

BRIDGET RILEY
PERCEPTUAL
ABSTRACTION

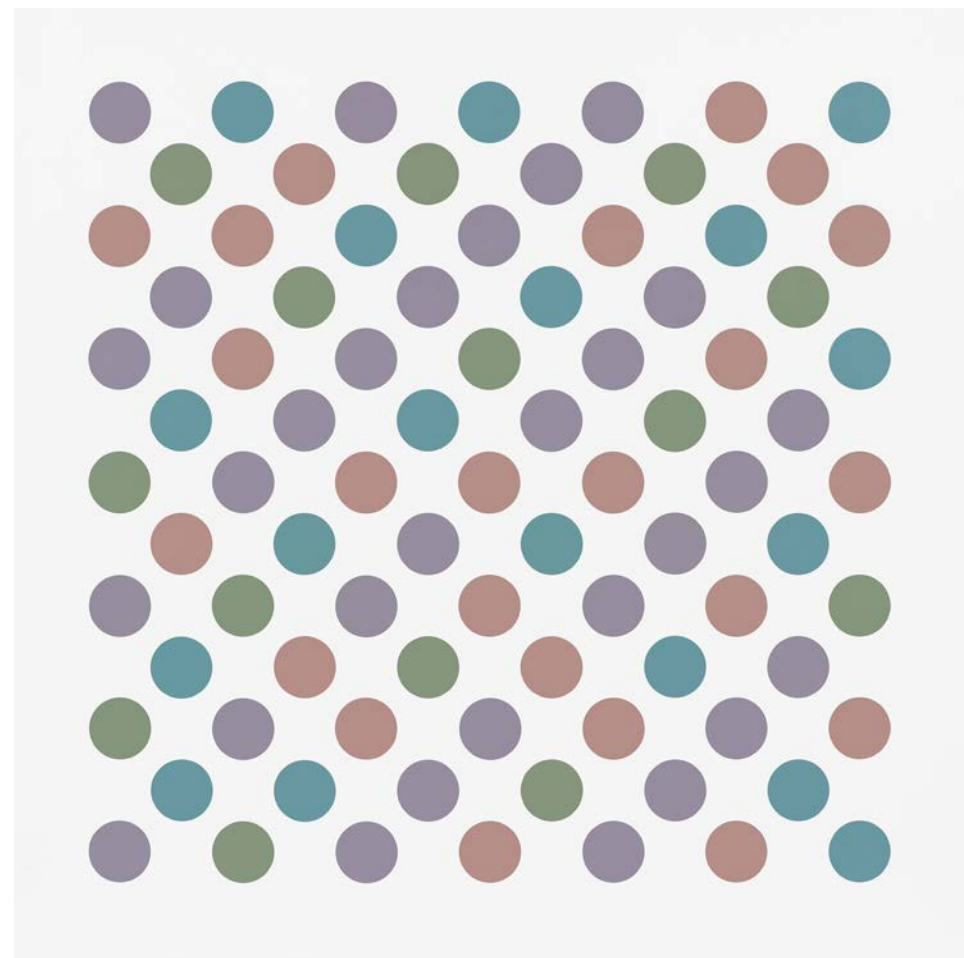
BRIDGET RILEY: PERCEPTUAL ABSTRACTION

Over a seven-decade career, Bridget Riley (b. 1931) has used color, line, and geometric pattern to explore the dynamic nature of visual perception in paintings, drawings, and screen prints. She first achieved international prominence in the early 1960s with her distinctive black-and-white paintings, their rhythmic lines and curves appearing to vibrate across the canvas. Since then, Riley has relied on deceptively simple shapes to startling effect. Working in series, the artist gradually expanded her palette, introducing gray tonal variations before shifting to vivid color juxtapositions. Riley's arresting paintings harness the disruptive and harmonious relationships among color, line, and form with compositions of remarkable complexity and vibrancy.

Selected by the artist, the works in this exhibition comprise the largest survey of Riley's work in the United States in twenty years. The show opens with an in-depth examination of Riley's seminal monochrome paintings of the 1960s on the third floor and presents the full range of her oeuvre in color on the second floor. Assembling Riley's most iconic paintings alongside rarely seen works, the exhibition traces the evolution of her deep engagement with the fundamentals of visual perception.

"Looking carefully at paintings is the best training you can have as a young painter," Riley has said of her deep appreciation of the work of painters of the past. For this exhibition she has selected a watercolor by Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863) and an oil study by John Constable (1776–1837) to hang alongside her work.

Bridget Riley: Perceptual Abstraction has been organized by the Yale Center for British Art and is on view through July 24, 2022. The exhibition was conceived by the artist in collaboration with Courtney J. Martin (Yale PhD 2009), Paul Mellon Director, Yale Center for British Art, working with Maryam Ohadi-Hamadani, former Postdoctoral Research Associate, with the assistance of Martina Droth, Deputy Director and Chief Curator; Charlotte Lefland, Senior Curatorial Assistant, Prints and Drawings; and Rachel Stratton, Postdoctoral Research Associate.



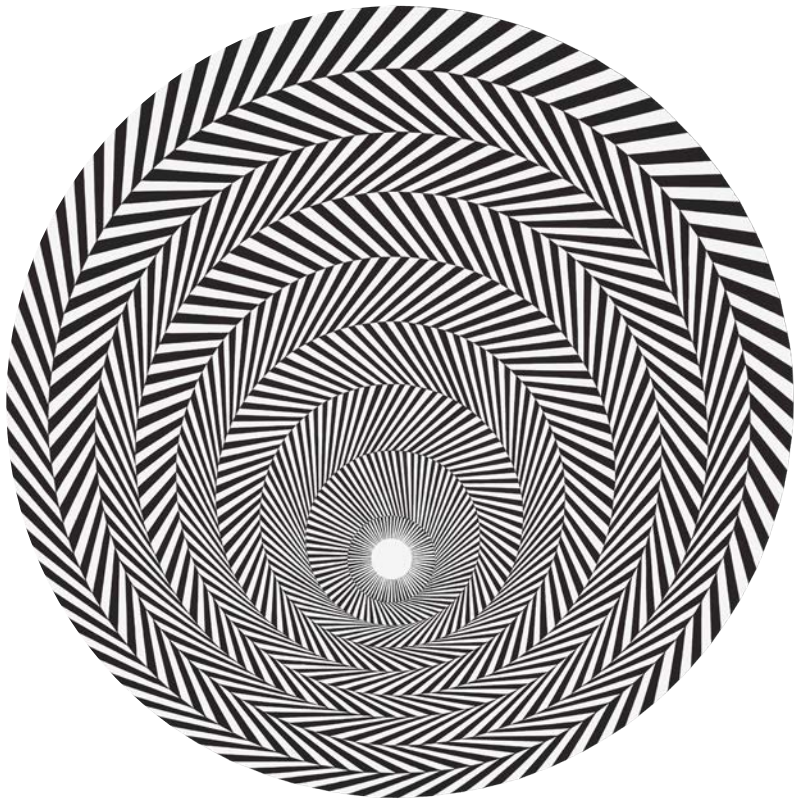
COVER *Late Morning 1*, 1967, acrylic emulsion on canvas, 89¼ × 89¾ in. (226.7 × 228 cm).
Courtesy of the artist

ABOVE *Measure for Measure 36*, 2018, acrylic on canvas, 49¼ × 49¾ in. (125.1 × 125.1 cm).
Private collection

THIRD FLOOR

Black and White: 1961 to 1968

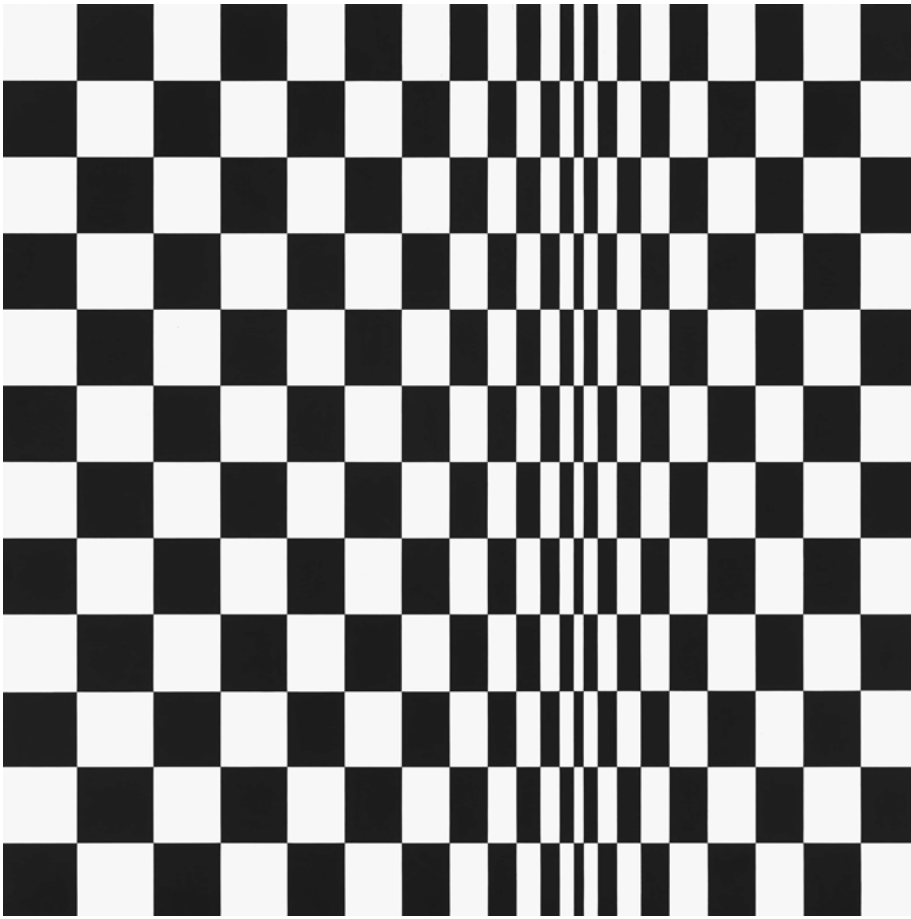
In the early 1960s, Riley worked exclusively in black and white. The lines, curves, circles, and triangles arranged on her surfaces result in energetic patterns, which appear to shift and pulse in space. Riley first came to international attention when her black-and-white painting *Current* (1964) was included in *The Responsive Eye*, a groundbreaking exhibition of geometric abstraction at the Museum of Modern Art in 1965. The following year, Riley began to introduce tonal variations in gray, creating a completely new sensory response: perception is slowed down through the appearance of depth and spatial recession. Riley has described this use of gray as a testing ground and a bridge she had to cross to meet the challenge of color.



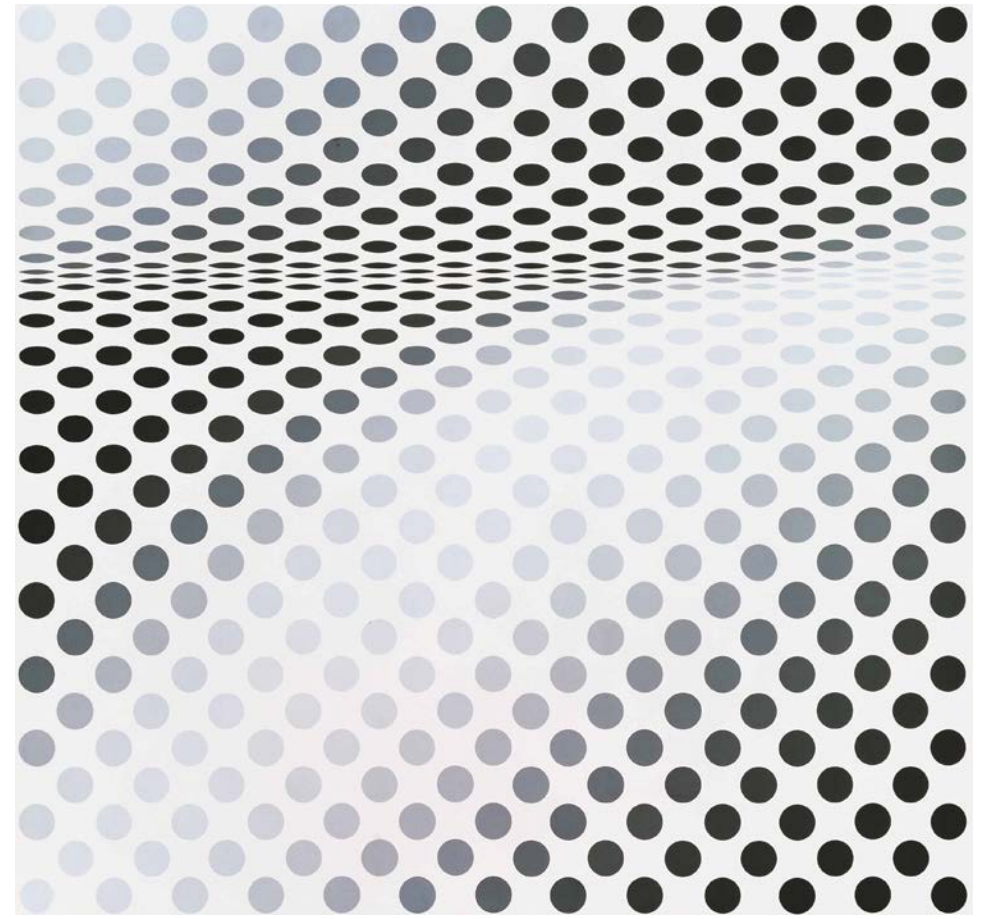
ABOVE *Blaze 4*, 1964, synthetic emulsion on board, 37 x 37 in. (94 x 94 cm). Courtesy of the artist

RIGHT Jorge Lewinski, Bridget Riley in her Warwick Road studio, London, 1964. Private collection
© The Lewinski Archive at Chatsworth. All rights reserved 2022 / Bridgeman Images





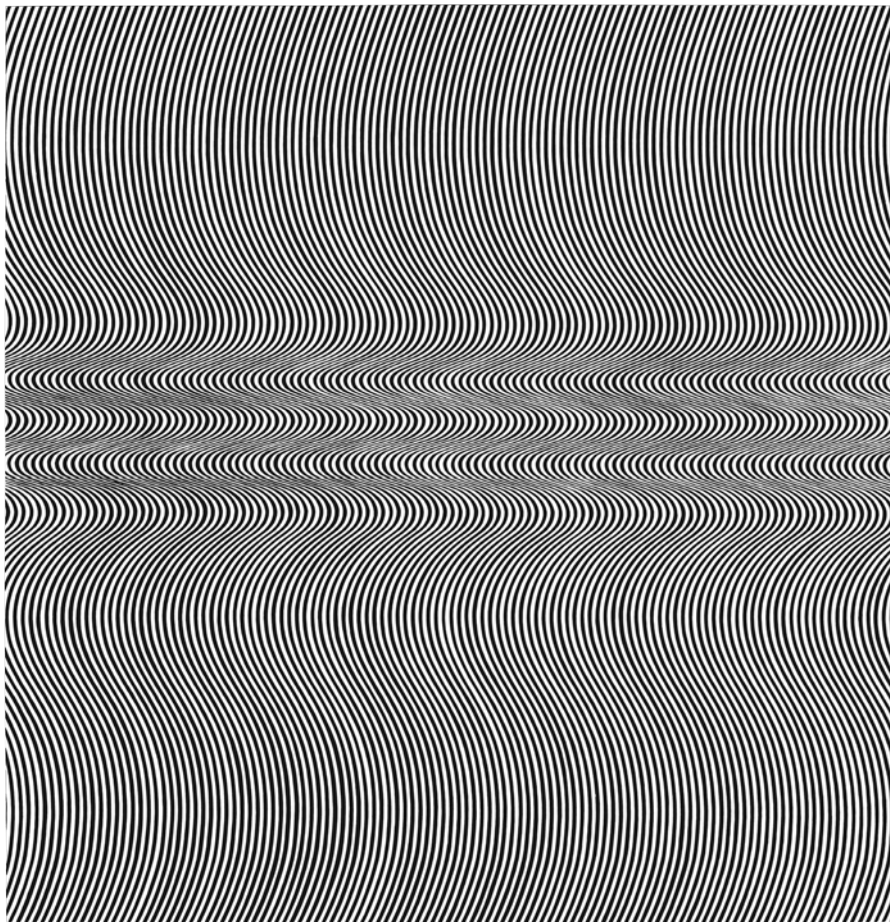
ABOVE *Movement in Squares*, 1961, synthetic emulsion on board, 48½ x 47¾ in. (123.2 x 121.2 cm).
Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre



RIGHT *Hesitate*, 1964, synthetic emulsion on board, 42½ x 44¼ in. (106.7 x 112.4 cm).
Tate: Presented by the Friends of the Tate Gallery, 1985

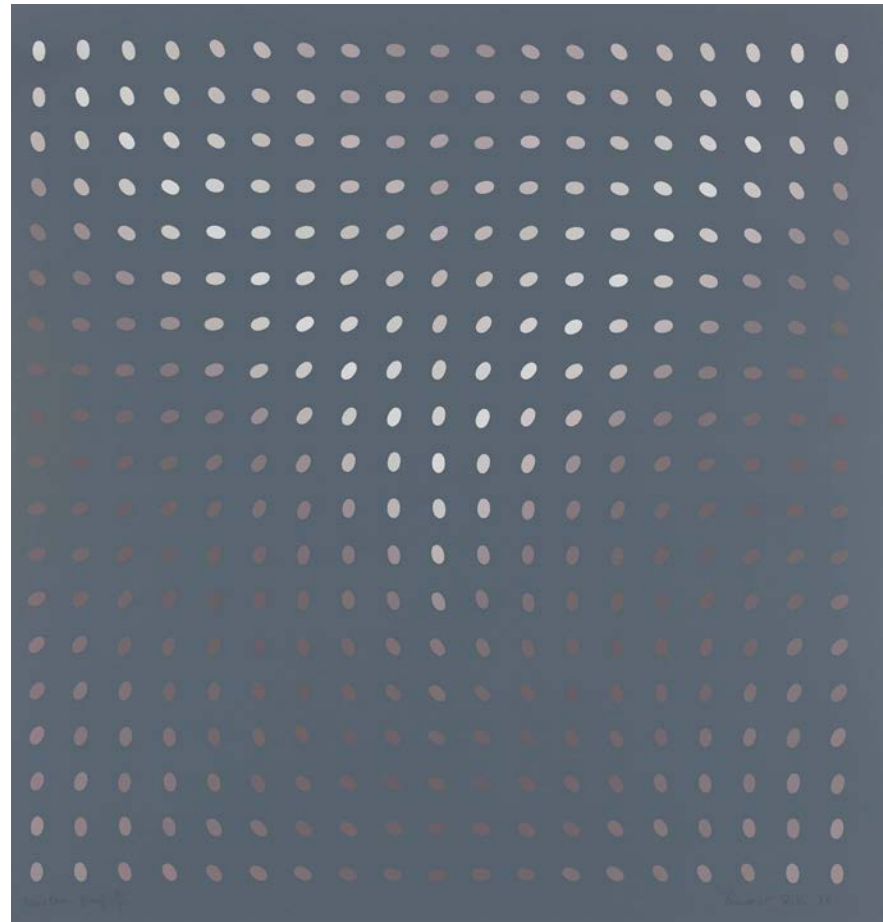
*William Seitz [curator of *The Responsive Eye*] came to my studio in Warwick Road, London, in 1964 to tell me about an exhibition he was organising for the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York to show the use of perception in the figurative painting of the past and the abstract painting of the present day. This was a very exciting premise for an exhibition and one that appealed to me immediately, as it crossed the same boundary that I had crossed in my own work and by the same bridge, perception.*

—BRIDGET RILEY



*When the term “optical mixture,” or rather *mélange optique* (as it was called in France), entered the world of studio talk, it signaled an important shift: the significance of the viewer rose to conscious recognition and with it a new, wider audience emerged.*

—BRIDGET RILEY



LEFT *Current*, 1964, synthetic emulsion on board, 58 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 58 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (148.1 x 149.3 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, Philip Johnson Fund, 1964

ABOVE *Untitled [Nineteen Greys D]*, 1968, screenprint in 19 colors on Saunders board, 30 x 30 in. (76.2 x 76.2 cm). Courtesy of the artist

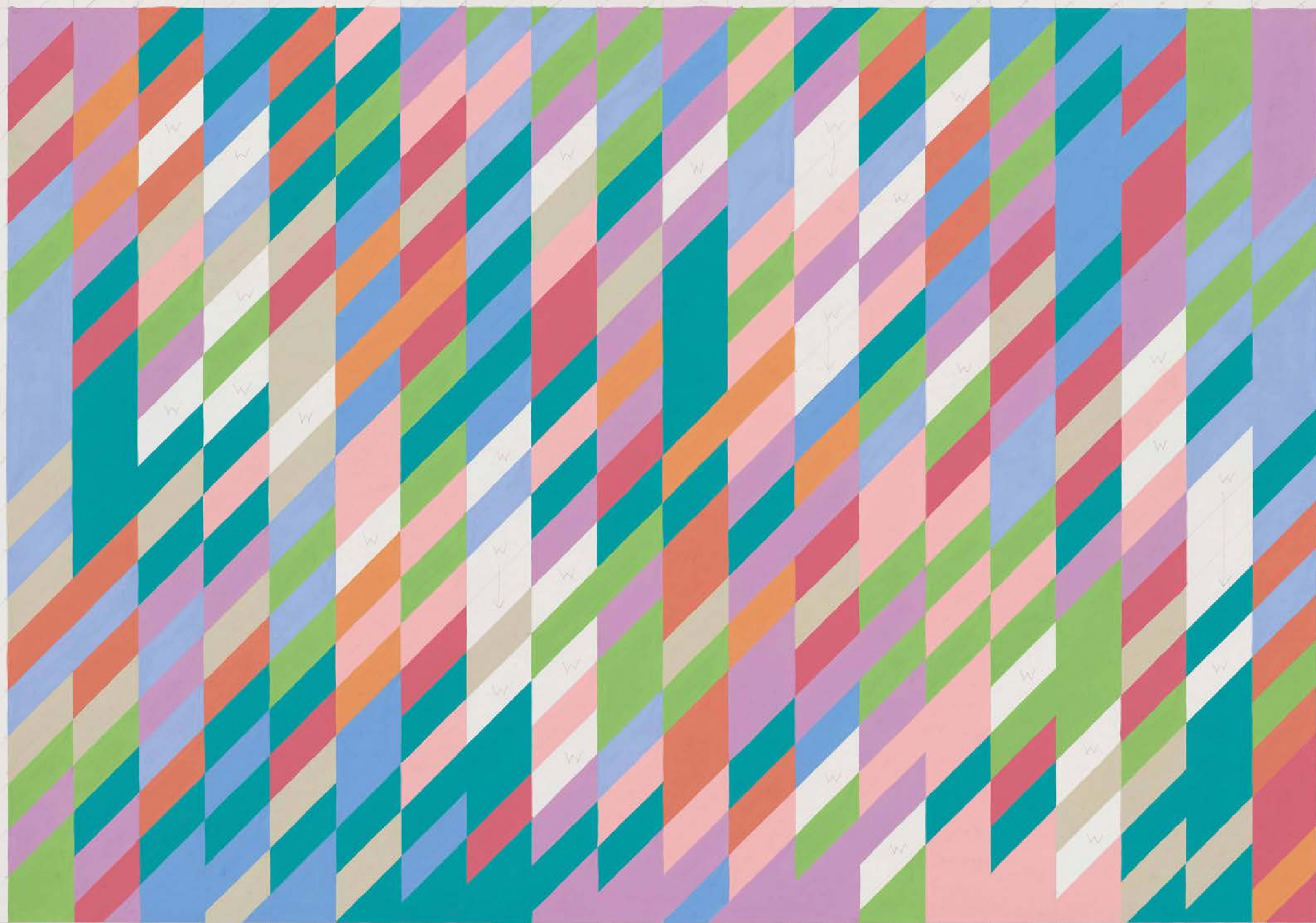
NEXT PAGES *July 18 '89*, 1989, pencil and gouache on paper, framed: 34 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 43 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 1 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (87.5 x 109.4 x 5 cm). Courtesy of Lance Uggla

July 18 89.

M = Deep Magenta.
R = Reversed Red

T = Deep Turq.
V = original (or lighter) Violet.

C = Dark.

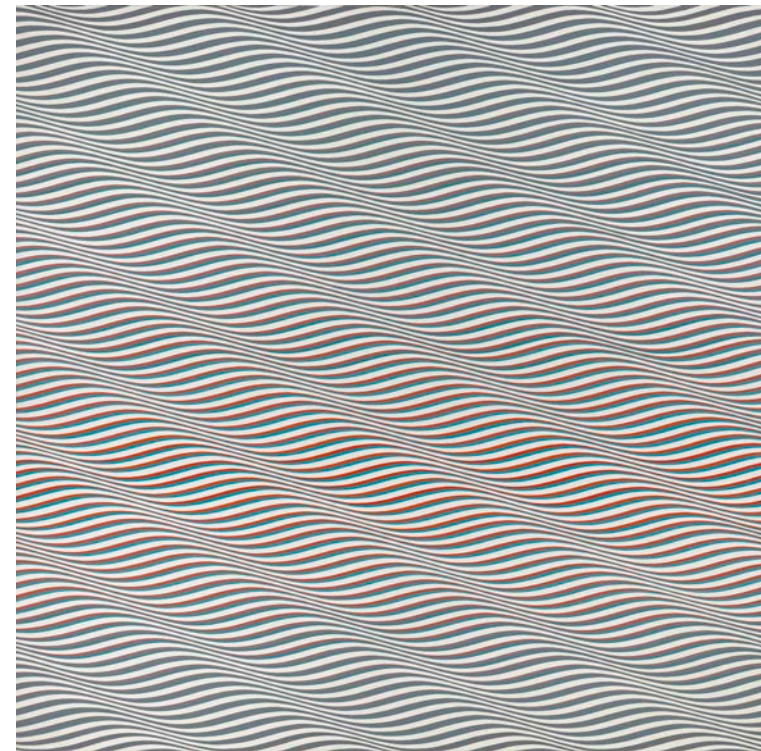


Make
hole in
Carlon
that lowest
R is thin
Columboid

SECOND FLOOR

Color: 1967 to 2021

Riley unveiled her first color paintings in 1968 at the Venice Biennale. That year, she also became the first Briton—and the first woman—to win the prestigious international painting prize. The works on this floor trace the evolution of her use of color. Her earliest color paintings consisted of vertical stripes in a restricted palette, arranged exactly on the canvas. Riley's ideas about color were profoundly shaped by her experience of nature, both at home and on her travels. Riley's visits to Australia, Egypt, and the islands of Bali, Java, Japan, and Tahiti prompted an expansion in her palette. Although the line served as Riley's primary visual vehicle through the 1980s, she later introduced rhomboids, curvilinear planes, and other dynamic forms to evoke sensations of space, movement, and light. Through visual color relationships, Riley creates canvases that radiate energy and motion.

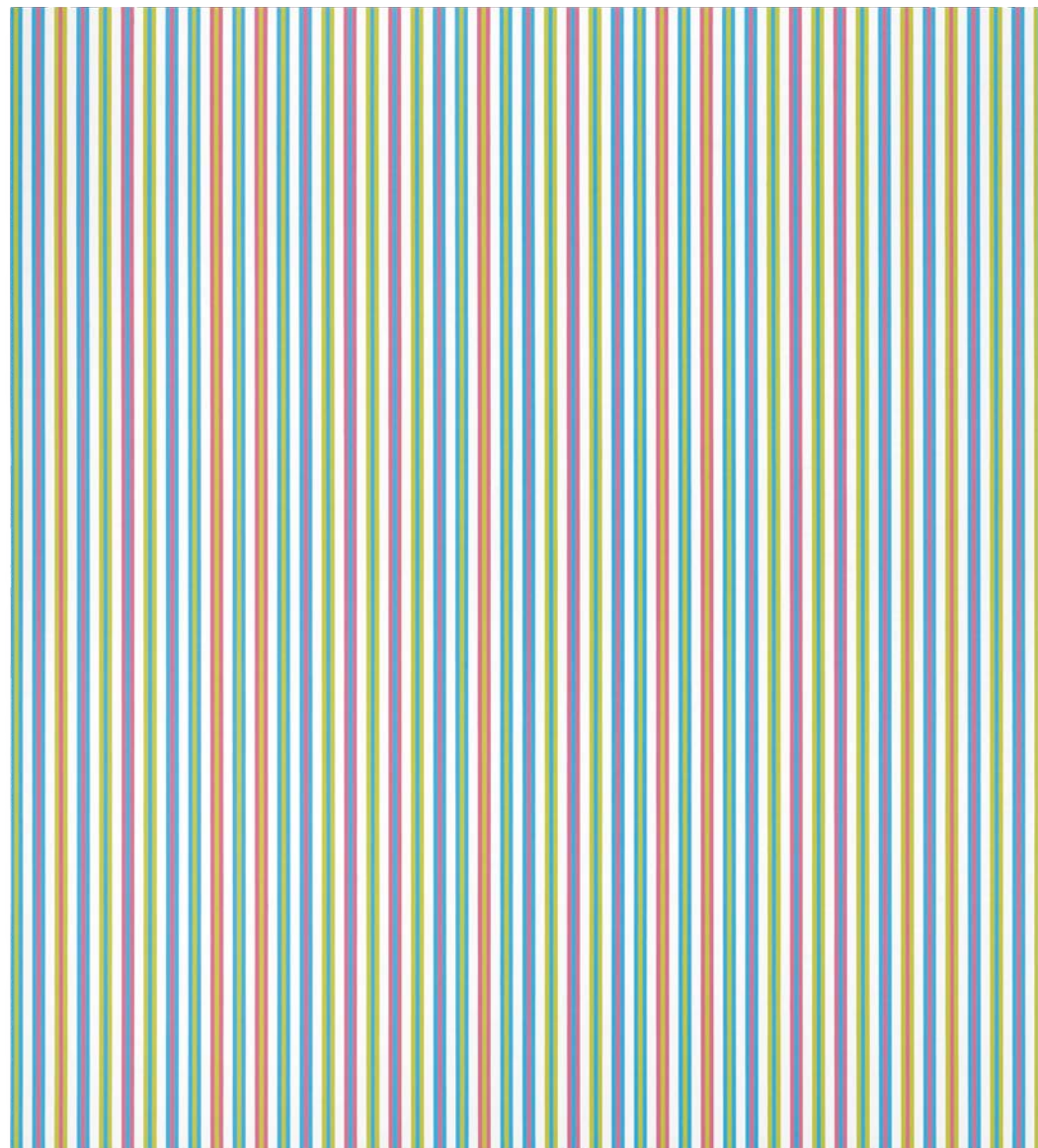


LEFT John Goldblatt, Bridget Riley working on *Chant 2*, 1967

ABOVE *Cataract 3*, 1967, polyvinyl acetate on canvas, 87³/₈ × 87³/₈ in. (221.9 × 222.9 cm).
Courtesy of the British Council Collection

Back in my Warwick Road studio, I got on with my work, continuing to develop the use of grays and colored grays, and pushed on towards color. Encouraged by critics and supporters in England, I wrote "Perception is the Medium," published in Art News in October 1965.

—BRIDGET RILEY



LEFT *Rêve*, 1999, oil on canvas, 89 $\frac{7}{8}$ × 93 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (228 × 238.3 cm). Courtesy of the artist

ABOVE *Elysium*, 2003/1973, acrylic on canvas, 102 $\frac{3}{4}$ × 92 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (261 × 236 cm).
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Lila Acheson Wallace Gift, 2016

WORKS BY CONSTABLE AND DELACROIX

Selected by Bridget Riley

ON VIEW ON THE THIRD FLOOR



Constable's Sketch for "The Haywain" depicts one of those late spring days when blustery, turbulent weather throws tall trees, heavy with new foliage, into a strong tonal contrast with the sky. He called this the "chiaroscuro of nature." Constable argued long and forcefully for the acceptance of nature as a viable subject for the painter. In this sketch, clouds of the palest yellow ocher, catching the light from above, are paired with an intense blue gray in the shadow below. The painter employs a drawing technique of diagonal hatching to take these yellow ochers and blue grays through his sketch to build an extraordinary pictorial plasticity. The eye is led around and through the little painting—from the shadowed foreground, out through sunlit fields to the far distance, back to the trees, and up to the sky.

When Constable's final painting, *The Hay Wain* (1821), was shown at the 1824 Paris Salon, the response was sensational, especially the response from younger artists. One such admirer, Eugène Delacroix, studied *The Hay Wain* closely and later wrote in his journal: "Constable says that the green of his meadows is superior to that of other artists because it is composed of a multitude of different greens. . . . What he says here of the green of the meadows can be applied to all the other colours."

Delacroix approaches his landscape in the same way he approached his figure compositions: by establishing foreground, middle ground, and background. Beyond a shadowed wall lies the diagonal passage of the hillside, leading to a screen of dark vegetation and little trees. Seen in opposite light, these appear in soft washes of blue greens, dark greens, olive greens, yellow greens, light greens, bright greens, gray greens, and even turquoise. The distant mountains recede through blue violets to the opalescent tints and fugitive greens of the sky above.

Delacroix's little watercolor may be an early sign of his great undertaking to penetrate the nature of pictorial color and discover its principles. He also established procedures that would prove to be of immense value not only to the Impressionists and Postimpressionists but also to succeeding generations of aspiring colorists—including myself.

—BRIDGET RILEY



LEFT John Constable, *Sketch for "The Haywain,"* ca. 1820, oil on canvas laid to paper, 4 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 7 in. (12.4 x 17.8 cm). Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection

ABOVE Eugène Delacroix, *Path on the Side of a Mountain, Eaux-Bonnes, the Pyrénées,* 1845, watercolor over graphite, 7 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 12 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (18.8 x 13.7 cm). Yale University Art Gallery, Everett V. Meeks, BA 1901, Fund

MORE RESOURCES

Display of Bridget Riley prints

On view in the Study Room
Visit britishart.yale.edu for hours.

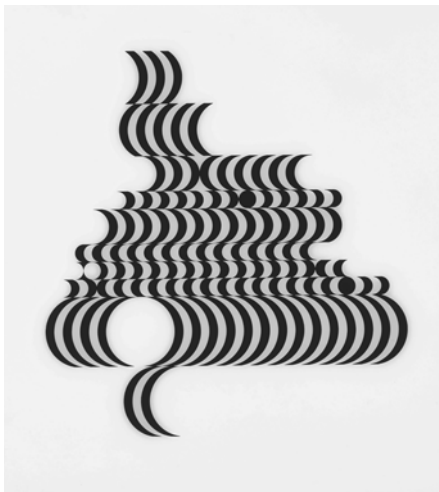
Online exhibition catalogue

Available at britishart.yale.edu

This digital publication explores Bridget Riley's long and prolific career—her early, energetic black-and-white work, her experimentation with gray, and her signature innovations with color and arresting patterns. The catalogue includes essays by Maryam Ohadi-Hamadani, Bridget Riley, and Rachel Stratton.

Activities for Children

Art activity booklets for children are available at the front desk of the museum.



ABOVE *Untitled [Fragment 2]*, 1965, screen print in black and white on Plexiglas, Plexiglas: 28 x 27¼ in. (71.2 x 69.3 cm); image: 27⅞ x 26¼ in. (68.9 x 66.9 cm). Tate: Purchased 1970

RELATED ONLINE PROGRAMS

To find more information and updates and to register for free, visit britishart.yale.edu.

at home: Art in Context Talks

Tuesday, March 29, 12:30 pm
Prints by Bridget Riley
Charlotte Lefland, Senior Curatorial Assistant, Prints and Drawings, YCBA

Tuesday, April 26, 12:30 pm
Bridget Riley Paintings
Rachel Stratton, Postdoctoral Research Associate, YCBA

Tuesday, May 10, 12:30 pm
Alex Bacon, Curatorial Associate, Princeton University Art Museum

Tuesday, June 28, 12:30 pm
Lindsay Caplan, Assistant Professor of History of Art and Architecture, Brown University

Tuesday, July 19, 12:30 pm
Moran Sheleg, Associate Lecturer, Courtauld Institute of Art

at home: Digital Docent Tours

Thursdays, 12:30 pm: March 31, April 28, May 26, and June 30

at home: In Conversation

Friday, May 6, noon
The Im-perceptible
Richard A. Schiff (Yale PhD 1973), Effie Marie Cain Regents Chair in Art, The University of Texas at Austin

BRIDGET RILEY SYMPOSIUM

Saturday, May 14, 9 am–5 pm

Panels, 9 am–noon; 1–3 pm
Respondent, James Meyer (Yale BA 1984), Curator of Modern Art, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC

Keynote Conversation, 3:30–5 pm
Anoka Faruquee (Yale BA 1994), Professor and Co-director of Graduate Studies, Painting and Printmaking, Yale School of Art; and Pamela Lee (Yale BA 1988), Carnegie Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art, History of Art Department, Yale University; moderated by Molleen Theodore, Associate Curator of Programs, Yale University Art Gallery

Friday, June 17, noon
Material Concerns:
Preserving Appearance
Sandra Amman, painting conservator, Amann+Estabrook Conservation Associates, in discussion with Mark Aronson, Deputy Director and Chief Conservator, YCBA.

Friday, July 8, noon
Bridget Riley Drawings
Cynthia Burlingham, Deputy Director of Curatorial Affairs, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Jay A. Clarke, Rothman Family Curator, Prints and Drawings, The Art Institute of Chicago; and Rachel Federman, Associate Curator of Modern and Contemporary Drawings, The Morgan Library & Museum, New York; moderated by Rachel Stratton, Postdoctoral Research Associate, YCBA.

The Yale Center for British Art (YCBA) houses the largest collection of British art outside the United Kingdom, encompassing works in a range of media from the fifteenth century to the present. The museum offers a vibrant program of events and exhibitions year-round in person and online. Opened to the public in 1977, the YCBA's core collection and landmark building—designed by architect Louis I. Kahn—were a gift to Yale University from the collector and philanthropist Paul Mellon (Yale College, Class of 1929). Visit the YCBA at britishart.yale.edu and connect on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube @yalebritishart.

BACK COVER *Uneasy Centre*, 1963, synthetic emulsion on wood, 15⅝ in. (39 cm) diameter. The Lambrecht-Schadeberg Collection, Museum für Gegenwartskunst Siegen

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**YALE
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ART**

Bridget Riley: Perceptual Abstraction is on view from March 3 through July 24, 2022.

A fully illustrated digital publication accompanies the exhibition. Visit britishart.yale.edu for this and related resources.