

JOHN STEPHAN (1906-1995)

Born in Chicago, John Stephan (1906-1995) studied art at the University of Illinois and the Art Institute of Chicago. Soon after, he began creating mosaics for a number of buildings in the Chicago area under the auspices of the Work Projects Administration. Post-World War II, he truly hit his stride as an artist, joining the ranks of Abstract Expressionists like Clyfford Still, Mark Rothko, and Barnett Newman.

With poet (and then wife) Ruth Stephan, he published *The Tiger's Eye*, an influential "little magazine" that chronicled the creative ferment of the period. Inspired by William Blake's "Tyger," the title symbolized the editors' faith in the power of creative vision, as did John Stephan's design for the cover which prominently features an abstracted eye. The publication featured European and American Surrealists, members of the Latin American avant garde, and young American painters soon to become known as Abstract Expressionists.

For the last three decades of his career, Stephan devoted himself exclusively to disc paintings. These nearly square compositions, always just inches taller than they are wide, each comprise a central monochrome circle delineated from its ground by multiple bands of contrasting colors. Depending how the particular colors come alive in relation to one another, the central orb floats or recedes, emanating pulsing energy or enveloping the gaze. Painting after painting, Stephan found within the fixed parameters of this geometric distribution an infinite potential for visual poetry in the juxtaposition of his subtly mixed colors.

Works by John Stephan are in the collections of the Smithsonian Museum of American Art, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, the Cincinnati Art Museum, Yale University Art Gallery, Loyola University in Chicago and numerous other institutions.