



Bridget Riley CH, CBE (1926 -)

Nationality

British

Education

1949-52: Goldsmiths' College, University of London

1952-55: Royal College of Art



Taught

1959: initiated a basic design course at Loughborough School of Art

1960: Hornsey School of Art, and from 1962 at Croydon college of Arts and Crafts

1961-64: Croydon School of Art

Background

Riley studied at Goldsmiths' College from 1949 to 1952, and at the Royal College of Art from 1952 to 1955. She began painting figure subjects in a semi-impressionist manner and then changed to pointillism around 1958, mainly producing landscapes. She taught children for two years before lecturing at Loughborough School of Art, where she initiated a basic design course in 1959. She then taught at Hornsey School of Art, and from 1962 at Croydon School of Art. She worked for the J. Walter Thompson Group advertising agency from 1960, but gave up teaching and advertising a few years later.

The artist

In 1960 Riley evolved a style in which she explored the dynamic potentialities of optical phenomena. These so-called 'Op-art' pieces produce a disorienting physical effect on the eye. In her early work, geometric forms were harnessed to mathematical progressions have the effect of buckling the appearance of surfaces and an apparent release of visual energy. In 1967, when she introduced colour, the artist simplified her forms to release pictorial energy. Thus bands of colour were deployed to create an unfamiliar experience of light. Riley's statements clearly reveal that she aspired to an affective poetry. She wrote of her childhood experience in Cornwall that it formed the basis of her visual life. The sea, the rocks and valleys became agents of a greater reality that Riley was painting in order to 'make visible.' Paradoxically, this romancing of the eye is conducted within an idiom of formal stringency and aesthetic of pure phenomenology.

The paintings came to international notice when, in 1965, Riley exhibited alongside Victor Vasarely and others at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in an exhibition called 'The Responsive Eye'. It was around this time that the term "Op Art" gained currency. It captured the imagination of the public and became a signal of the swinging sixties; the fashion, design and advertising industries fell in love with its graphic value, and Riley became an art celebrity.

Riley began investigating colour in 1967, the year in which she produced her first stripe painting. Her paintings of the late 1960's and 70's became mainly concerned with the visual and emotional response to colour. In 1981, she visited Egypt was enchanted by the colourful hieroglyphic decoration in ancient Egyptian art, "The colours are purer and more brilliant than any I had used before", she wrote. Following her visit Riley created colours in what she called her "Egyptian palette" and produced works such as the "Ka" and "Ra" series. Riley was awarded the ACA Critics Prize in 1963 and in 1964 she was awarded a Peter



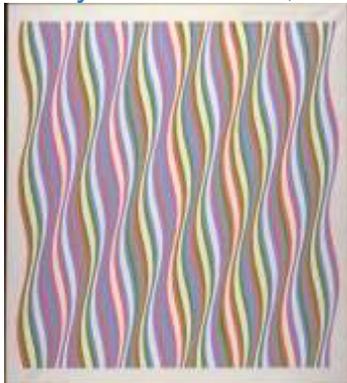
Stuyvesant Foundation Travel bursary to the USA. In 1968 she won an International Painting Prize at the Venice Biennale. She has been given honorary doctorates by Oxford (1993) and Cambridge (1995). In 1998 she became one of only 65 Companions of Honour in Britain. In 2012, she became the first woman to receive the Sikkens Prize, the Dutch art prize recognizing the use of colour. "Painting is, I think, inevitably an archaic activity and one that depends on spiritual values" (Bridget Riley).

Group shows include Young Contemporaries, London, 1955; Diversion, South London Art Gallery 1958; an Arts Council Touring Exhibition, 1962; Tooth's Critics Choice Exhibition, selected by Edward Lucie-Smith, 1963; John Moores' Exhibition, Liverpool, 1963; The New Generation, Whitechapel Gallery 1964; Movement, Hanover Gallery, London, 1964; Painting and Sculpture of a Decade 1954-1964, Tate Gallery, 1964; and Op Art, touring Ireland in 1967. Her numerous European and American exhibitions include The Sixties Collection Revisited, Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, Connecticut, 1978.

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Her first solo exhibition was held at Gallery One in 1962 with a second solo show the following year. Other solo shows were held at Nottingham University, 1963; Richard Feigen Gallery, New York and Feigen Palmer Gallery, Los Angeles, 1965; Museum of Modern Art, New York, with US tour, 1966; Venice Biennale, British Pavilion (with Phillip King), 1968; Hayward Gallery, London, 1971; National Gallery, Prague, 1971; Hayward Gallery and Kunsthalle Nuremberg, 1992; Kettle's Yard, Cambridge, 1995; and Waddington Galleries, London, 1996. (Tate Gallery).

Study for 'Entice 1, 1974'



In 1973 Riley rhythmic introduced bands and in this study were phased to create diagonal fractures across undulating waves. Groups of colour were employed in patterns that separated colours but pulled them into patterns that arrested one's vision and suggested that it could travel freely beyond the edge of the picture.