

JOHN BERGGRUEN GALLERY

228 GRANT AVENUE SAN FRANCISCO CALIFORNIA 94108 TEL 415-781-4629

FAX 415-781-0126 GALLERY@BERGGRUEN.COM WWW.BERGGRUEN.COM

SFGATE

Berggruen presents Bridget Riley's first S.F. exhibition

By Jessica Zack

Published 12:53 pm, Tuesday, June 14, 2016

As a young London artist in the 1950s, Bridget Riley was painting figurative studies and nature scenes when Georges Seurat's Pointillist experiments sparked in her a kind of artistic and perceptual awakening. She painted a copy of Seurat's "Bridge of Courbevoie" in 1959 to better understand his mastery of color's interplay with light. That first experiment with color theory set in motion what would become more than five decades of ardent inquiry into the nature of color, not as the means to conveying life but as the subject itself of Riley's art.

Now 32 of Riley's large abstract canvases and smaller works on paper are on view on two floors at John Berggruen Gallery in what is the world-renowned artist's first San Francisco exhibition.

Working with a limited, restrained palette, Riley's signature stripes and curves in tangerine, ochre, lilac and soft green appear to oscillate and pulse. "At the core of color lies a paradox," said the now 85-year-old artist. "It is simultaneously one thing and several things — you can never see color by itself; it is always affected by other colors."

Riley's fame soared after her inclusion in the Museum of Modern Art's famous 1965 exhibition, "The Responsive Eye." "She was one of the premier practitioners of Op Art, and she's remained stalwart in her dedication throughout her career to this single-minded inquiry into the visual play of how colors relate to one another," says John Berggruen.

His elegant survey of Riley's work dating back to 1970 resulted from Berggruen's discovery of a shared love of the artist's work with far-flung art-world colleagues.

"I got in touch with private art dealer friends in London, Berlin and elsewhere, and David Zwirner, who represents Riley in the U.S., and all of these strong advocates of her work came together with enthusiasm and work to loan. Suddenly this became the largest show she's had on the West Coast. It was such a joy to see it all come together. Despite her important museum shows and books, she has never been as well known here on the West Coast as she is in Europe and New York."

Berggruen admits that even more than with some other artists, Riley's tonal abstract work "absolutely must be seen in person."

JOHN BERGGRUEN GALLERY

228 GRANT AVENUE SAN FRANCISCO CALIFORNIA 94108 TEL 415-781-4629

FAX 415-781-0126 GALLERY@BERGGRUEN.COM WWW.BERGGRUEN.COM

“It can be hard to describe, like when we talk about the importance of Mark Rothko, but in person there is a texture, one could say an aura.”

Riley once said of her work: “There’s no theory in them. The only way anyone can enter my painting is by looking.”

Jessica Zack is a freelance writer who frequently covers art and film for The San Francisco Chronicle.

Bridget Riley: The Interactive Character of Color, 1970-2014: 9:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Monday-Friday, 10:30 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday. Through June 30. John Berggruen Gallery, 228 Grant Ave., S.F. (415) 781-4629. www.berggruen.com