ARCHEUS / POST-MODERN

www.archeus.com

Bridget Riley, Right Angle Curves Study No.4, 1966

ARTIST
Bridget Riley (b.1931)

TITLE
Right Angle Curves Study No.4

MEDIUM
Gouache on paper

DATE
1966

SIZE
8 3/4 x 15 1/2 in : 22.3 x 39.4 cm

INSCRIPTIONS
Signed and dated lower left, and titled "Rt Angle Curves study no 4." in pencil

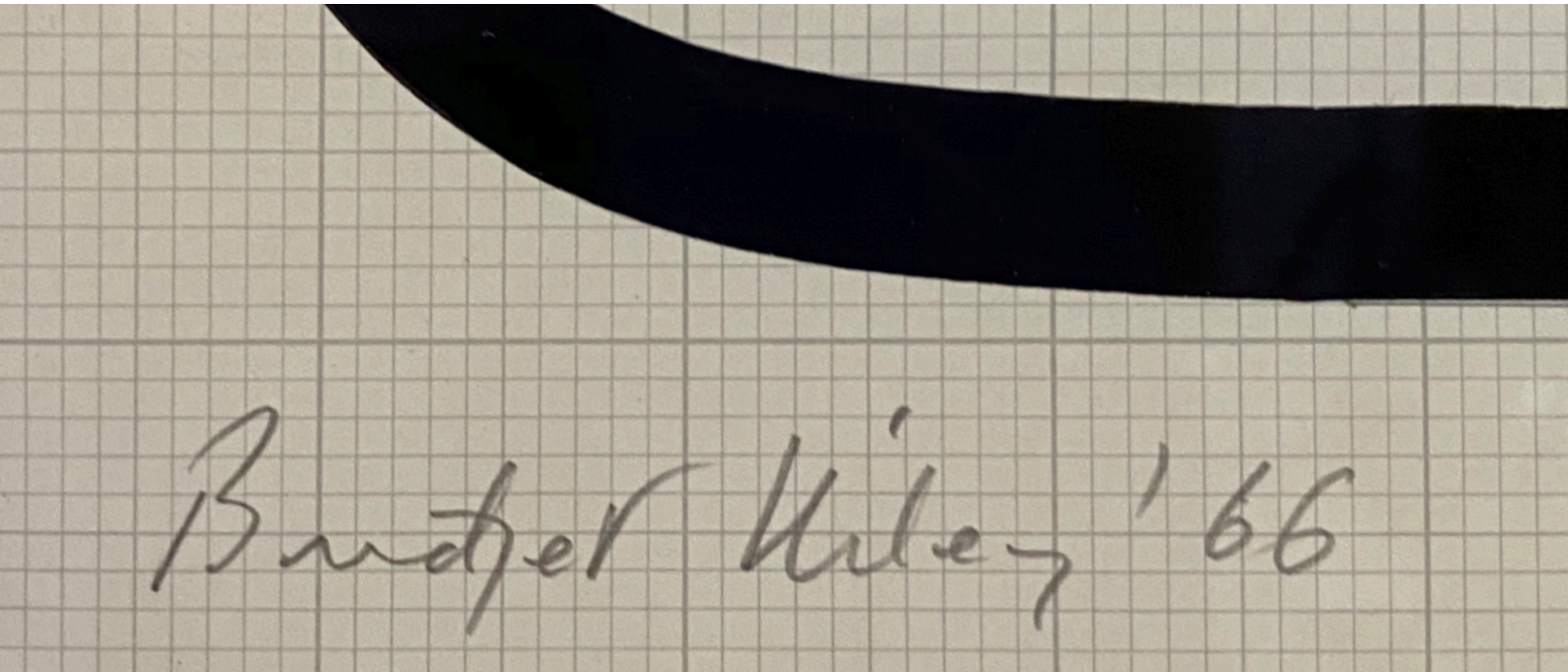
EXHIBITED
Bridget Riley : Black & White, Karsten Schubert, London, May 29 - Jul 14, 2001, no.8; with Sprüth Magers, Art Basel 2019

PROVENANCE
Karsten Schubert, London
Anne Faggionato, London
Private Collection, London
Private Collection, California

REFERENCE
AC17-12

An entrancing arrangement of shifting lines, Bridget Riley's Right Angle Curves Study No.4 is an early study intended for one of the artist's ground breaking series of black and white paintings that has come to elicit the zeitgeist of 1960s 'Swinging London'. The acutely altering repetition found within Right Angle Curves Study No.4's composition expertly demonstrates Riley's sustained investigations into visual phenomena. Eschewing optical systems based on scientific theory, Riley's iconic Op Art paintings focus on bold, yet systematic geometries. By designing schematics that destabilise perceptual experience she draws the viewer into a visual dialogue with the image. 'I wanted the space between the picture plane and the spectator to be active,' she explained of her early paintings, and 'It was in that space, paradoxically, the painting 'took place'' (B. Riley, 'The Experience of Painting', in R. Kudielka (ed.), The Eye's Mind: Bridget Riley. Collected Writings 1965-1999, London, 1999, p. 122). While few others have so thoroughly engaged in the analysis of the sensations of vision as Riley has while exploring the parameters of abstract art, her arrestingly powerful compositions informed not only the art, but also the fashion and design of one of the most formidable generations in modern British culture - lending to the power of the British Invasion that resulted in the rise of counterculture on both sides of the Atlantic.

Through the extensive study of the optical discoveries of Neo-Impressionist painters like Georges Seurat and the energy and motion of the Italian Futurists, Riley had come to discover that sight works together with the mind to effect perception. Expanding on the perceptual theories that played a central role in post-war philosophical and artistic debate, Riley began to explore the way sensory perception controls our understanding of reality, and to challenge the reliability of our senses through the volatile nature of her abstract images. By founding her practice on these principles, and creating paintings in which kinesis is only manifested in the mind of the viewer, Riley effectively embraced an existential uncertainty, a condition she later aligned with the loss of an overarching belief system in modern society: 'In general, my paintings are multifocal. You can't call it unfocused space, but not being fixed to a single focus is very much of our time. It's something that seems to have come about in the last hundred years or so. Focusing isn't just an optical activity, it is also a mental one. I think this lack of a centre has something to do with the loss of certainties that Christianity had to offer. There was a time when meanings were focused and reality could be fixed; when that sort of belief disappeared, things became uncertain and open to interpretation. We can no longer hope as the Renaissance did that 'man



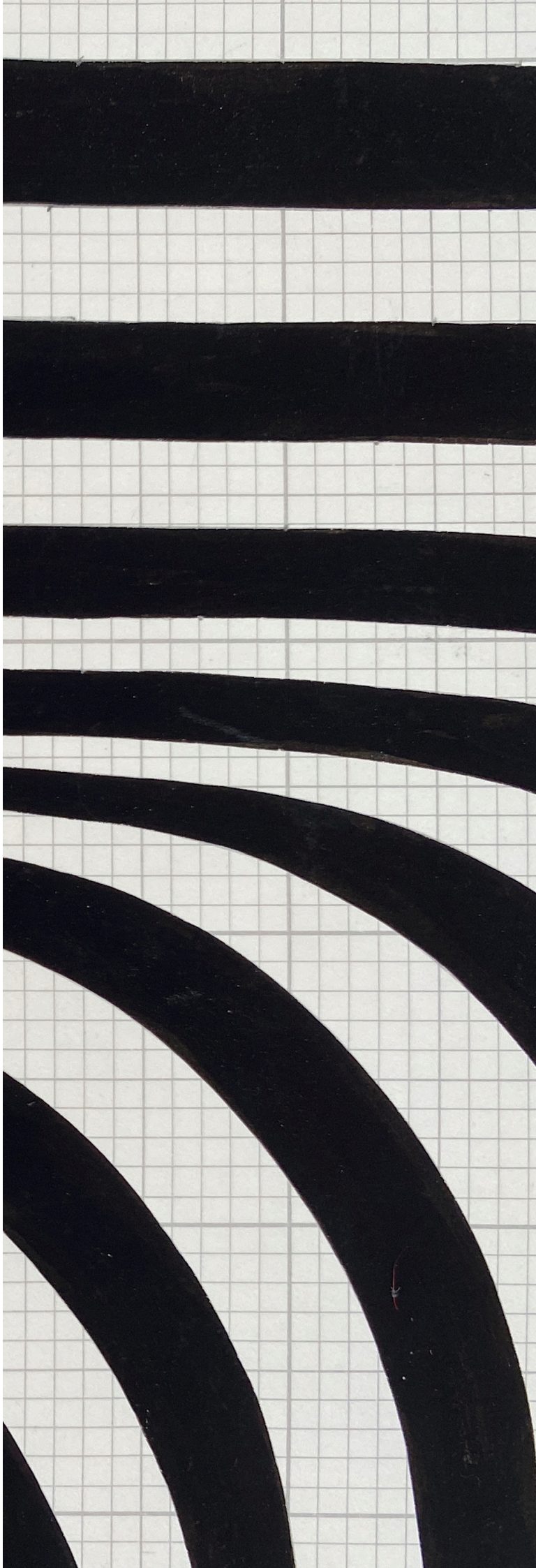
is the measure of all things' (B. Riley quoted in L. Cooke, Bridget Riley: Reconnaissance, reproduced on http://www.diacenter.org).

In 1965, a selection of Riley's black and white paintings was included in the landmark exhibition, The Responsive Eye at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Cast under the leading light of a new art movement known as Op Art, Riley's works hung alongside artists of varying practices, all of whom the curator William Seitz believed were creating works that 'exist less as objects than as generators of perceptual responses' - including Josef Albers, Ellsworth Kelly, Frank Stella and Kenneth Noland (J. Borgzinner, 'Op Art: Pictures That Attack the Eye', Time, 23 October 1964). Following the success of The Responsive Eye, Riley's art, which appeared to resonate perfectly with the zeitgeist of the time, amassed a considerable amount of attention from all facets of popular culture - though often to the artist's dismay. While the early 1960s was a time of cultural and social liberation, especially in London as the debate between Englishness and Britishness was born, Riley quickly discovered that the lack of copyright laws protecting artists from appropriation subjected her unique, yet highly marketable compositions to be adopted and adapted into popular culture. Her electric, innovative style seemed to reflect the atmosphere of emancipation and experimentation that also welcomed new rock bands - from The Beatles to The Who - alongside daring short hemlines in fashion, a new wave of cinema starring James Bond, and the corresponding relaxation of previously rigid social mores. Commenting on Riley's role in this 'revolution of youth' Francis Follin has observed: 'As an Op artist, Riley was part of 'new Britain' along with the Beatles, Mary Quant and David Frost, her art aligned with the urban, scientific, socially progressive face of a new, young national identity' (F. Follin, Embodied Visions: Bridget Riley, Op Art and the Sixties, London, 2004, p. 120). While Riley felt this sudden commodification violated the integrity of her art, neither the visceral nor psychological responses stimulated by confronting the real thing could be subsumed, and in 1968 she was chosen to represent Britain in the Venice Biennale. It was there that the impact of her visual dynamic won her the International Prize for Painting, for which she became both the first living British painter and first female to achieve such distinction.

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.

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



ARCHEUS / POST-MODERN
www.archeus.com

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