

# A Free Course on the History of Western Art

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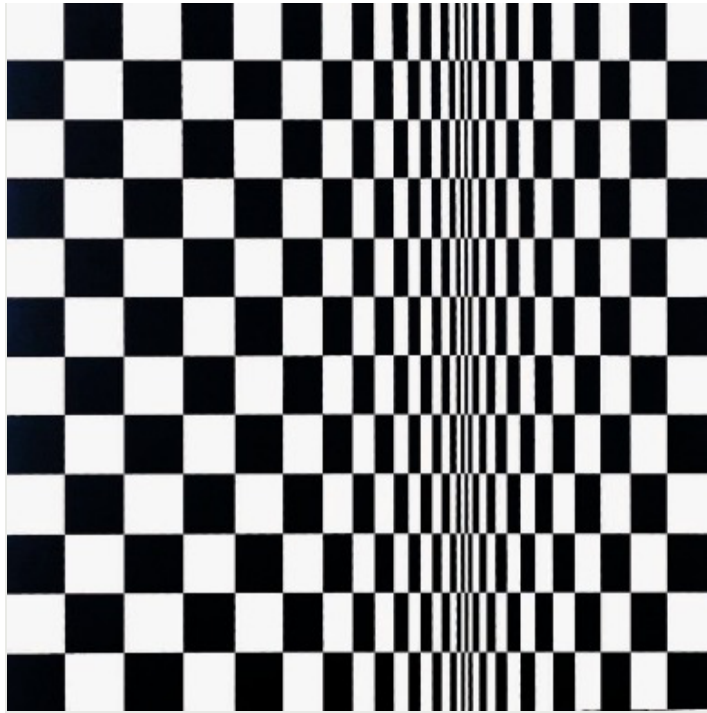
- Welcome. This is one of my last talks on the History of Western Art. It has been my aim to replace myself with an AI system or a combination of AI systems. In the last few weeks, I have been experimenting with ElevenLabs. Most of this talk is a clone of my voice with the intonation to use added to the text by Claude. My feeling is that the voice is now better than my own. No ums or uhs, no hesitation, good pronunciation particularly of foreign words and better speech inflection. As my History of Western Art draws to a close after five years of recording I can move on to my next area of interest, a Substack series of articles giving “A Fifty-Year Perspective on the Future of AI”.

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- If they use information from specific books, websites or articles these are referenced at the beginning of each talk and in the ‘References’ section of the relevant page. The talks that are inspired by an exhibition may use the booklets and books associated with the exhibition as a source of information.
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Bridget Riley, *Movement in Squares*, 1961

## 60-06 OP ART AND BRIDGET RILEY

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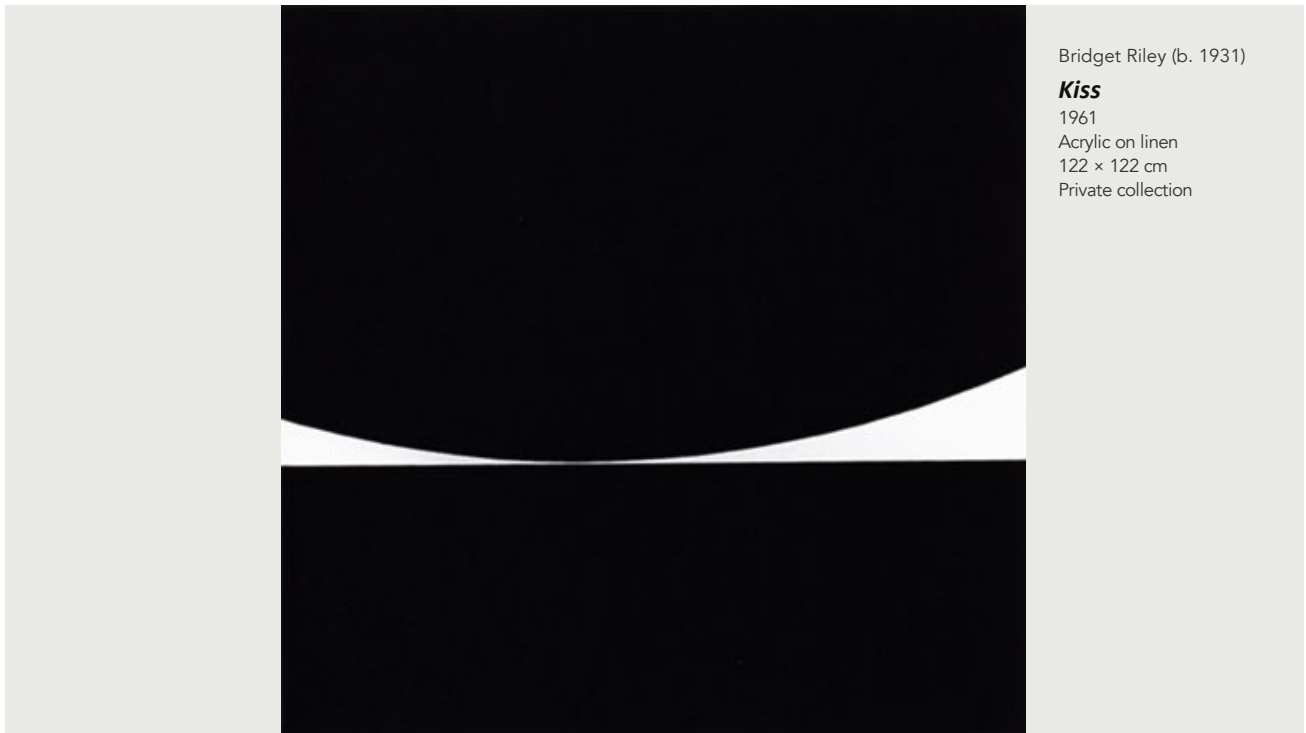


- This is Section 60 on recent art movements. and this talk is about Op Art and Bridget Riley. Optical Art uses geometric forms to create dizzying illusions of movement, vibration, and depth. British artist Bridget Riley became its leading pioneer in the 1960s with her mesmerising black-and-white patterns. Her meticulous works, like *Movement in Squares*, challenges our visual perception, physically engaging us in a dynamic, shimmering experience.

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Bridget Riley (b. 1931)

**Kiss**

1961

Acrylic on linen

122 × 122 cm

Private collection

Bridget Riley (b. 1931), *Kiss*, 1961, Acrylic on linen, 122 × 122 cm, Private collection

- *Kiss* is **Bridget Riley's** first fully abstract painting and a gateway into one of the twentieth century's most eye-catching movements: **Op Art**. Two sensuous black forms almost touch, separated by a sliver of white that flashes like an electric charge. Riley painted it after a painful breakup with her mentor and lover **Maurice de Sausmarez**, channelling heartbreak into pure visual energy. She later recalled: "I decided on two black shapes, opposites, nearly touching but not touching, the white spaces between them making almost a flash of light."
- Op Art — short for **Optical Art** — emerged in the late 1950s from roots in **Constructivism**, the **Bauhaus**, and the colour experiments of **Neo-Impressionism**. The Hungarian-French artist **Victor Vasarely** is considered its grandfather, having painted *Zebra* as early as 1937. *Time* magazine coined the term in 1964, and the movement peaked with the landmark 1965 exhibition *The Responsive Eye* at MoMA, New York.
- Critics such as **Clement Greenberg** dismissed Op Art as mere retinal tricks. The style was rapidly co-opted by fashion and advertising, which both delighted and infuriated its practitioners. Riley herself was outraged when American manufacturers copied her designs for fabrics without permission or payment. Though Op Art's commercial peak was brief — roughly 1964 to 1968 — its influence endures in graphic design, fashion, and digital art. Riley, now in her nineties, remains its most celebrated living exponent.

## **Pronunciation Guide**

Vasarely — vah-zah-REL-ee

Bauhaus — BOW-house

Maurice de Sausmarez — mor-EES duh SOZ-mah-ray

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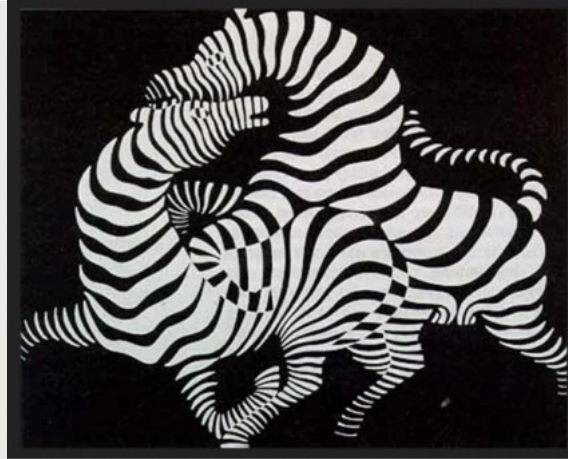
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Victor Vasarely (1906–1997)

**Zebra**

1937

Ink on paper

52 × 60 cm

Centre Pompidou, Paris

Victor Vasarely (1906–1997), *Zebra*, 1937, Ink on paper, 52 × 60 cm, Centre Pompidou, Paris

- Two zebras entwine against a black background in what many art historians regard as the earliest example of **Op Art**. There are no outlines — the animals exist solely through undulating black and white stripes whose curves suggest muscular volume and sexual energy. The figures simultaneously appear and dissolve into abstract pattern. **Vasarely** was still working as a graphic designer in Paris when he made it, yet the piece foreshadows everything that followed.
- Born **Győző Vásárhelyi** in Pécs, Hungary, Vasarely abandoned medical studies to train at **Sándor Bortnyik's** art school in Budapest — widely regarded as the Hungarian **Bauhaus**. He moved to Paris in 1930 with his wife **Claire Spinner** and spent the next decade in commercial art, but his fascination with visual perception never dimmed. The art critic **Frank Popper** later called him "the grandfather of Op Art."
- Vasarely would return to the zebra motif throughout his career, even creating a sculpture version in 1965. His early graphic works of the 1930s — depicting tigers, harlequins, and chess boards — all exploited the same tension between figure and ground. Remarkably, the work was made two years before the outbreak of the Second World War, during a period when European art was fracturing between Surrealism and geometric abstraction. Vasarely chose a third path: art as optical science.

## **Pronunciation Guide**

Victor Vasarely — vik-TOR vah-zah-REL-ee

Győző Vásárhelyi — DYUH-zuh VAH-shahr-hey-ee

Sándor Bortnyik — SHAHN-dor BORT-nyik

Pécs — PAYCH

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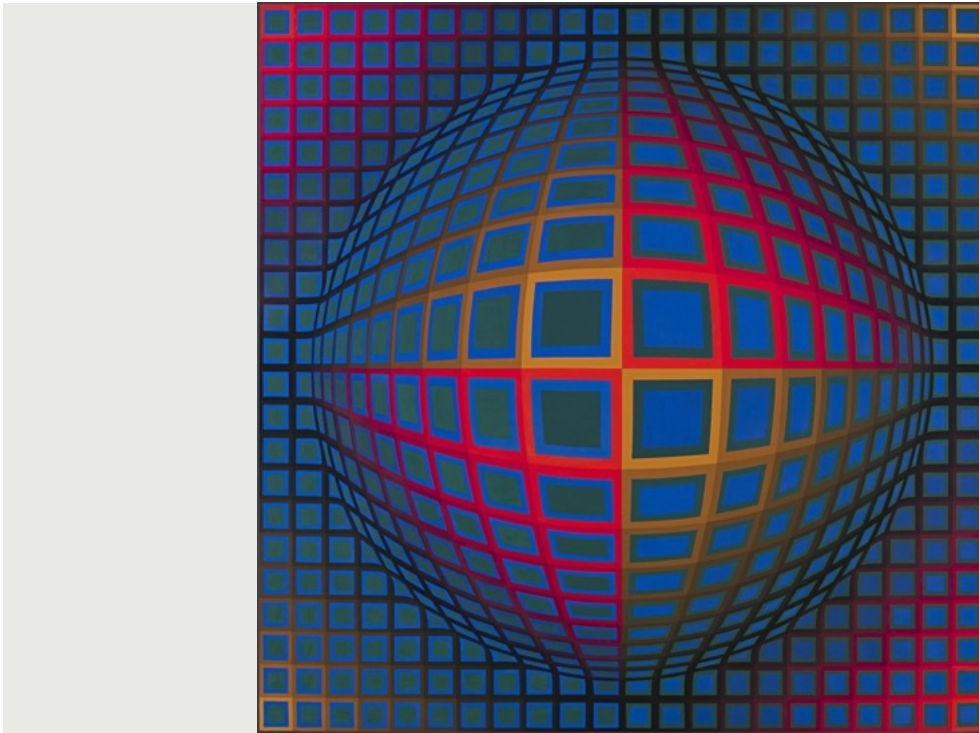
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Victor Vasarely (1906–1997)  
**Vega-Nor**  
1969  
Oil on canvas  
200 × 200 cm  
Buffalo AKG Art Museum, New  
York

Victor Vasarely (1906–1997), *Vega-Nor*, 1969, Oil on canvas, 200 × 200 cm, Buffalo AKG Art Museum, New York

- A grid of coloured cells appears to bulge outward from the canvas like a swelling sphere, creating a breathtaking illusion of three-dimensional volume on a flat surface. **Vega-Nor** belongs to Vasarely's celebrated *Vega* series, named after one of the brightest stars in the night sky. Vasarely explained: "This composition expresses the extension, the expansion of the Universe."
- The work was made using Vasarely's **Alphabet Plastique** — a systematic method in which a limited set of colours and geometric forms could be permuted endlessly, like letters in an alphabet. Warm colours such as orange and yellow advance toward the viewer at the centre, while cool tones recede at the edges. The cells narrow progressively outward, reinforcing the spherical illusion. Art historian **József Sárkány** noted that the viewer's movements "always give rise to new paintings."
- By 1969, Vasarely was at the peak of his fame. He had shown at MoMA's *The Responsive Eye* in 1965 and the following year opened a museum in the Renaissance Palazzo of Gordes in Provence housing over 500 works. He had also redesigned the **Renault** car badge and created David Bowie's *Space Oddity* album artwork. His Op Art had gone truly global — yet critics increasingly accused the movement of being decorative rather than intellectually serious.

## **Pronunciation Guide**

Vega-Nor — VAY-gah NOR

Alphabet Plastique — al-fah-BEH plas-TEEK

József Sárkány — YO-zhef SHAR-kahn-y

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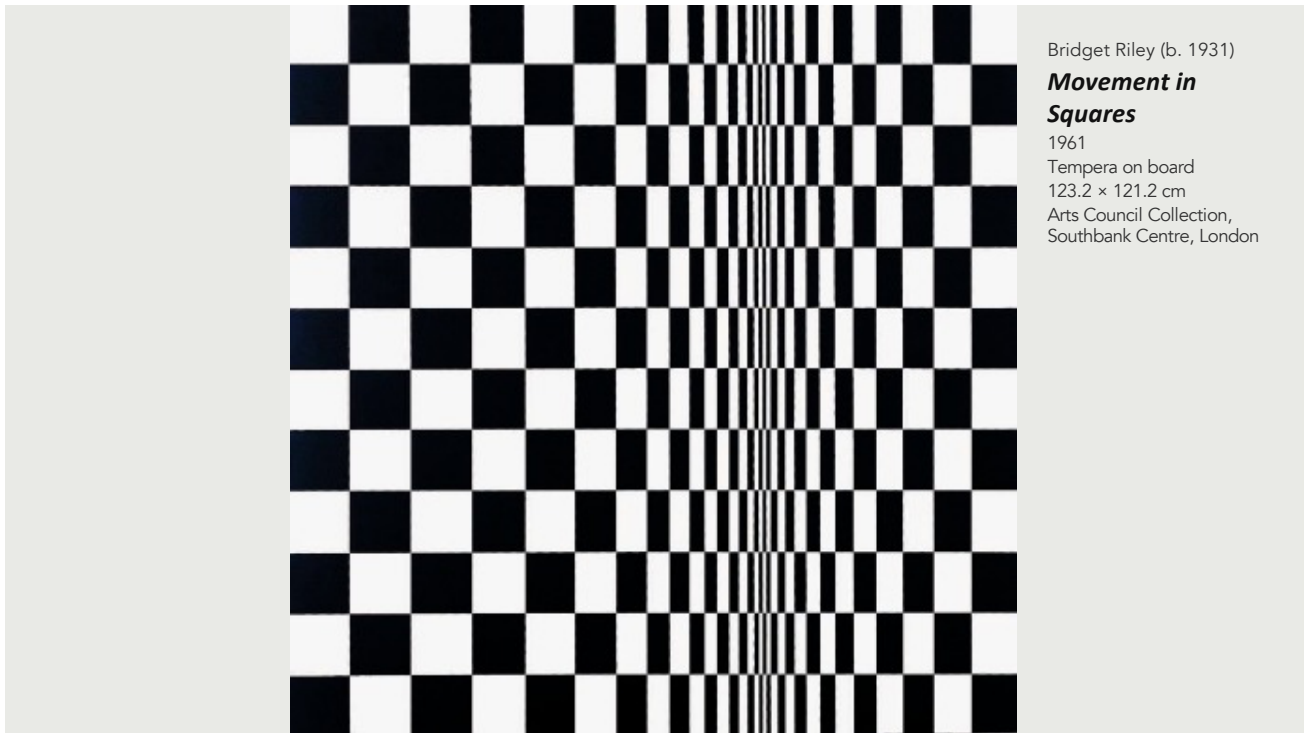
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Bridget Riley (b. 1931), *Movement in Squares*, 1961, Tempera on board, 123.2 × 121.2 cm, Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London

- Twelve rows of alternating black and white squares march across the board — but as the eye moves rightward, the squares compress dramatically, creating an irresistible illusion of depth. It feels as though the picture plane is folding inward, sucked by some invisible gravitational force. Riley cites this as her **first major breakthrough** into abstraction, created shortly after *Kiss*.
- Riley designed it in a single sitting. She began with the simplest possible form — the square — and just kept drawing. "Quite suddenly something was happening down there on the paper that I had not anticipated," she said. "The squares began to lose their original form." She painted alternate squares black, stepped back, and was "surprised and elated" by what she saw. The critic **Anton Ehrenzweig** would later describe the experience of viewing Riley's work as inducing "hallucinations."
- This was a turbulent period. Riley had suffered a **mental breakdown** in 1956 after returning to Lincolnshire to care for her father, who had been severely injured in a car accident. She spent time as an in-patient at the Middlesex Hospital and worked briefly in an antique shop. Recovery came slowly through teaching and through studying **Georges Seurat** and **Piet Mondrian**. A 1956 exhibition of American Abstract Expressionists at the Tate proved pivotal. By 1961, she had found her voice — and it was deafeningly visual.

## **Pronunciation Guide**

Anton Ehrenzweig — AN-ton EH-ren-tsvyg

Georges Seurat — zhorzh suh-RAH

Piet Mondrian — peet MON-dree-ahn

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Bridget Riley (b. 1931)

**Fall**

1963

Polyvinyl acetate paint on  
hardboard

141 × 140.3 cm

Tate Britain, London

Bridget Riley (b. 1931), *Fall*, 1963, Polyvinyl acetate paint on hardboard, 141 × 140.3 cm, Tate Britain, London

- A single perpendicular curve repeats across the board, gently undulating at the top before compressing rapidly toward the bottom. The effect is vertiginous — like watching fabric billowing in a gale, or staring into a waterfall. Riley said: "I try to organise a **field of visual energy** which accumulates until it reaches maximum tension." The Tate purchased it the year it was made — an early institutional endorsement.
- *Fall* was exhibited at Riley's second show at **Gallery One** in London in 1963, where gallery-goers reported dizziness and nausea. The show's catalogue essay by **Anton Ehrenzweig** described the experience as inducing hallucinations. Riley later revealed that visitors were secretly taking drugs in front of the painting, attempting to intensify its optical effects. That same year she won both the **AICA Critics Prize** and a prize at the **John Moores** exhibition in Liverpool.
- Riley's technique was meticulous. She used emulsion paint on hardboard to achieve flat, impersonal surfaces with no visible brushwork. She wanted the viewer to encounter pure optical sensation, free from any trace of the artist's hand. Her working method — designing compositions on paper before having them scaled up and executed — would later involve studio assistants, a practice she compared to an architect's use of builders. The 1960s saw Riley emerge as Britain's most talked-about young artist, even as the Pop Art of **David Hockney** and **Peter Blake** (her fellow Royal College alumni) dominated headlines.

## **Pronunciation Guide**

Polyvinyl acetate — pol-ee-VY-nil AS-eh-tayt

Anton Ehrenzweig — AN-ton EH-ren-tsvyg

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Bridget Riley (b. 1931)

**Current**

1964

Synthetic polymer paint on  
composition board

148.1 × 149.3 cm

The Museum of Modern  
Art, New York

Bridget Riley (b. 1931), *Current*, 1964, Synthetic polymer paint on composition board, 148.1 × 149.3 cm, The Museum of Modern Art, New York

- Undulating black and white lines ripple across the board like heat haze rising from hot tarmac. The painting appears to shimmer, vibrate, and even produce phantom colours where none exist. This is the work that made Riley an **international sensation**. In 1965, it was reproduced on the cover of the catalogue for MoMA's landmark exhibition *The Responsive Eye*, curated by **William C. Seitz**.
- Seitz described the effect: "The eyes seem to be bombarded with pure energy." The exhibition featured over 120 works by 99 artists from 15 countries, but it was Riley's work that dominated press coverage. One visitor called it "the kind of thing a madman might put on a cell wall to drive someone crazy." Public enthusiasm was enormous — yet critical reception was divided. **Thomas Hess** of *Art News* dismissed the entire show, while **Clement Greenberg** was openly hostile.
- The fallout was devastating for Riley personally. American textile manufacturers immediately pirated her designs for dresses and fabrics — without permission, credit, or royalties. Riley was furious. "They vulgarised these works beyond belief," she later said. At the time there was no **artist's copyright protection** in America for such appropriation. The experience soured her relationship with the United States for years. Yet *Current* entered MoMA's permanent collection, purchased through the **Philip Johnson Fund** — a vindication that outlasted the

controversy.

### **Pronunciation Guide**

William C. Seitz — SYTS

Clement Greenberg — KLEM-ent GREEN-berg

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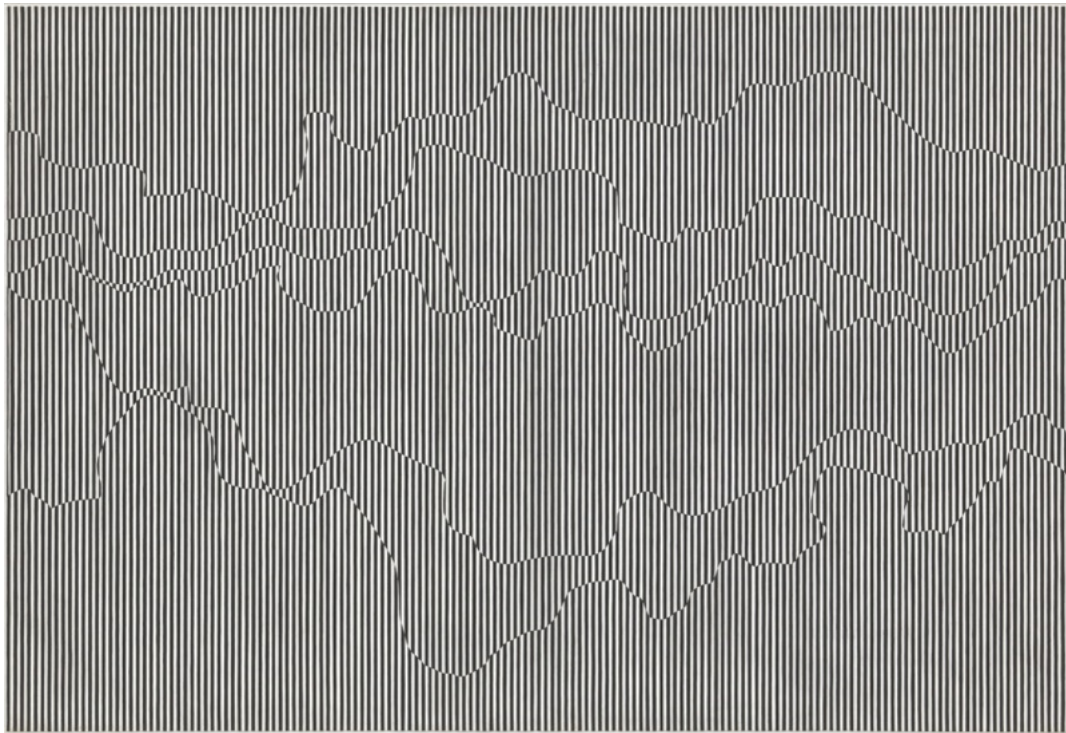
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Julian Stanczak  
(1928–2017)  
***The Duel***  
1963  
Acrylic on canvas  
152.4 × 152.4 cm  
The Museum of  
Modern Art, New York

Julian Stanczak (1928–2017), *The Duel*, 1963, Acrylic on canvas, 152.4 × 152.4 cm, The Museum of Modern Art, New York

- Vertical lines slightly out of step along a wandering line create a fierce visual tension — each side seeming to push against the other like opposing armies.
- **Julian Stanczak** was one of Op Art's most important yet undersung figures. It was his 1964 exhibition at the Martha Jackson Gallery, titled *Optical Paintings*, that prompted artist and critic **Donald Judd** to use the phrase "optical art" in his review for *Time* — effectively coining the term that defined the movement.
- Stanczak's path to art was extraordinary. Born in Poland, he was deported to a **Soviet labour camp in Siberia** aged thirteen during the Second World War. The brutal conditions left his right arm permanently paralysed. He taught himself to paint with his left hand. After the war, he emigrated through Uganda to the United States, where he studied under **Josef Albers** at Yale — the same master who shaped fellow Op artist **Richard Anuszkiewicz**.
- Albers's rigorous colour theory courses at Yale laid the foundation for the "Colour Function" school of Op Art, distinct from Riley's early black-and-white approach. Stanczak was always primarily a colourist, interested in how hues interact at their edges to produce shimmering, unstable effects. His work bridges Op Art and Colour Field painting. He spent most of his career teaching at the Cleveland Institute of Art, far from the New York spotlight — proof that Op Art was never simply a trend but a serious, lifelong inquiry into perception.

## **Pronunciation Guide**

Julian Stanczak — YOO-lee-an STAN-chak

Josef Albers — YO-zef AL-bers

Richard Anuszkiewicz — an-ush-KAY-vich

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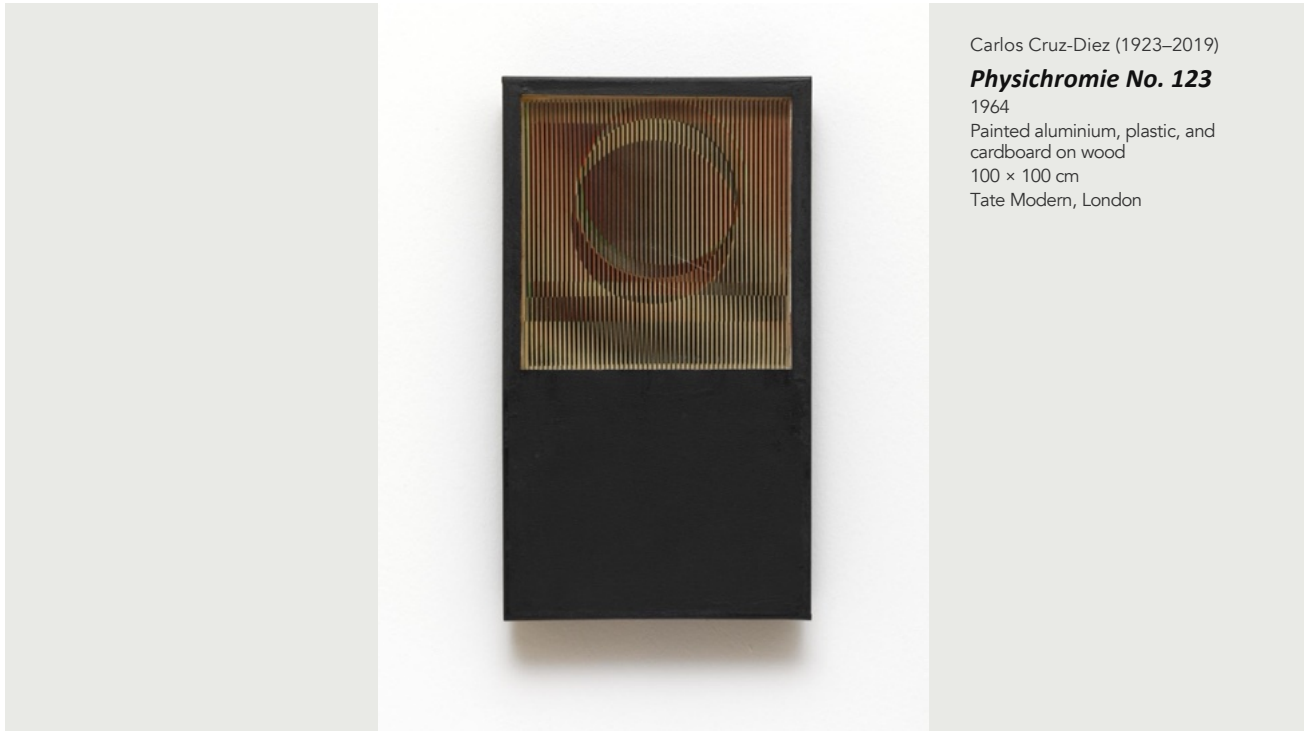
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Carlos Cruz-Diez (1923–2019)

***Physichromie No. 123***

1964

Painted aluminium, plastic, and

cardboard on wood

100 × 100 cm

Tate Modern, London

Carlos Cruz-Diez (1923–2019), *Physichromie No. 123*, 1964, Painted aluminium, plastic, and cardboard on wood, 100 × 100 cm, Tate Modern, London

- Thin vertical strips of coloured aluminium project from the surface at slight angles, so that as the viewer moves, entirely new colours appear to materialise from nowhere. **Cruz-Diez** called these works **Physichromies** — a term combining "physical" and "chromatic" — because colour is generated by the physical act of looking rather than by pigment alone. The piece changes constantly; it is never the same painting twice.
- Born in **Caracas, Venezuela**, Cruz-Diez moved to Paris in 1960, where he exhibited alongside Vasarely, **Jesús Rafael Soto**, and the **Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel** (GRAV), a collective devoted to participatory art. His London debut came in 1965 at the pioneering **Signals Gallery**, which championed Latin American kinetic and Op artists for British audiences.
- Cruz-Diez represents the **Latin American dimension** of Op Art that is often overlooked. Venezuela produced an extraordinary cluster of kinetic and optical artists, partly because President Marcos Pérez Jiménez commissioned modernist architecture and integrated art during the 1950s. Cruz-Diez created over 1,600 *Physichromies* during his lifetime. His public installations — including coloured crosswalks — brought Op Art into the streets of cities worldwide. He died in Paris in 2019, having spent six decades proving that colour is not fixed but endlessly in flux.

## **Pronunciation Guide**

Carlos Cruz-Diez — KAR-los KROOZ DEE-ez

Physichromie — FIZ-ee-kro-mee

Jesús Rafael Soto — heh-SOOS rah-fah-EL SO-toh

Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel — GROOP duh reh-SHAIRSH DAR vee-ZWEL

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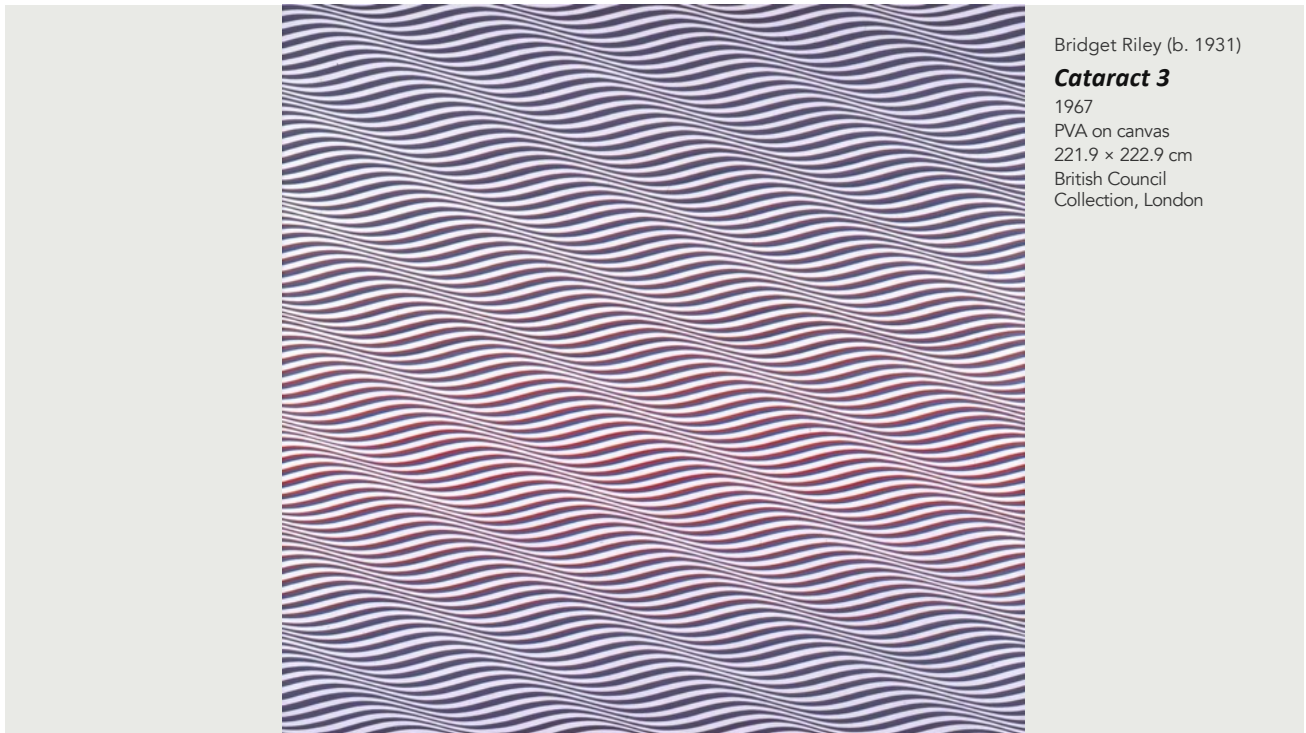
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Bridget Riley (b. 1931)

**Cataract 3**

1967

PVA on canvas

221.9 × 222.9 cm

British Council  
Collection, London

Bridget Riley (b. 1931), *Cataract 3*, 1967, PVA on canvas, 221.9 × 222.9 cm, British Council Collection, London

- Coloured stripes of red, green, turquoise, and grey undulate across a vast white canvas like ribbons caught in a current of water. This was Riley's **breakthrough into colour** — and it terrified her. "Colour presented a crisis for me," she admitted. After six years working exclusively in black and white, she realised: "The basis of colour was its instability." Grey served as the crucial bridge, a conduit allowing chromatic hues to enter the monochrome world.
- The *Cataract* series was made in the run-up to the **1968 Venice Biennale**, where Riley became the first British contemporary painter — and the **first woman** — to win the International Prize for Painting. The title carries a double meaning: a rushing waterfall and the clouding of the eye's lens. Riley described her ambition for the viewer's eye to feel "caressed and soothed, experiencing frictions and ruptures, glide and drift."
- Riley's method involved intense work on small studies before handing the final execution to studio assistants — ensuring the finish was smooth and impersonal. The assistants followed her exact specifications, using masking tape and rulers. Riley compared this to a composer writing a score: the creative act was in the design, not the manual execution. The *Cataract* paintings signalled a new direction. From here, stripes would dominate her work through the late 1960s and into the 1970s, growing ever more chromatic and complex.

## **Pronunciation Guide**

Cataract — KAT-uh-rakt

Venice Biennale — VEN-iss bee-en-AH-lay

PVA — pee-vee-ay (polyvinyl acetate)

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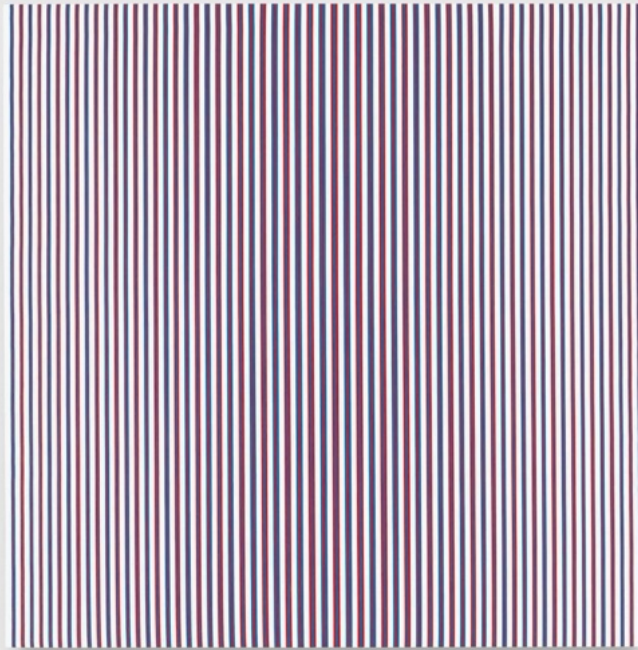
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Bridget Riley (b. 1931)

**Chant 2**

1967

Emulsion on canvas

231.1 × 228.6 cm

Private collection

Bridget Riley (b. 1931), *Chant 2*, 1967, Emulsion on canvas, 231.1 × 228.6 cm, Private collection

- Vertical stripes of red, blue, turquoise, and white march across a monumental canvas, their edges generating phantom colours that flicker in the spaces between. *Chant 2* was one of three paintings Riley showed at the **1968 Venice Biennale** — the trio that clinched her the International Prize. The title suggests music, and Riley has always drawn parallels between colour relationships and musical harmony.
- This was the work that confirmed Riley as far more than a maker of black-and-white dazzle. She had been studying colour theory and the effects of **simultaneous contrast** — the phenomenon whereby adjacent colours alter each other's appearance. The precision is remarkable: each stripe must be exactly the right width and hue to generate the intended optical shimmer. Even tiny variations would collapse the effect.
- In 2008, *Chant 2* sold at Sotheby's for **£2,561,250** (\$5.1 million) — then a record for Riley at auction. It went to a private American collector. The price reflected a dramatic resurgence of interest in Riley's work, which had lost ground during the 1980s to the aggressive gestures of **Neo-Expressionism**. A 1999 exhibition at the **Serpentine Gallery** of her 1960s paintings had triggered a remarkable revival. The Young British Artists, including **Damien Hirst**, openly acknowledged Riley's influence.

## **Pronunciation Guide**

Chant — CHAHNT

Venice Biennale — VEN-iss bee-en-AH-lay

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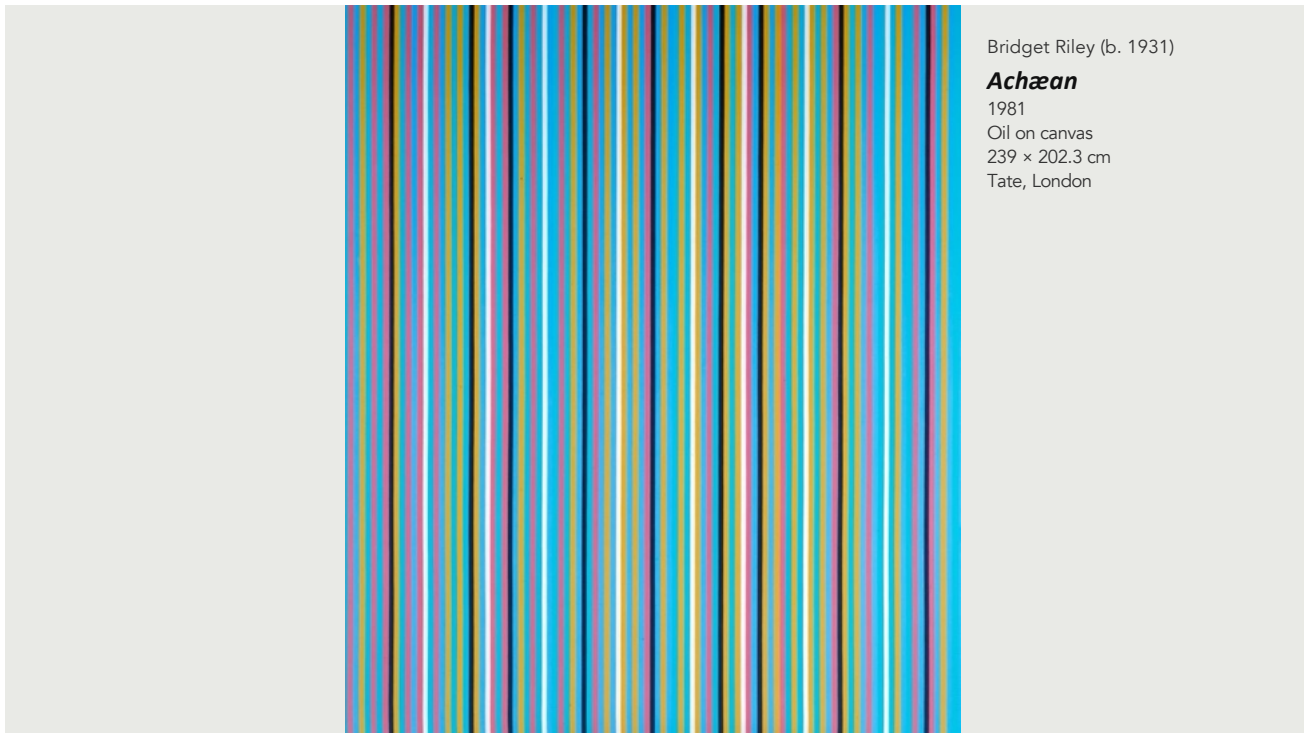
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Bridget Riley (b. 1931), *Achæan*, 1981, Oil on canvas, 239 × 202.3 cm, Tate, London

- Vertical stripes of blue, lilac, salmon pink, black, white, and golden yellow blaze across a vast canvas with an intensity unlike anything Riley had achieved before. *Achæan* marks the arrival of her **Egyptian palette** — colours of startling purity and brilliance inspired by a transformative visit to **Egypt** in the autumn of 1981. "The colours are purer and more brilliant than any I had used before," she wrote.
- The title was given retrospectively, referring to the ancient **Achaean Greeks** who created the finest early sculptures — works Riley described as "vigorous but simple." She saw the same qualities in this painting: dark, Mediterranean, muscular. Riley regarded these shades as a breakthrough. In the Egyptian colour system, pigments had retained their individual brilliance for over three thousand years while still generating new effects in the spaces between colour groups.
- This work also marked a technical shift: Riley switched from acrylic to **oil paint**, relishing its richer surface and greater subtlety. There is no regulated system of colour placement here; the arrangement appears intuitive, though in places it suggests reflection about a central axis. The 1980s were a difficult decade for Riley commercially. The art world was obsessed with the bombastic figuration of **Julian Schnabel** and **Georg Baselitz**. Riley's disciplined abstraction seemed unfashionable. She pressed on regardless, trusting her inquiry into colour.

## **Pronunciation Guide**

Achæan — ah-KEE-un

Julian Schnabel — SHNA-bel

Georg Baselitz — GAY-org BAH-zeh-lits

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Bridget Riley (b. 1931)

**Nataraja**

1993

Oil on canvas

165.1 × 227.7 cm

Tate, London

Bridget Riley (b. 1931), *Nataraja*, 1993, Oil on canvas, 165.1 × 227.7 cm, Tate, London

- Vertical and diagonal stripes collide across the canvas in a riot of colour — violet, green, orange, pink, and blue interrupt and overlay one another, creating a sense of rhythmic movement that is almost musical. The title **Nataraja** comes from Hindu mythology, meaning "Lord of the Dance" — a reference to the god **Shiva** in his form as cosmic dancer, usually depicted with four arms. Riley chose the title for its emphasis on rhythm and counter-rhythm.
- This is a masterpiece of Riley's **diagonal stripe paintings**, a series she began in the 1980s after her Egyptian-inspired works. The diagonal cuts across the verticals, creating a multiplicity of discrete colour areas that constantly shift as the eye moves. The effect recalls flickering light or a spinning kaleidoscope. Riley described her colours as having different "tempo," pitched against the structure of the formal movement — a deliberate analogy with musical composition.
- The palette was influenced by Riley's travels to **India**, just as *Achæan* had been shaped by Egypt. She was enchanted by Indian textiles, temple colours, and the intensity of tropical light. The Tate purchased the painting in 1994. By the early 1990s, Riley had been awarded the **Companion of Honour** (1998) and would go on to win the **Praemium Imperiale** for painting in 2003. Her reputation, once eclipsed by Neo-Expressionism, was climbing back to where it belonged.

## **Pronunciation Guide**

Nataraja — nah-tah-RAH-jah

Shiva — SHEE-vah

Praemium Imperiale — PRAY-mee-um im-peh-ree-AH-lay

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Bridget Riley (b. 1931)

**Rajasthan**

2012

Wall painting (acrylic on wall)

Variable dimensions, site-specific

Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart

Bridget Riley (b. 1931), *Rajasthan*, 2012, Wall painting (acrylic on wall), Variable dimensions, site-specific, Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart

- Large curvilinear forms in red, grey, orange, and turquoise sweep across the gallery wall, their edges flowing beyond any conventional frame. The white wall itself becomes part of the painting — creating straight edges against which the coloured curves seem to spill outward, probing the surrounding space. *Rajasthan* represents a radical late development: the liberation of Riley's forms from the rectangle of the canvas into the real architectural space of the gallery.
- The title refers to the princely state in northwestern **India**, and the colour palette draws on the vibrant hues of Indian textiles and temples. Riley had returned to the curve after a seventeen-year gap, having worked through stripe and rhomboid paintings. She explained: "The curve is more open to amazing changes than the straight line. Lines can be twisted into curves, and curves can be used as contours of forms." The work was first shown at the **De La Warr Pavilion** in Bexhill-on-Sea in 2015.
- Remarkably, this wall painting traces its lineage back to *Tremor* (1962), one of Riley's earliest black-and-white works. She felt at the time that it contained unrealised potential but could not see how to develop it. Fifty years later, she found the answer. Riley began creating wall paintings in 1983 with a commission for the **Royal Liverpool Hospital** — soothing bands of blue, yellow, pink, and white that reportedly caused a drop in vandalism and graffiti. At eighty-one, Riley was still pushing the boundaries of what painting could be.

## **Pronunciation Guide**

Rajasthan — RAH-jah-stahn

Staatsgalerie — SHTAHTS-gal-uh-ree

De La Warr — duh-lah-WAIR

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Bridget Riley (b. 1931)  
**Messengers**  
2019  
Wall painting (acrylic on wall)  
Variable dimensions, site-specific  
The National Gallery, London

Bridget Riley (b. 1931), *Messengers*, 2019, Wall painting (acrylic on wall), Variable dimensions, site-specific, The National Gallery, London

- A monumental wall painting fills a stairwell at the **National Gallery** — one of the world's supreme collections of Old Master paintings. Discs and lozenges of vivid colour float against the white walls, creating a sense of joyous, dancing movement. The title *Messengers* suggests these forms carry visual information from one part of the composition to another, like notes in a musical score. It is Riley's most prominent public commission to date.
- The invitation to create a permanent work inside the National Gallery was a profound honour. Riley had spent her entire career studying the Old Masters housed there — from **Titian** to **Veronese** to **Seurat**. Her copy of Seurat's *The Bridge at Courbevoie* — made at the Courtauld in 1959 — had hung in her studio ever since, a constant reminder of the optical tradition she inherited and transformed. "I have always taken care to learn from the past," she said.
- At eighty-eight, Riley oversaw the installation with characteristic precision. The shapes — circles and disc-like forms — had entered her vocabulary in the 2000s, marking yet another evolution. Critics received the work warmly. **Alastair Sooke** of *The Daily Telegraph* called Riley "one of Britain's best artists." The commission placed her in the company of masters she had studied all her life — a fitting culmination for an artist who once said: "Perception is the medium through which states of being are directly experienced."

## **Pronunciation Guide**

Titian — TISH-un

Veronese — veh-roh-NAY-zeh

Courbevoie — koor-buh-VWAH

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Bridget Riley (b. 1931), *Measure for Measure*, 2017, Oil on canvas, 226 × 254 cm, Artist's collection

- Discs of colour — red, blue, green, yellow, and pink — are scattered across a white ground in a seemingly casual arrangement that is, in fact, meticulously calibrated. Each disc relates to every other through a complex web of colour relationships. The eye darts between them, linking and re-linking, generating phantom connections. The title borrows from **Shakespeare** — "measure for measure" implies balanced exchange, an apt metaphor for the reciprocal energies of colour.
- This disc painting belongs to Riley's most recent body of work, shown to acclaim at her major **Hayward Gallery retrospective** in 2019 — the largest exhibition of her work ever staged, with over 200 works spanning seventy years. The *Guardian* gave it five stars. At the opening, the eighty-eight-year-old Riley was photographed in her signature boiler suit, as sharp-eyed and exacting as ever.
- Riley's legacy is vast. She founded **SPACE** in 1968 with **Peter Sedgley** and the journalist **Peter Townsend** — an artists' organisation providing affordable studios that continues today. She influenced **Damien Hirst** (whose spot paintings owe her a debt), **Lance Wyman** (designer of the Mexico 1968 Olympics identity), and generations of fashion and graphic designers. In 2025, a major solo exhibition at the **Musée d'Orsay** in Paris confirmed her standing as one of the most important living artists. From a breakdown in a Lincolnshire cottage to the walls of the National Gallery — Riley's journey is one of art history's great stories

of persistence, rigour, and the sheer power of looking.

### **Pronunciation Guide**

Musée d'Orsay — mew-ZAY dor-SAY

Peter Sedgley — SEDJ-lee

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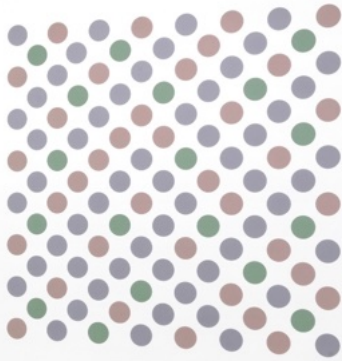
# 60-06 OP ART AND BRIDGET RILEY

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Bridget Riley  
***Measure for  
Measure***  
2017



- Op Art shifted art from passive observation to active, bodily experience. It remains a cornerstone of **graphic design** and **modern fashion**, where its rhythmic patterns continue to inspire designers like [Mary Quant](#). Today, its systematic, mathematical approach lives on in **digital art**.
- Thank you for your time and attention.



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