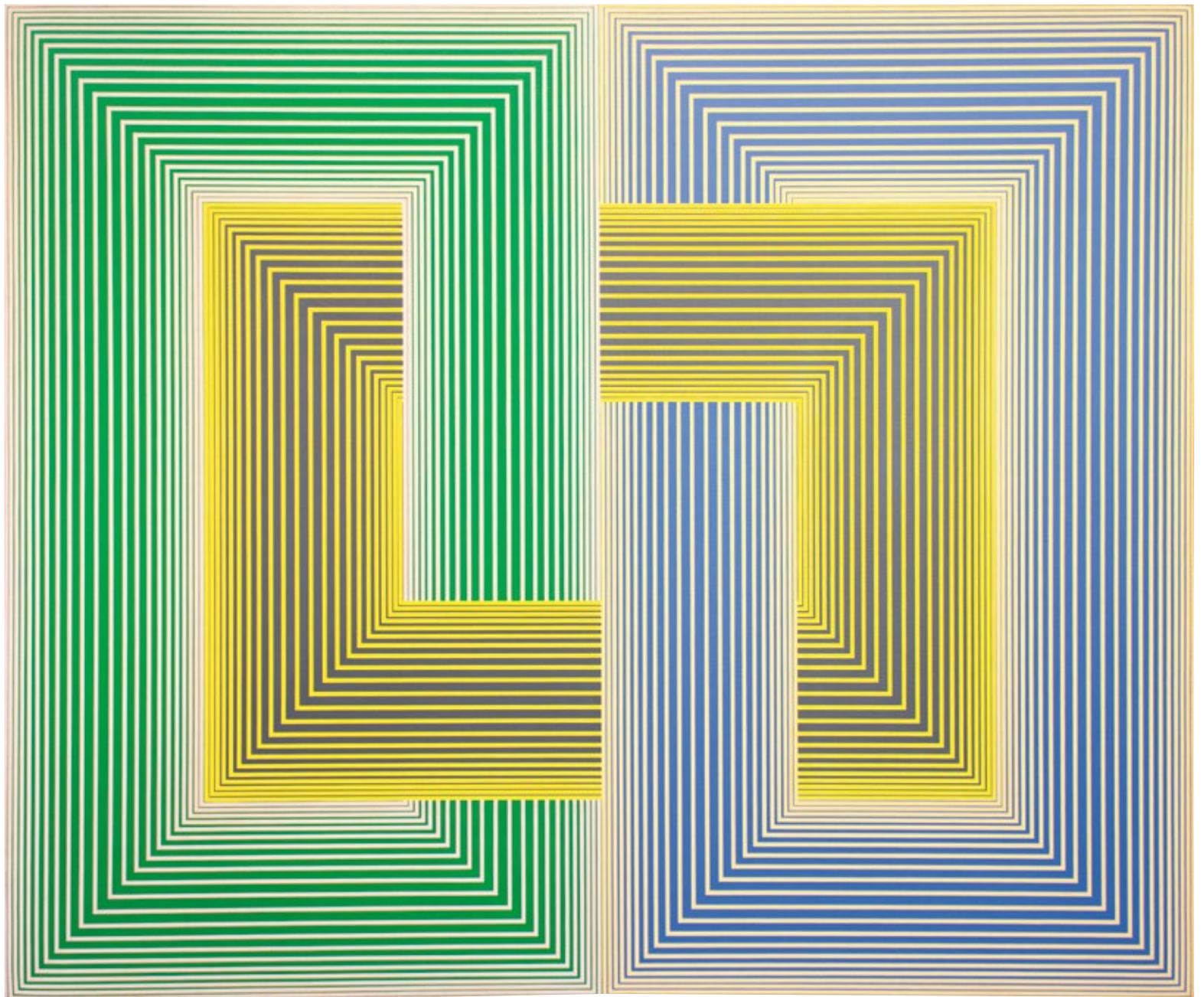
The work of Richard Anuszkiewicz also has a contemplative and even cosmic aspect. While critics lumped him into an ill-conceived "Op Art" category, he always resisted this label. In fact, with his mathematical approach and his deep quest to understand the nature of color and its interaction with consciousness, he can be considered a true heir to the long Platonic tradition of art that extends from the Renaissance through Kandinsky and Mondrian, a tradition that turns away from the appearances of everyday life and toward the eternal and beautiful truths of shape, number, and color. And just as the graphic elements of his "Knots" endlessly and seamlessly interconnect, all the periods and series of Anuszkiewicz's life work seem to interconnect and amplify each other, as if they were all part of one great series.

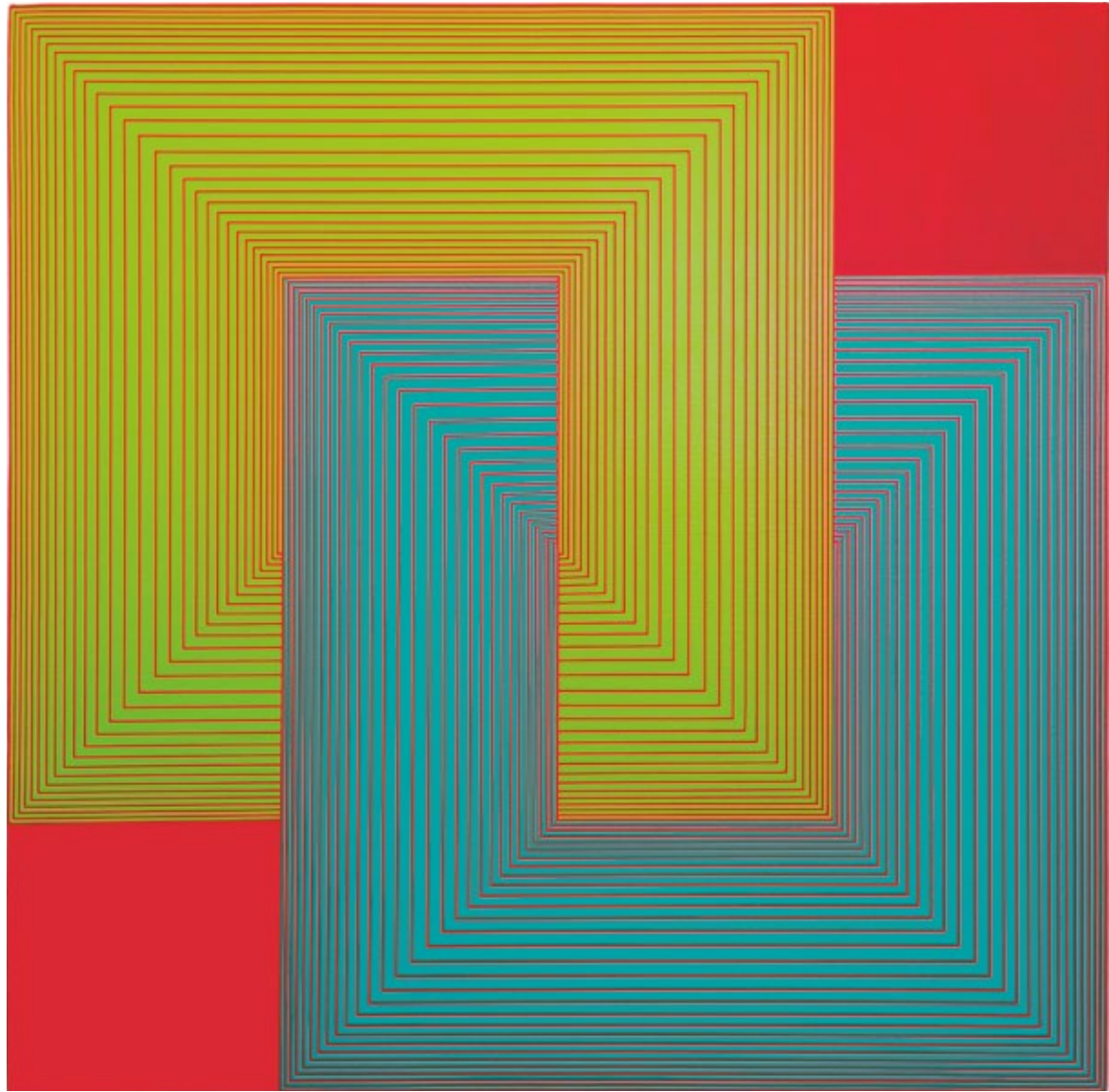
John Dorfman

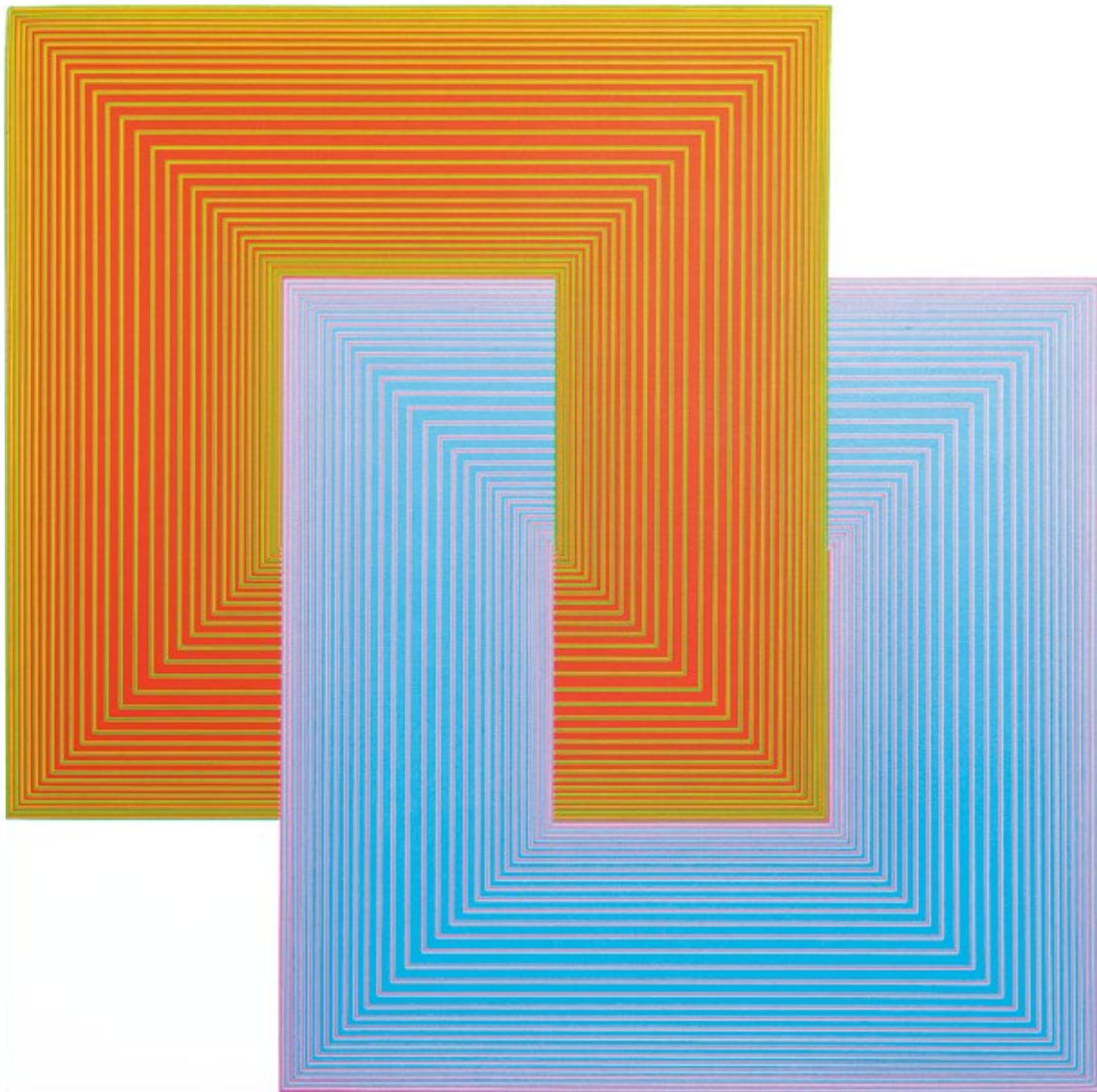
John Dorfman is an independent art writer based in the Boston area and the former editor-in-chief of Art & Antiques magazine.



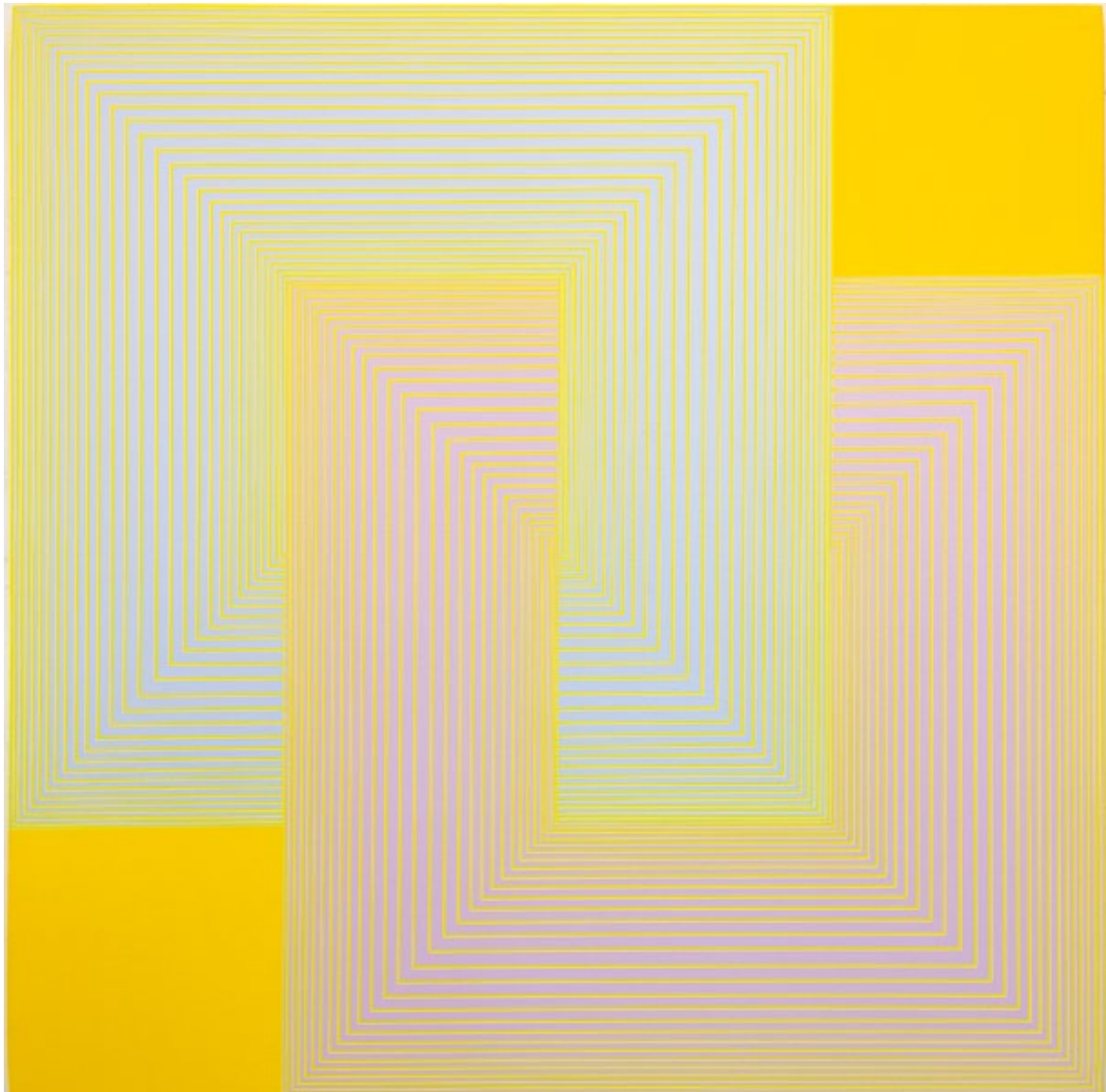






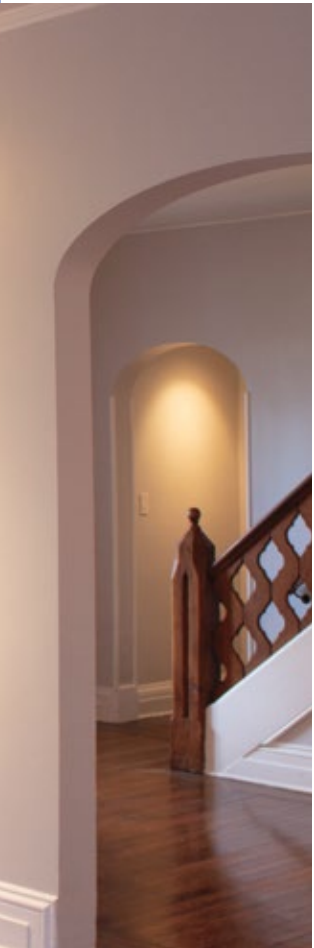


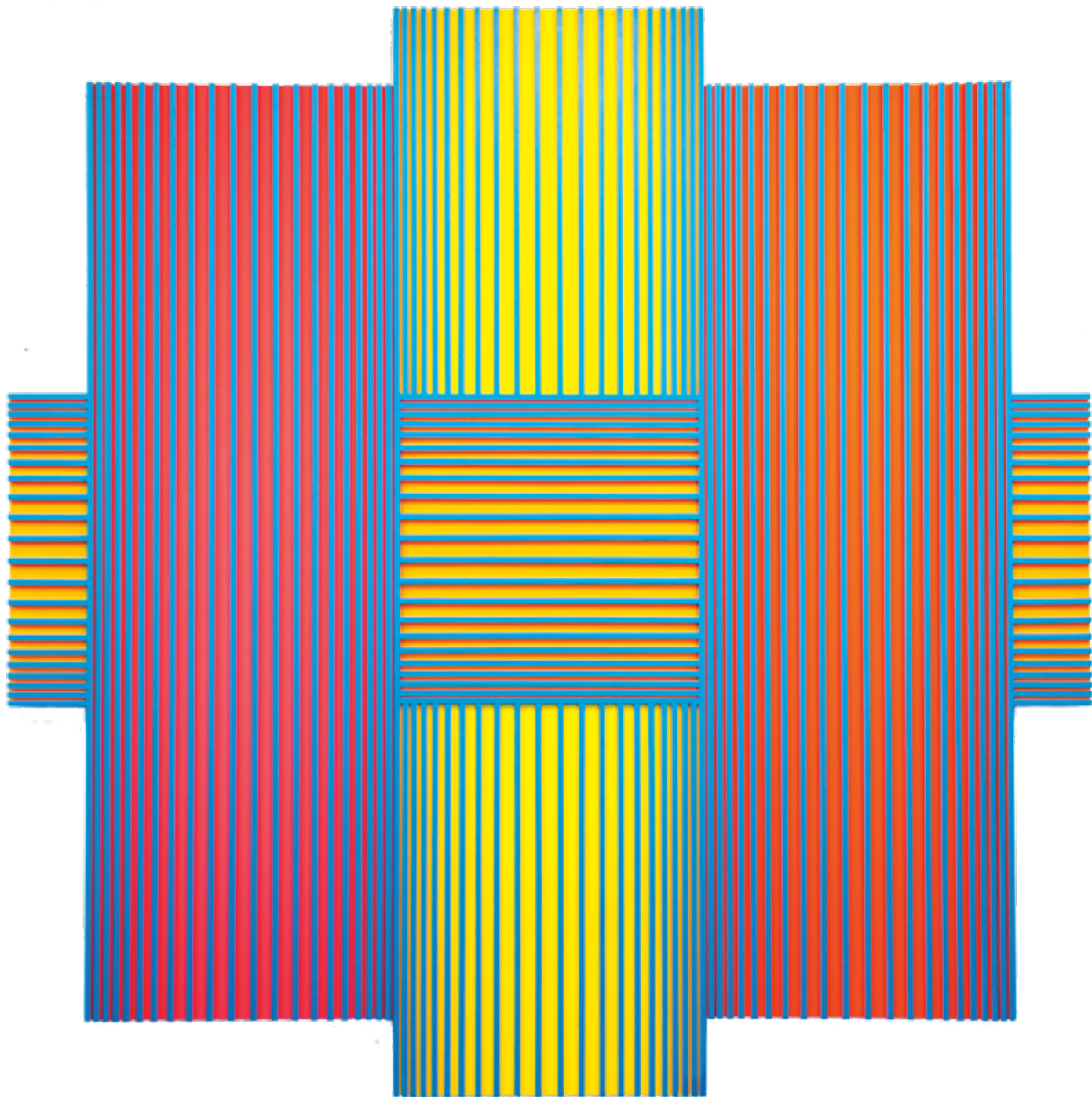
Untitled (Knot No. 1117), 1986-2019
Acrylic on canvas, 48 x 48 inches



Untitled (Knot No. 1118), 1986-2019
Acrylic on canvas, 48 x 48 inches

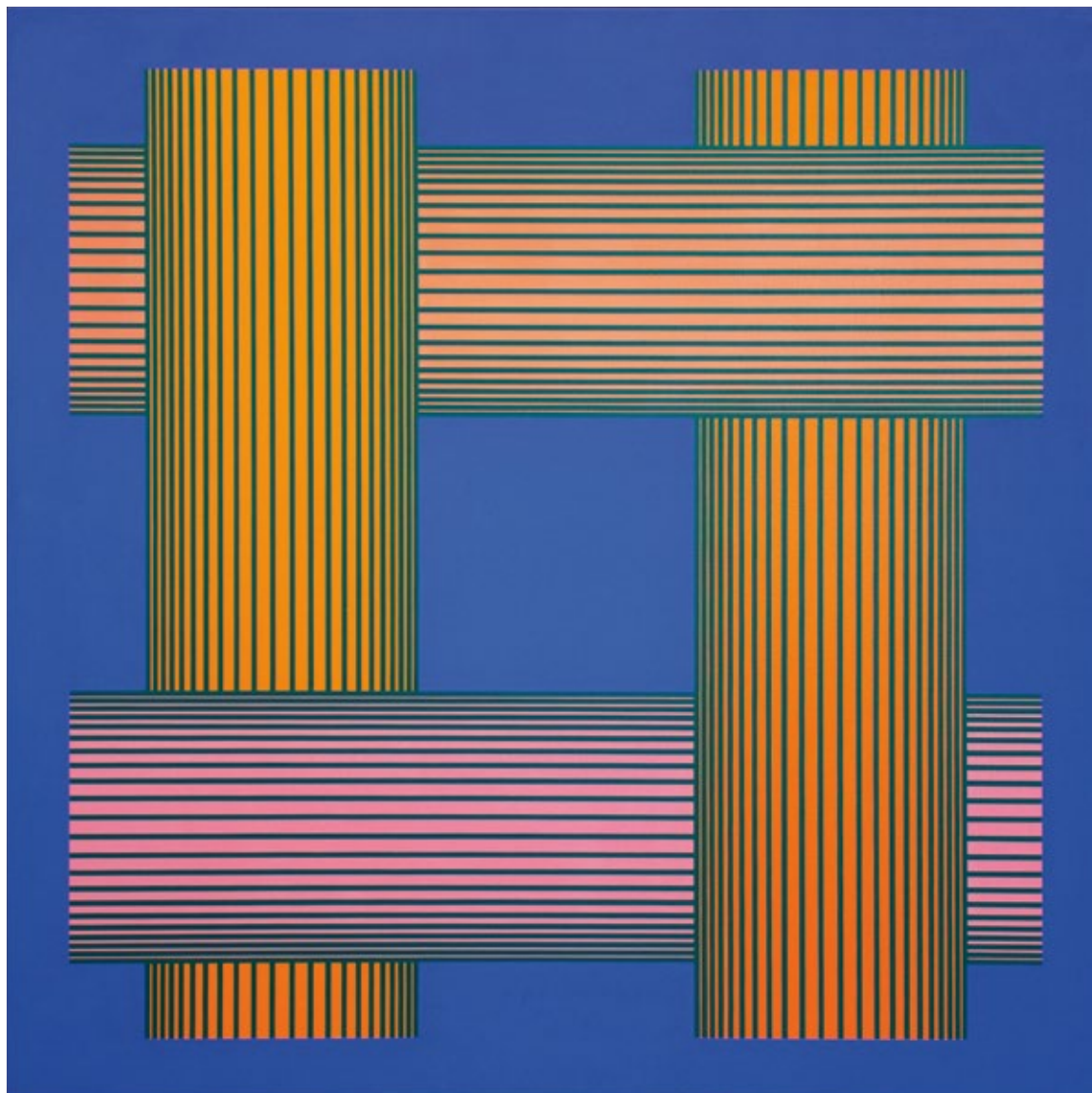




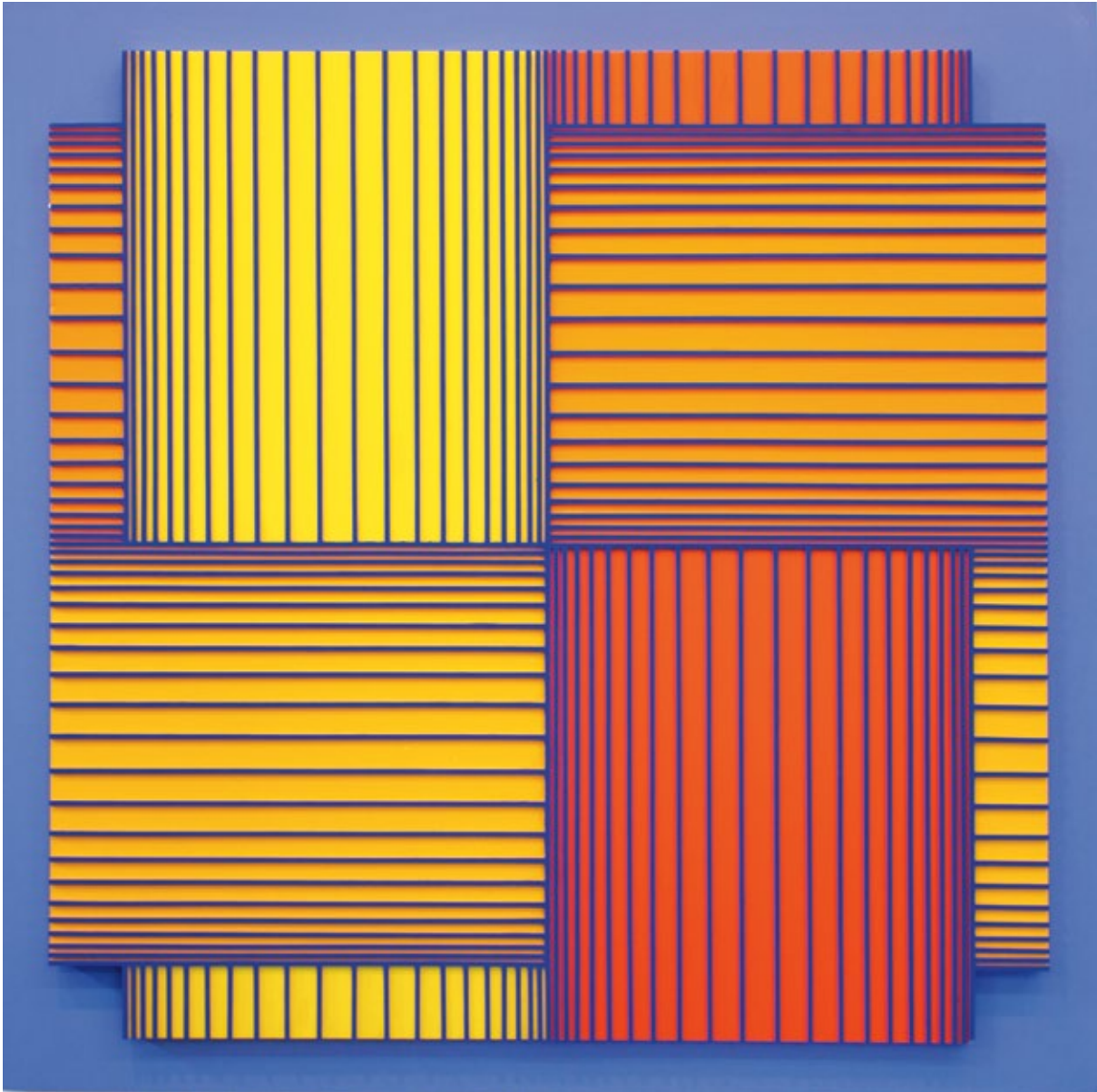


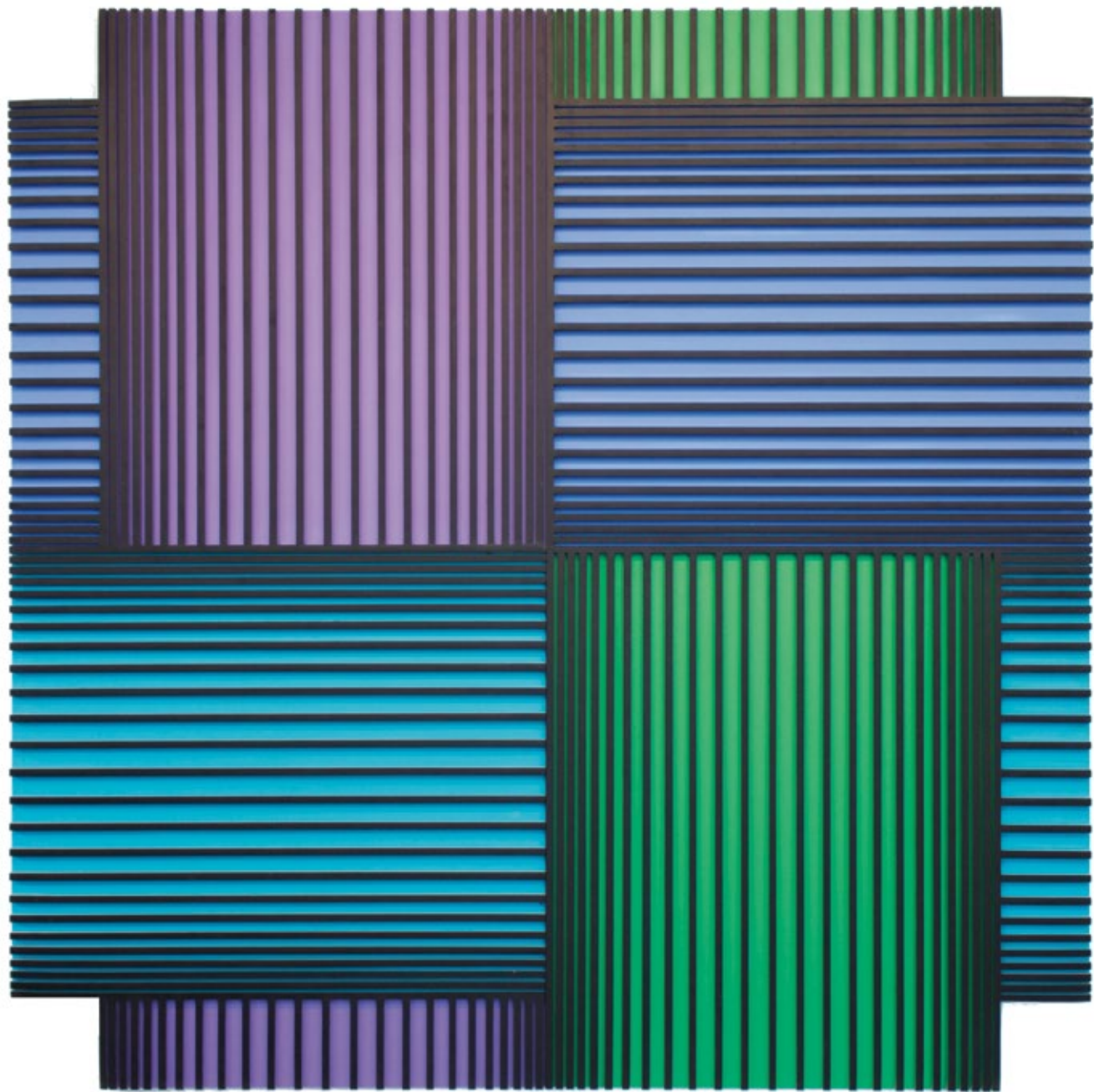


Translumina – Yellow to Red (No. 800), 1987
Acrylic on canvas, 24 x 24 inches



Translumina with Deep Blue (No. 839), 1986
Acrylic on canvas, 48 x 48 inches





RICHARD ANUSZKIEWICZ

Interconnections 1986-2020

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Untitled (Knot No. 1120)
1986-2020
Acrylic on canvas
72 x 84 inches

Selected Public Collections

Akron Art Museum, Akron, OH
Albany State Capitol, Albany, NY
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Allentown Art Museum, Allentown, PA
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Boca Raton, FL
Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY
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Germany
National Museum of Contemporary Art,
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New Jersey State Museum, Trenton, NJ
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Philadelphia Museum of Art,
Philadelphia, PA
Ringling Museum, Sarasota, FL
Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Santa
Barbara, CA
Springfield Art Museum, Springfield, MO
Saint Louis Art Museum, Saint Louis, MO
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Whitney Museum of American Art, New
York City, NY
Wichita Art Museum, Wichita, KS
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am Rhein, Germany
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