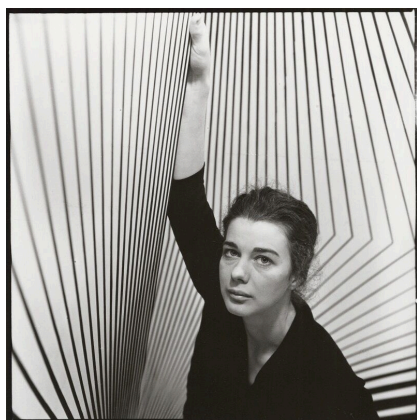


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CART 263 Section A

Bridget Riley: Painting with Perception

Bridget Riley is a revolutionary figure in the Op Art movement, which is a branch of geometric abstract art that focuses on optical illusions through the use of precise manipulation of shapes and colours. She has spent her career experimenting with the dynamic interplay of colour, form, and perception by creating vibrant optical pattern paintings. Her main artistic practices were painting, drawing and printmaking.



Riley was born in London in the spring of 1931. From 1946 to 1948, she attended Cheltenham Ladies' College; from 1949 to 1952, Goldsmiths College, and from 1952 to 1955, the Royal College of Art. Riley received traditional classical training in art and studied the art of representation. Through her art education, she learned life drawing, landscape painting, the mastery of tone, light and shade, composition, depth, etc. At the start of her journey as an artist, Riley focused on impressionistic landscapes and figurative works, perfecting her skills in traditional representational art.

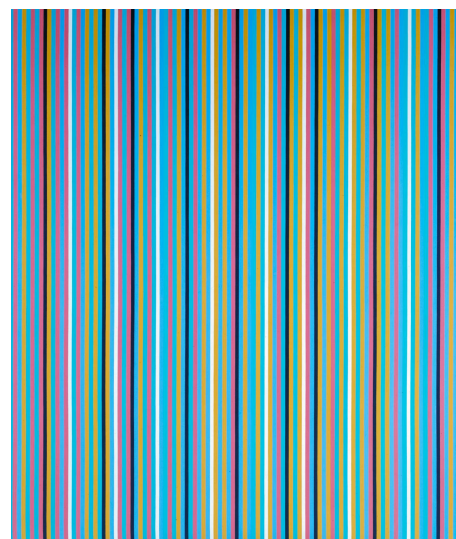
Riley's art style and approach changed drastically when she started studying various Pointillist artists. The one that truly captured her interest was Georges Seurat, a post-Impressionist painter known as the founder of the art style. At 28 years old, she saw one of his paintings, *The Bridge at Courbevoie*. She painted a copy and it hung in her studio from that day forward. This is a testament to how Seurat's art was a "tool" to allow her to develop her way of practicing art as an "optical science". Riley was also heavily inspired by Victor Vasarely who focused on geometric abstraction.

Her art style evolved a lot over the years. From 1961 to 1965, her works only featured contrasting black and white shapes, with occasional shades of grey. The goal of her art at the time was to create a sense of movement with minimal components, creating optically striking and dynamic compositions. These pieces were spotlighted at her first solo exhibition at

Musgraves Gallery One in 1962. Three years later, Riley stunned the world of Op Art with *The Responsive Eye*, which was showcased at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, connecting pop culture, art, and perception.

Another shift happened in her style in 1967 when she decided to introduce colour into her optical illusion artworks by her first stripe paintings. These works were composed of meticulously arranged lines of colour, to create rhythmic patterns that evoke a sense of movement and depth. During the 1970s, she moved away from strictly creating geometric shapes and created curved paintings which produced illusions of undulating movement. Later, around the 1980s, she introduced diagonal lines to her paintings and painted a rhomboid series.

It was during this period of experimentation and innovation that she created *Achæan*, one of her most striking works, which exemplifies her mastery of colour and optical effects. She painted it in 1981, using oil paint and it is currently in the Tate Modern Museum in London. She would travel in search of inspiration and she painted this one after a trip to Egypt. Her voyage inspired her to intensify the colours she used in her paintings. For this reason, she developed what she called her “Egyptian palette” which was inspired by the local landscape and the paintings she viewed inside the tombs. Unlike a lot of her later illusion pieces, the composition was made up of only vertical lines of colour that ran from the top to the bottom of the canvas. As a result, it was the chosen shades of yellow, blue, red, and turquoise that created the optical effect. According to Riley, the use of these colours felt like a breakthrough because they were much purer and brighter than her usual colour palette.



To achieve this composition, she methodically experimented with colour and form using flat strips of gouache paint until she was finally pleased with the form and colour placement. This piece does not have a strict or predictable system or symmetry, nevertheless, to the eyes there is the appearance of a mirroring effect around a central point, giving off a sense of balance and rhythm.

What drew me to Achæan was how it reflects Riley's deep appreciation for new places and the ways travel inspired her practice. The vibrant "Egyptian palette" makes me feel like I am being transported to the landscapes that inspired her. The vertical lines feel like a departure from her well-known works, offering a fresh perspective on her artistry. It is a piece that not only showcases her technical skill but also invites the viewer to journey with her and see the world through her eyes.

Ultimately, Bridget Riley's primary focus was not on specific subject matters or themes but instead on perception itself. She aimed to create compositions that engaged viewers in a perceptual encounter through the use of abstraction to explore how the eye and brain interpret visual information. Consequently, she spent a lot of time experimenting with colour relationships and compositions in her studio. She tests many different arrangements before selecting a final version which her team would then assist in the transition from study to canvas. The titles of her pieces allude to moods, atmospheres or references to music, culture or place, ignoring any sense of narrative or description. Undoubtedly this aspect complemented the experience and allowed for many interpretations.

To conclude, I chose to dive into the world of Bridget Riley for many reasons. First, I am fascinated by the fact that her art piece could be considered interactive, without really any concrete interaction. The viewer serves as a co-creator, finalizing the works, since without their eyes and engagement, the work remains incomplete. The optical effects vary based on the individual, depending on their height, perspective and their interpretation. Riley's artwork urges the viewer to slow down and immerse themselves in the experience to allow her works to unfold in front of their eyes.

Not to mention, Bridget Riley's artistic journey is a testament of her unrelenting curiosity and dedication to mastering perception. Over the decades, her work evolved from traditional representational art to groundbreaking optical illusions, highlighting her constant growth and exploration. Riley's art reflects a lifelong commitment to pushing the boundaries of the world of visual experience. Her ability to adapt, innovate, and refine her technique showcases her status as a true leader of the Op Art movement. In the end, Op Art is now a chapter of the past, yet Riley's art endures thanks to its deep connection to traditional painting and its emphasis on perception.

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