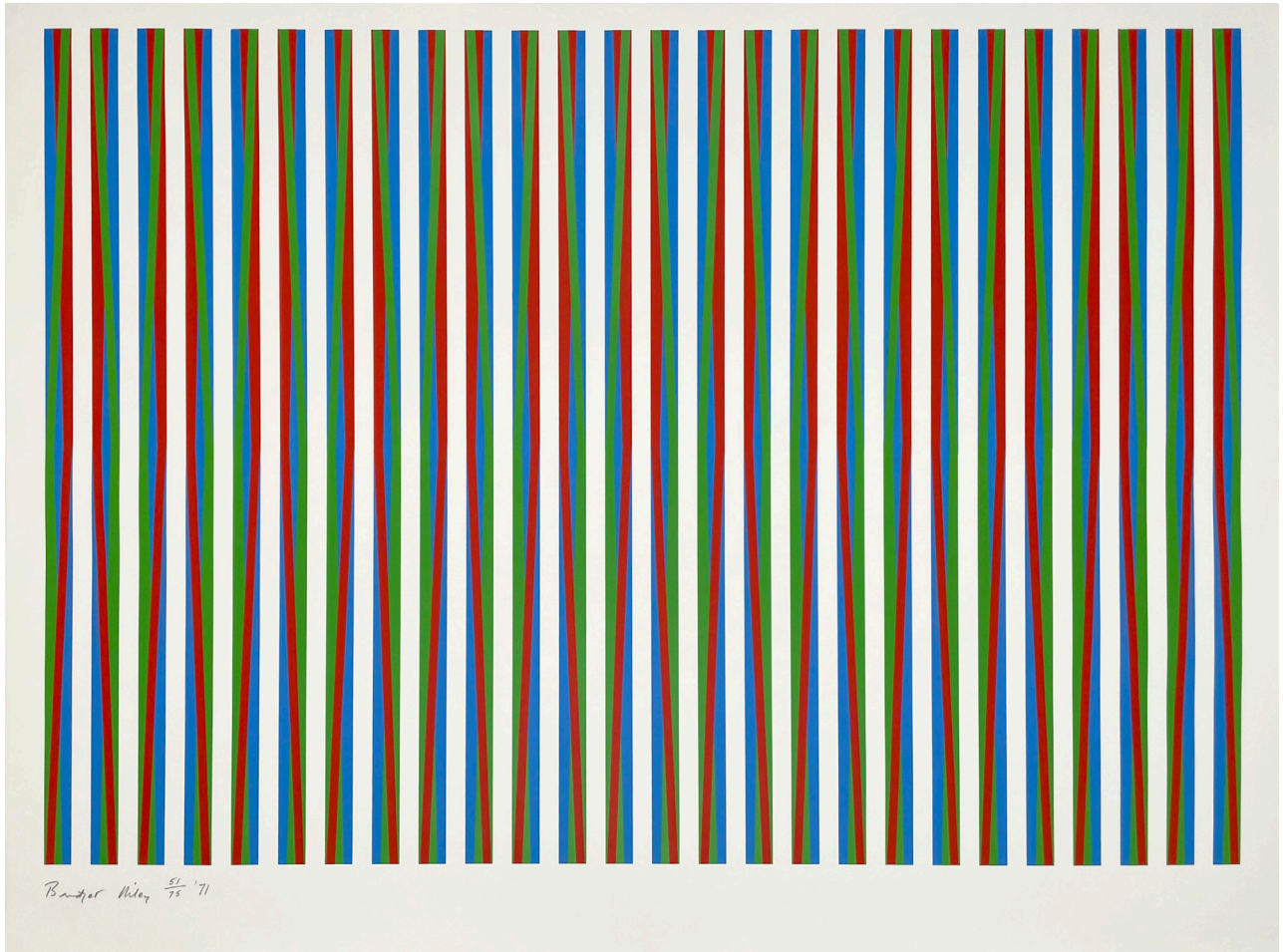


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Bridget Riley, Firebird, 1971



**ARTIST**

Bridget Riley (b.1931)

**TITLE**

Firebird

**MEDIUM**

Screenprint in three colours, on wove paper

**DATE**

1971

**SHEET**

30 1/8 x 40 in : 76.5 x 101.7 cm

**EDITION**

From the edition of 75

**PRINTER**

Printed by Kelpira Studio, London

**PUBLISHER**

Published by the artist and donated to the Hayward Gallery, London

**LITERATURE**

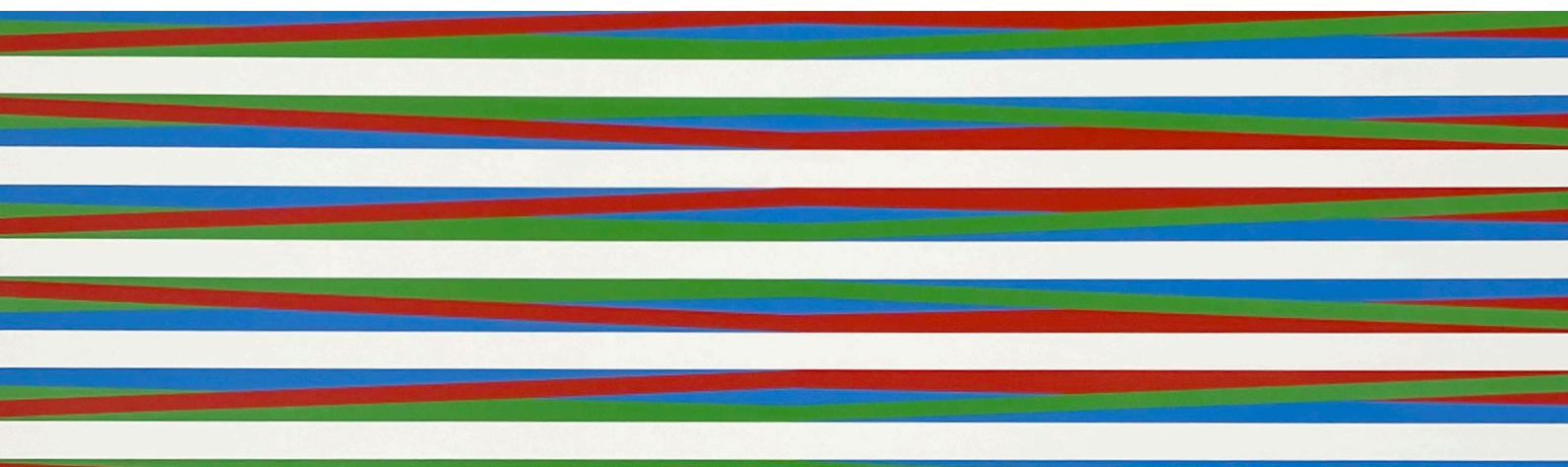
"Bridget Riley - The Complete Prints 1962-2020", The Bridget Riley Art Foundation, Thames & Hudson, London, 2020, no. BRS 10, pp.90-91 (illus.)  
Schubert 9

**EXHIBITED**

Kunstverein Göttingen 1972, Druckgraphik, no.2  
Arts Council, London, 1973-74, no.75  
British Council, London, 1976-78, no.39  
Arts Council, London, 1980-84, no.16  
21st International Biennial of Graphic Art, 1995  
British Council, London, 2004-05  
Arts Council, London, 2001-03  
British Council, London, 2004-05  
Städtische Galerie, Villingen-Schwenningen, 2013  
Museum in Kulturspeicher Würzburg, 2019

**REFERENCE**

A22-85



Executed in 1971, the present work is Riley's first screenprint in colours and relates directly to the pivotal painting *Zing I* of the same year, a study for which was illustrated on the cover of Studio International published that summer. The issue coincided with Riley's landmark touring European retrospective, which completed its run to great acclaim at the Hayward Gallery, London, during this period. *Zing I* featured in the exhibition, which attracted more than 40,000 visitors and earned Riley significant critical acclaim: Robert Melville, writing in the New Statesman, claimed that 'No painter, alive or dead, has ever made us more conscious of our eyes than Bridget Riley' (R. Melville, 'An Art Without Accident', New Statesman, 23 July 1971, p. 121). The coloured stripe paintings that dominated her oeuvre between 1967 and 1974 represent the cornerstone of her optical investigations: she would return to the format in the early 1980s.

In *Firebird* and related studies, she began to experiment with overlapping and entwining her thin pigmented strips, creating a chromatic complexity that would find extended expression in her subsequent curve paintings. Vertical twisting bars of the three primary colours Red, Blue and Green, separated by equal areas of uncoloured space, generate a powerful, spirited and active array of imagined colours for the viewer. The eye constantly darts over the composition conjuring

yellows, oranges and mauves which are the product of a diligently and brilliantly produced investigation into relative hue. Her preparatory works on paper, comprising pencil drawing with hand-mixed ribbons of gouache, provided a critical laboratory in which she calculated her increasingly daring perceptual effects.

The editions produced by Riley throughout the 1960s totalled 14 in black and white, and 4 in grey which was seemingly the bridge that she had to cross to colour. The 1970s brought 18 prints, beginning with *Firebird*, all in colour. As *Firebird* is the first print in colours in Bridget Riley's canon, it therefore occupies an important place in the history of Op Art.

The edition of 75 was originally donated to the Hayward Gallery to raise funds for the institution. Due to economies made with the quality of the paper which turned out to be overly acidic, many examples within the edition are discoloured and some have not survived.

The Arts Council of Great Britain has a copy of this work in their permanent collection.

RARE.



## Bridget Riley

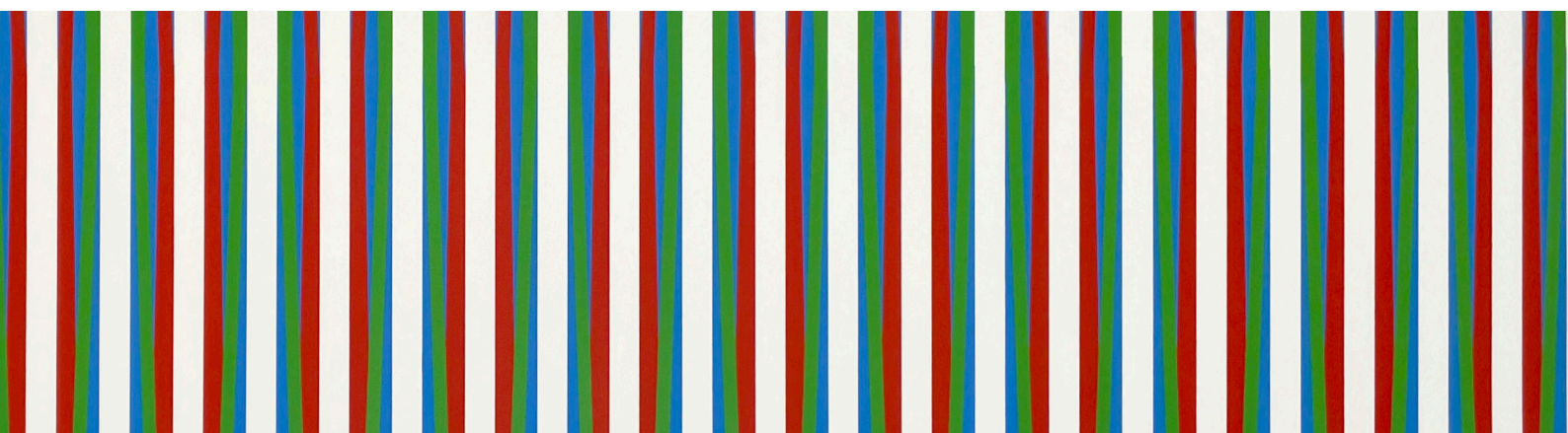
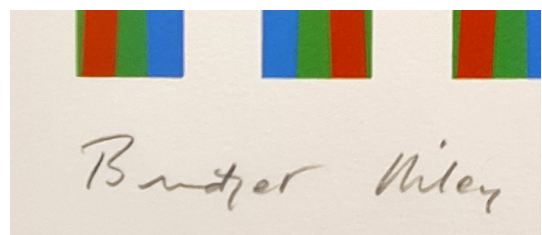
Bridget Riley created some of the most era-defining images in the history of art, her black and white optical art provided a visual summary for 'Swinging London'. By 1960 and approaching her late-twenties, Riley had settled into a dynamic style of hard-edged abstraction with, often, wild optical properties. She came to international attention in 1965 when her work was included in MoMA's famous exhibition *The Responsive Eye*, presenting her pictures with other artists of the Op Art movement, and illustrating her painting *Current* on the cover. She worked almost exclusively in a black, white and grey palette until 1967, when colour was allowed into her work and the first of the famous stripe paintings was produced. In the following year she represented Great Britain at the Venice Biennale for which she received the International Painting Prize.

Throughout her career, Riley has exhibited an unwavering commitment to experimentation and innovation. She has continuously pushed the boundaries of her practice, exploring various techniques and approaches to create fresh and exciting work. Her rigorous investigation of colour interaction, line and form has resulted in a diverse oeuvre that encompasses paintings, prints and murals.

Riley's significance extends beyond her technical prowess and aesthetic achievements. Her contributions to hard-edge abstraction have had a transformative impact on the entire field of contemporary art. By developing mastery of a visually dynamic style that relies on optical illusions, something first explored by many artists internationally during the 1950s, Riley challenged traditional notions of representation and perception. Her work opened new avenues of artistic exploration, inspiring countless artists and paving the way for subsequent generations of abstract and conceptual artists.

In Britain, Riley's influence has been particularly profound. Her early exhibitions at the Hayward and Tate Galleries in London catapulted her to prominence, making her a central figure in the British art scene. Abundant and frequent retrospectives of her work have been presented internationally at leading institutions from her mid-career period onwards.

Bridget Riley is considered to be one of the most important artists living and working in Britain.





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All enquiries:  
Brian Balfour-Oatts  
[brian@archeus.com](mailto:brian@archeus.com)  
US: 1-212-652-1665  
UK: +44 (0)7979 695079