



**DOERR DALLAS
VALUATIONS**



By Jonathan Horwich
Modern Art Specialist

BRIDGET RILEY, TURNING 91

'Nature is the origin and feeds what I make'

As Bridget Riley turns 91 we look back at the work of a truly groundbreaking artist whose life and work is influenced by nature in all its forms.

'I am a painter and that's what I do' said Bridget Riley in a recent BBC interview and looking back to the 60s you see just how fresh and new her work still is and as the years have gone on it only looks better, fresher and more new. Bridget Riley has spent 60 years pushing the boundaries of what is possible in art and continues to do so.

Cornwall has been a major influence on Bridget Riley's work almost from birth.

Her great grandfather had built a Cornish family home on the coast in the 19th Century and at the outbreak of the War in 1939, Bridget along with her sister mother and aunt decamped to Cornwall where they remained for the duration. Her father was away fighting and early on in the war was declared 'missing' which remained the case until happily at the cessation of hostilities the family was reunited. So in these formative years her influences were all female as they shared a small four room Cornish cottage. Bridget didn't go to school for the five years the family was in Cornwall which she described as 'heavenly, there was no transport and nowhere to go and no particular reason to go anywhere' She was able to absorb the world around her watching the way waves move the unique shapes they make, there was just nothing else to do but to look and appreciate the world around her in this extraordinarily beautiful coastal landscape. There was a war on so there was no petrol for private cars and no public transport so you had to walk everywhere. Bridget's fate as an artist was probably sealed during this time as both her mother and aunt had studied Art at Goldsmiths College so probably the foundations of her artistic future were laid and set during these heavenly five years The shapes the sea makes as it rolls in and out on the tides were endlessly fascinating to Bridget. As she says herself 'they will never be the same again each and every time they're different, every single

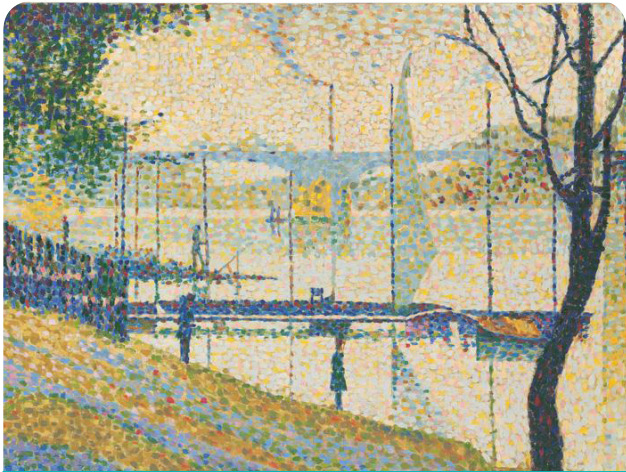
wave every single ripple, every single breaking of a wave on a shore or rock all are unique and have never happened before and will never happen again.

After the war Bridget began her studies in London and was classically trained at Goldsmiths College then followed by the Royal College of Art for some more classical training, all focusing on painting, drawing and sculpture. Her classmates included Peter Blake, Frank Auerbach and John Bratby. Her student work while at the Royal College is very much what was expected of you in the 1950s, sombre and faintly French narrative paintings nothing at all like you associate with Bridget's work now. Bridget left the RCA in 1955 and intent on being a painter she set out to find her style, she found the work of Georges Seurat resonated and strongly influenced her then and for the rest of her life. She saw in his work something similar to what she was looking for, something new and different. For a while during 1959, she experimented by both adopting his style and by faithfully copying one of his pictures called

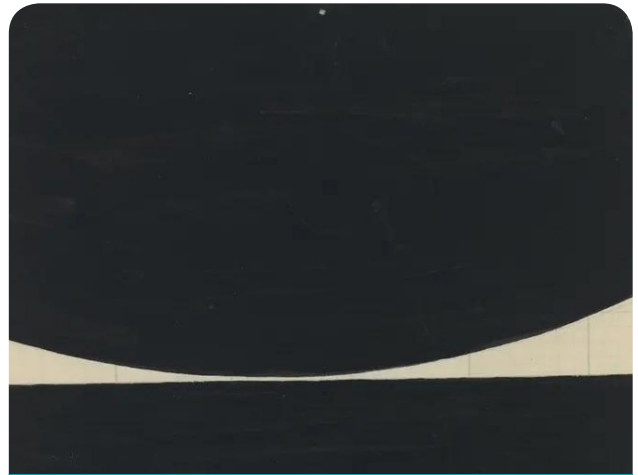


Bridget Riley's Seurat 'style' original work from 1960

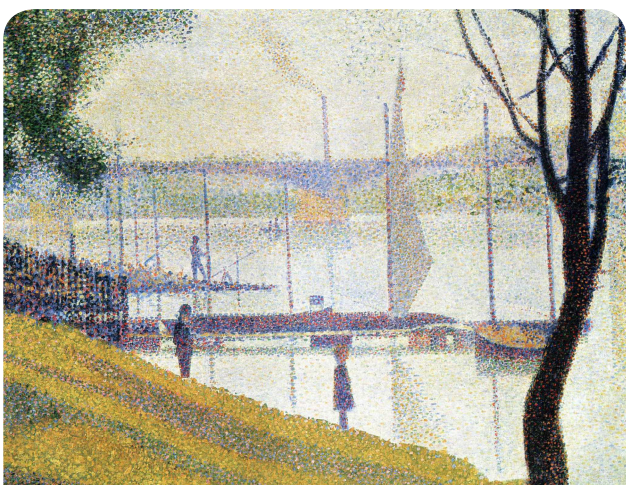
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Bridget Riley's 1959 Copy after George Seurat's work titled Le Pont de Courbevoie



The Kiss 1961 by Bridget Riley shown in her first solo show the same year



Seurat's original 1887 version

'The Bridge at Cordova' a work dating from 1887. Her progress towards what we see as her familiar work today moved more rapidly as the 60s dawned, when everything that was needed to change social barriers and norms fell away and everyone was open to new ideas and looking for ways to progress fashion and trends further and faster than ever before. Bridget viewed the Art world as pretty stagnant in the 1950s, indeed she had a particular phrase she used to describe it 'Infectious apathy and vicious insularity'.

At this time the Whitechapel Gallery in London was at the epicentre of what was new and happening in Art, its director Brian Robertson was bringing over the work of the American Abstract Expressionists such as Mark Rothko and Jackson Pollock which encouraged the young British artists of Bridget's generation to claim this space to showcase their work with confidence that it was all new and fresh and of its time.

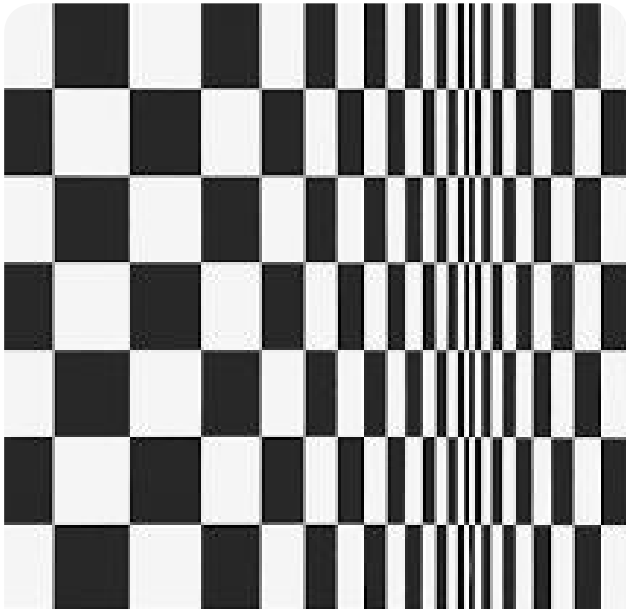
Bridget was inspired to create work that looked like nothing anyone had ever seen before, she not only broke the mould she literally blew it up! 'The Kiss' appears as one of her earliest groundbreaking images in 1961, in her first show in London when she really hit her stride and she had finally broken away from all the 19th Century conventions she had been taught about constructing a work of art.

We use 'Abstract' to describe Bridget's work, but for me and many others including Bridget it's not the right or appropriate word, it's something else that draws from

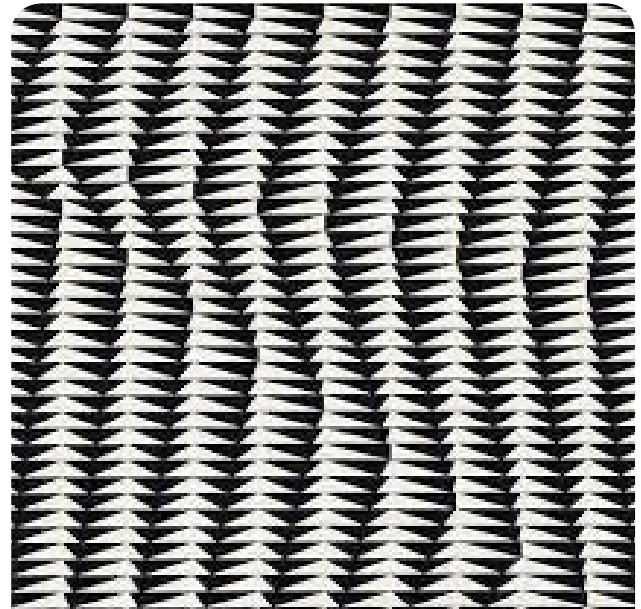


Blaze 1 1964

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Movement in squares 1961



Shift 1963



Black to White discs 1962

nature and shows nature. In these early years all of her work is black and white, what changes are the shapes, forms and movement variations. By 1962 discs appears with the movement expressed by the fading of the discs from left to right strong towards the centre and then fading out towards the sides this picture marks the beginning of experimentation between what the artist sees and what the viewer experiences, experimenting all the time with what it feels like to look at a work.

At the same time, the early 60's witnessed the arrival of the Op Art, Psychedelic Movement with the appearance of mind bending art experiences teamed up with light and mechanical ways of making patterns to create optical illusions for an audience hungry for Psychedelic experiences.

It was a blockbuster exhibition of mixed International Contemporary Artists at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1965 that sealed Bridget's reputation as a major international artist. The exhibition took NY by storm, welcome as this was Bridget was totally taken by surprise and made uncomfortable by seeing how fast her art flowed out from MOMA onto the streets of NY. Within days of the opening her images had been siphoned off onto dresses, skirts T-shirts and fabrics of all sorts which defined the era for the rest of the 60's.



The Who sporting a Blaze 1
Bridget Riley Tee shirt (unofficial)

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1965 NY catwalk image of a Bridget Riley inspired bikini and bath robe



Another catwalk Bridget Riley design dress circa 1965



In 2015 Bridget returned to Black and white with this work inspired by tree leaves in the wind



The corridors of the 10th Floor of St Marys hospital Paddington Showing a special commission by Bridget



Bridget with her specially commissioned work for the Annenberg Court at the National Gallery London

However in commercial terms it was all out of her hands, imagine creating a series of paintings for a major exhibition and in the next morning it's key elements are all in stock in Bloomingdale's, all without your permission or involvement.

Colour appears in 1967 when along with the sculptor Philip King Bridget is selected to represent Britain at the Venice Biennial, where she becomes the first Briton and the first woman to win the International prize for painting.

Bridget's work has continued to evolve and change over the intervening sixty years, in 2015 she returned to Black and White, Discs re-appear in her Annenberg Court painting for the National Gallery and now her work brightens up the long corridor walls of major hospitals in London and Liverpool. A trip to Egypt in the late 70's brought a new series of works limited to the Egyptian palette of five colours only and the market for her work, once focussed only on the 1960's has now broadened out to include all and everything and we all at Doerr Dallas wish Bridget a very happy 91st birthday on April 24th.

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