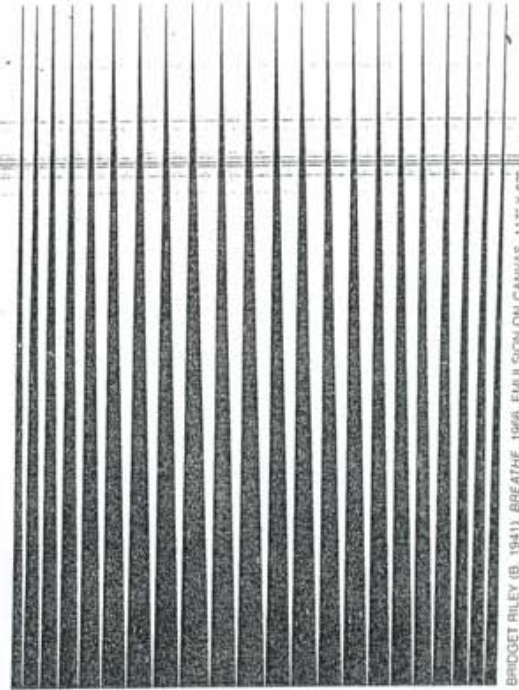


Parabolic  
Curve and  
Vocabulary  
and

"I want to create an image which will stimulate a fresh way of seeing again something that was experienced but has been forgotten with the passage of time."  
—Bridget Riley

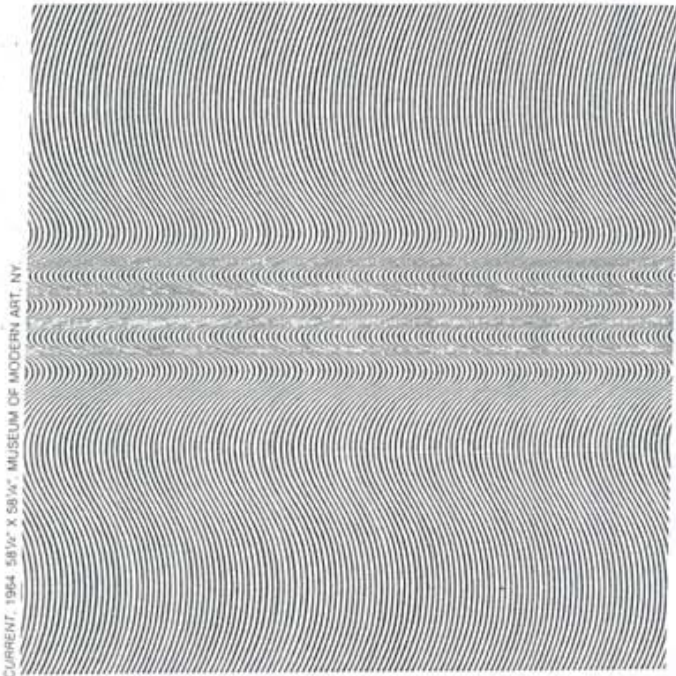
# BRIDGET RILEY CREATING A "MYSTERIOUS PRESENCE"



BRIDGET RILEY (B. 1941) BREATHE. 1966. EMULSION ON CANVAS. 117" X 82". PRIVATE COLLECTION, LONDON.

Bridget Riley bases her paintings on a single "disruptive event." In *Breathe* (above), the symmetrical arrangement of positive and negative shapes sets up a rhythm of expansion and contraction with the greatest tension in the center.

In *Current* (left), Riley repeats long, thin, vertical lines. Curves in the center create an area of wildly vibrating movement.



CURRENT. 1964. 58 1/2" X 58 1/2". MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NY.

The painting on the cover and those on the next six pages were done by British Op artist Bridget Riley and, as you've seen, their visual effects certainly make a strong impression. Are these like any paintings you've ever seen before? A better question might be: Do these paintings remind you of any *experiences* you've ever had? Maybe it would help to look at the titles — *Current*, *Breathe*, and *Movement in Squares*. Bridget Riley isn't interested in painting sensational "special effects." She wants to create visual equivalents for certain states of mind. Her almost hypnotic images (which she calls "mysterious presences") are meant to remind the viewer of a feeling or memory.

Riley's creation of the painting *Movement in Squares* (right) is a good example of the way she works. The idea came to her during the summer of 1960, when she was traveling in Italy. One hazy afternoon, the artist happened to look out her hotel window onto the black and white patterned pavement of the plaza below. As she watched, a violent thun-

Look at these paintings separately. Keep staring at each one for a while. How are you feeling? Does everything start to move; are you getting a little dizzy? Are you even beginning to see colors — yellows, reds, greens in these black and white paintings? Do all these images contain any sort of meaning?

BRIDGET RILEY (B. 1941), BREATHE, 1966, EMULSION ON CANVAS, 117 X 81  
PRIVATE COLLECTION, LONDON

derstorm swept across the square and the whole scene seemed to completely dissolve, creating a feeling of anxiety. This anxious feeling was resolved as the storm moved away and the plaza looked just as it had before. She remembers thinking, "I wonder if this breakup could somehow be given an equivalent in painting?" She began to try and work out a pictorial vocabulary which would evoke certain feelings or states of mind. She would first establish a *unit* — a **shape, a line, a space** — and **transform** it in some way: **tilt** it or **expand** and **contract** it. She would **repeat** the unit, gradually **changing** it until she brought it to the point of highest **tension**. She would then **close the cycle** by returning to the original shape.

Now that you know more about what Bridget Riley is trying to do in her work, try looking again at these

three paintings and the others in this issue. Which ones make you feel anxious, which are uplifting, and which make you feel as if you are floating or almost in a hypnotic trance? What kinds of natural events might have inspired some of Riley's other works — an earthquake; breathing; going over rapids in a stream; watching smoke rise; feeling a breeze gently rippling colored vines? Can you pick out some of the **units** Riley uses to express these events — **squares; triangles; long, thin, wavy lines**? How does she use **positive and negative shapes; repetition; variation and progression; symmetry and asymmetry**?

In *Movement in Squares* (below), the artist repeats and varies the same shape to create the illusion of squares disappearing into deep space.

MOVEMENT IN SQUARES, 1962, TEMPERA, ARTS COUNCIL OF GREAT BRITAIN, LONDON

