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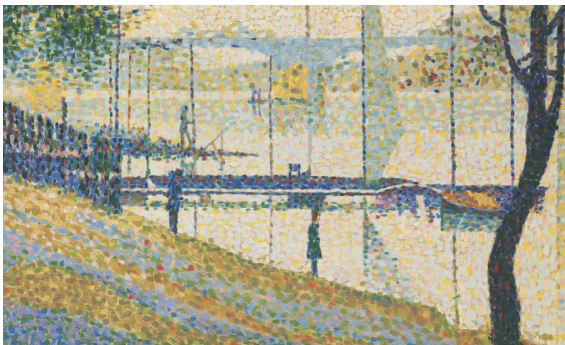
Hayward Gallery, London Bursting with movement and energy, always remaining in the here and now, Riley's paintings give their pleasures generously

Adrian Searle

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Bridget Riley's art is as sneaky as it is spectacular. Some of her paintings make you want to fall over and some make you feel like you're fainting, your eyes ping-ponging all over the place. Others are more stately in their visual rhythms, but the experience of a Riley is never static. The eye roams and the brain roams with it. You think you get it, and then you don't. All this with a few repeated intervals of black and white, some circles or stripes or blocks of colour. Riley's paintings and wall drawings are great to look at. They are also deadly serious.

This is the third major exhibition of Riley's work to be held at the Hayward, and the largest retrospective of her work to date. Travelling to from the National Galleries of Scotland, and spanning the artist's entire career, from drawings she made as a schoolgirl in the 1940s, to works completed this year, the exhibition is full of surprises as well as familiar works.

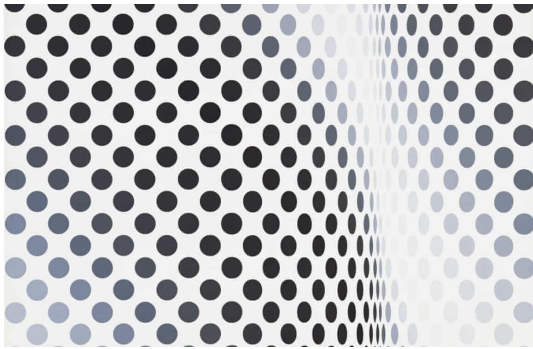


Detail of Copy after Le Pont de Courbevoie by Georges Seurat, 1959. Photograph: Bridget Riley 2019. All rights reserved.

Among the studies for paintings and early works - including her analytical transcriptions of Georges Seurat, painted to understand how pointillism worked - we find youthful life studies and, much later, portrait drawings of friends made in the 1980s. And, in the first gallery, a 2005 reconstruction of a 1963 aluminium enclosure, a sort of spiralling cell where we find ourselves enfolded in a black and white, optically

arresting work painted on its curved walls. I thought, suddenly, of those brainwashing cells beloved of 1960s spy thrillers.

There always seems to be a Bridget Riley show on somewhere in the world. She is as ubiquitous to British art as Henry Moore, though with better reason. Moore invented very little. Like many artists, after developing his own style, and with a few more or less interesting detours, he went into production, making Henry Moores rather than sculpture. After which, there is little to be said, and too much to look at. Moore's art is redolent of its period. Somehow, even in the op-art, swinging 60s works that first made her name, Riley's art is almost always in the present. In fact, its presentness, and the way her work bursts and shimmers, rolls and flickers and writhes before us, winking at us, humming with its painted intervals and visual beats, going in and out of phase, dopplering and creating grand visual chords, prisms the paintings out of their time. They are always in the here and now.



Detail from Pause, 1964. Photograph: Bridget Riley 2019. All rights reserved.

At 88, Riley remains full of curiosity, and is still enlarging and deepening her territory, simplifying and re-complicating her art as she goes. Always interesting, and often astonishing, I do feel that the Hayward show is a bit too big. I'd have preferred fewer works, a less dutiful hang. The lighting is a bit too warm for my liking. Her retrospective in the top-lit exhibition spaces of Tate Britain in 2003 had a kind of clarity the Hayward lacks. Riley's work likes daylight.

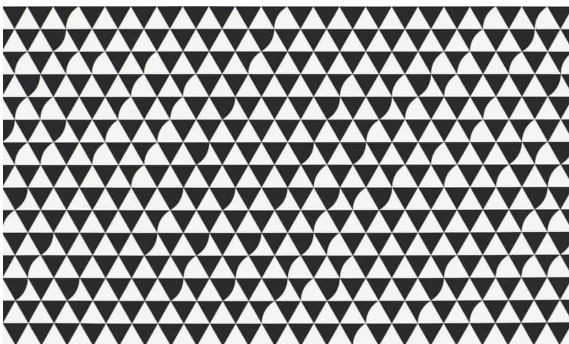
Colour and its intensity and tonality (degrees of light and dark) is relational, and comparative, and depends both on context and on the physics of light, and on the ways in which eye and brain perceive visual phenomena. How we see things, and what we see, has psychological as well as physiological and neurological dimensions. We could talk about simultaneous contrast and the grey scale, colour saturation and the way the cones and rods in the eye tire and begin to deceive us, but somehow her paintings go beyond the technical and the phenomenological. There's magic there.



Rajasthan, 2012. Photograph: Tim Nighswander/Bridget Riley 2019. All rights reserved. Courtesy the artist and David Zwirner

It's all relative, and subjective, a matter of the mind as well as the body. Memory and mood, youthfulness and age all play their part. Just as the ageing ear can no longer here the sounds made by bats, so the eye deteriorates. Never forget that we are bodies in time and space, our own time as much as the stilled time in the art we're looking at. The conditions of our encounters matter too. Whether we can sit or linger, whether an artwork is bigger or smaller than us, whether we can take it in all at once, or whether what we are encountering demands successive and individually incomplete, repeated looks. What happens when someone walks between us and a Riley painting, or one of those enormous wall drawings? Look how they're framed, watch how they are engulfed.

Riley makes us aware of all this. Her paintings are not eye tests, or colour charts, or perceptual games and conundrums. They're paintings, although without any surface texture or inflection; no brush marks, no wandering lines, no fuzzy edges, no blips in the nub of the canvas. Even her curves, where she uses them, are true. Invariably, she signs the paintings down the side of the canvas, out of harm's way. This small but evident human touch always provides me with a sign of release. It is like an exhalation.



Detail from Cascando, 2015. Photograph: Bridget Riley 2019. All rights reserved

Most of her paintings and her large-scale wall drawings have been completed by assistants, following Riley's own working drawings, her precise colour swatches and instructions. Her application is already complete. Her work is all in a literal sense flat and exact. But there is nothing flat or mechanical in Riley's art, which is full of life and movement and energy, slowness as well as instantaneousness. These works give their pleasures generously. Riley's wall drawings of abutted and overlapping open circles are

utterly fixating; I watch them doing their endless thing. I'm baffled by the diagonal rhomboid paintings and have never got with the compound curve paintings. Rajasthan, a 2012 red, orange and green wall painting, disappoints me. But her most recent works, with their muted coloured circles, show what spot paintings can do. They look back to John Constable's cloud studies, even as they seem to look out at us.

Some works creep up on you. Others demand that you move up close then step away, or watch rather than look at them, and let them take you over. There is some art that only needs to be seen once, or not at all. Riley's depends on multiple appraisals, on looking and looking away, on departures and returns, on refocusing and re-encountering. As Michael Corleone says in *The Godfather Part 3*, "Just when I thought I was out, they pull me back in."

Bridget Riley is at the Hayward Gallery, London, from 23 October to 26 January