

Bridget Riley

Wall Works 1983–2023

Potsdamer Straße 77-87, 10785 Berlin

9 June – 19 August 2023

Opening: Friday, 9 June, 6 – 8 pm

Galerie Max Hetzler is pleased to present *Wall Works 1983–2023*, a solo exhibition of **Bridget Riley's** work in Potsdamer Straße 77-87. This is the artist's ninth solo exhibition with the gallery and represents the most comprehensive retrospective of her wall paintings to date. Thirteen compositions, half of which are loaned by international public collections and four of which are new, offer an overview of this important body of work.

Those entering the exhibition rooms of Galerie Max Hetzler will have the opportunity to fully immerse themselves in the world of the British painter Bridget Riley (b. 1931). Thirteen large-format paintings stretch across the walls, spread over two floors. Together, the works form a serene school of vision. For Riley, the act of seeing is not a given. On the contrary, viewing, observing, looking, and focusing are actions which are often misunderstood by their performers. According to the artist, the challenge of modern art is 'learning to paint once more and to reinvent painting for oneself.' Her point of departure lies in the many ways in which the world appears to us, and the question of how one might translate seeing into painting. Riley considers so-called 'realism' to be a misunderstanding. In a 1998 conversation, she sums up the misconception of what we consider as painted reality noting: 'people would be very shocked indeed if the world itself was as dead in its appearance as they seem to expect a painting to be.'

So, how do we see? The presented murals are composed of elements of visible phenomena – the toolbox of appearances. Colour. Shape. Light. Darkness. Outline. Form. Support. Yet, the impression that these minimalist forms go hand in hand with a simple visual experience is deceptive. Perception plays tricks on us. *Dancing to the Music of Time*, for instance, is the title of a work created for the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, in 2022. Here, what appears to be a collection of disparate dots suddenly begins to move as the viewer's gaze sweeps across the surface. The eye, Riley notes, is 'surprised by flashes of light'. Similarly, in *Composition with Circles 5* from 2005, our sense of sight falters as the circles begin to oscillate. There is no primary or secondary narrative; our lenses try in vain to focus.

In her paintings, Riley takes up a tradition that reaches far back into art history. In the 19th century, no movement was more concerned with the phenomenon of perception than Impressionism, as demonstrated by the French painter Georges Seurat, in whose works cities and their inhabitants dissolve into trembling dots which could disperse at any



Bridget Riley, *Rajasthan*, 2012
Photo: Staatsgalerie Stuttgart

moment, like flocks of birds. In the same period, the tricks played on us by light and shadow prompted the German physicist and physiologist Hermann von Helmholtz to quip that the human eye is 'a badly crafted instrument' which he would feel 'fully justified in returning', if sold to him by an optician. Afterimages, false colours, flashes of light – Helmholtz's list of grievances was long. Riley, however, turns this assessment on its head, presenting these supposed weaknesses as strengths. The idiosyncrasies of the eye form the basis for the pleasure of seeing. They are not flaws at all, but rather provide the abundance from which art can draw.

This diversity is a constant theme in Riley's work; in *Intervals Wall Painting*, 2021, simple chords of colour in three varying tones prompt optical surprises; in *Rajasthan*, 2012, the eye searches in vain for the boundary where the painting ends and the wall begins; in *Cosmos*, 2017, the dots seem to float above the wall like a constellation of stars in space, alternating between proximity and distance.

Bridget Riley's works remind us that we need painting to understand the exhilaration of seeing.

Julia Voss

Coinciding with this retrospective of Bridget Riley's wall paintings in Berlin, the artist's first ever ceiling painting was unveiled in the British School at Rome in early May 2023. Entitled *Verve*, the large-scale work has been installed in the foyer of the BSR, covering four barrel vaults of the ceiling and using Riley's 'Egyptian palette' to 'offer a glimpse of nature in her most promising and serene mood'.¹

Bridget Riley was born in 1931 in London, United Kingdom, where she lives and works. Solo exhibitions of the artist's work have been held in international institutions, including the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2023); Art Institute of Chicago (2022 and 2014); Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern; Yale Center for British Art, New Haven; The Philips Collection, Washington, D.C. (all 2022); Hayward Gallery, London (2019–2020); National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh; National Gallery, London (both 2019); Kawamura Memorial DIC Museum of Art, Sakura (2018); Gemeentemuseum, The Hague; Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh (both 2016); The Courtauld Institute, London (2015); Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Siegen (2012); The National Gallery, London (2010); Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris (2008); Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney (2004); Tate Britain, London (2003); Dia Center for the Arts, New York (2000); Serpentine Gallery, London (1999); National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo (1980); Museum of Fine Arts, Dallas (1978); Kunsthalle Bern; Kunsthalle Düsseldorf (both 1971); Kunstverein Hannover (1970); Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam (1969); and The

¹ Bridget Riley, British School at Rome, 2023.

Museum of Modern Art, New York (1966), among others. The artist represented Britain at the 34th Venice Biennale (1968) where she was awarded the prize for painting. Riley participated in Documenta IV (1968) and Documenta VI (1977).

Bridget Riley's works can be found in the public collections of over 113 museums and foundations worldwide, including Centre Pompidou, Paris; Dallas Museum of Art; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Staatsgalerie Stuttgart; and Tate, London, among others.

The artist's work will be the subject of a solo exhibition at The Morgan Library & Museum, New York, from June to October 2023.

[Further exhibitions and events](#)

Berlin:

23 June – 19 August 2023

Werner Büttner

Malerei 1981–2022

Bleibtreustraße 45 & 15/16, 10623

23 June – 19 August 2023

the yellow light at 6pm

Remembering, envisioning, sensing landscape

Darren Almond, Georg Baselitz, Glenn Brown, André Butzer, Sarah Crouner, Carroll Dunham, Hedwig Eberle, Ida Ekblad, Günther Förg, Katharina Grosse, Alex Israel, Melike Kara, Alex Katz, Friedrich Kunath, Beth Letain, Jake Longstreth, Tal R, David Salle, Ben Sledsens, Sean Scully, Julian Schnabel, David Schutter, Mònica Subidé, Vivian Suter, Liliane Tomasko, Tursic & Mille, Rinus Van de Velde, Grace Weaver, Emma Webster, Toby Ziegler
curated by Christian Malycha
Goethestraße 2/3, 10623

Paris:

7 June – 29 July 2023

Toby Ziegler

Blind men exploring the skin of an elephant

46 & 57 rue du Temple, 75004

London:

2 June – 29 July 2023

Thomas Struth

41 Dover Street, W1S 4NS

Marfa:

4 May – 10 December 2023

Grace Weaver

Indoor Paintings

1976 Antelope Hills Road

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