

Vertigo Op Art and a History of Deception 1520–1970

May 25 to October 27, 2019

Press conference:
Friday, May 24, 2019, 10 am

Opening:
Friday, May 24, 2019, 7 pm

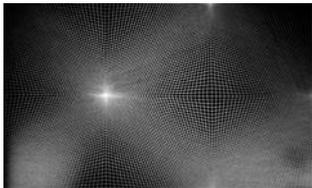
Of all the pioneering art movements of the 1960s, Op art and kinetic art seem to have been accorded the least recognition. Often they were depreciatingly seen as too spectacular and thus superficial. Wrongly so, since Op art and kinetic art sharpen our awareness of the ambiguous nature of reality. They quite literally show us that perception is not objective but dependent on volatile parameters relating to context and to the beholder, with all the epistemological consequences that this has.

The exhibition *Vertigo. Op Art and a History of Deception 1520–1970* presents a puzzling world of sensory illusion, comprising a broad spectrum of works including paintings, reliefs, and objects, installations and experiential spaces, and film and computer generated art.

The exhibition title is taken from Alfred Hitchcock's famous 1958 film, in which Hitchcock—just like our exhibition—worked with the concept of vertigo in both senses: as a physical phenomenon and as a sensual and optical illusion. The “vertigo effect” of the cinematography in Hitchcock's film marked a legendary juncture in the history of cinema, in which a view into the abyss was shown as a spectacularly destabilizing spiral draw that leads to a physical reaction in both the character in the film, Scottie, and the audience. The opening credits of this film were also groundbreaking, with a total view of an eye in which a spiral begins to turn, and then ultimately leads into an abstract experiment with seemingly endless coils. This sequence was made by the designer Saul Bass and the animated film artist John Whitney, a pioneer of abstract film and of animation technologies, who is represented with works in this exhibition.

Op art works do not only speak to the visual—they also draw on the experience that relates to the whole body. It is thus no coincidence that Bridget Riley gives her pictures titles that name physical experience and states, such as *Blaze*, *Static*, *Cateract*, *Hesitate*, and *Climax*. In their flicker films Peter Kubelka and Tony Conrad subject viewers to the danger of epileptic fits. To achieve the intended effects, Op art and kinetic art also require that the viewer move around in front of the work and set themselves in relation to it.

This approach is theoretically founded in the work of Umberto Eco (and others) In his book *Opera Aperta* (1962), Eco saw beholders of art as active participants in the constitution of the works, and even as a necessary prerequisite for the works' completion. With these ideas, Eco and the Op art movement can be seen as early proponents of participatory art in the second half of the twentieth century. In his 1962 text *Arte programmata*, Eco also offered an early theory of Op art.



Richard Anuszkiewicz
Convex & Concave, 1966
Courtesy D. Wigmore Fine Art, Inc.,
New York, © Bildrecht Wien, 2019

Press contact
Katharina Murschetz
T +43 1 52500-1400
katharina.murschetz@mumok.at

Katja Kulidzhanova
T +43 1 52500-1450
katja.kulidzhanova@mumok.at

Fax +43 1 52500-
1300 press@mumok.at
www.mumok.at

mumok – Museum moderner Kunst
Stiftung Ludwig Wien
Museumsplatz 1, 1070 Wien

In formal terms, the focus of these works on geometrical forms places them within the tradition of abstract and concrete art throughout the twentieth century, which included the minimal art of the 1960s (arriving later on the scene than Op art). Op art and minimal art are different in that the former quite clearly abandons the comfort zone of harmonious proportion and instead goes for violent effects, distortion, and other forms of sensory exaggeration including optical illusion, deceptive irritations, and afterimages.

Op art is thus committed to an anti-classical principle, which is why in this exhibition, *Vertigo*, it is seen as a mannerism of concrete art. In this sense, very carefully selected paradigmatic works will be seen to refer to anti-classical art from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries and also precursors from the early twentieth century. These works show that pulsating patterns, shimmering and fleeting afterimages, paradox spatial illusions, anamorphoses, moiré patterns and flicker effects, and further methods of optical illusion—and also the effect of these on the body—were all of interest in earlier epochs, as a counter to concepts of the “classical.” The exhibition design takes the form of a labyrinth, a trope that is often used in mannerism and in Op Art, and thus itself draws on games of illusion and sensory deception.

This exhibition was initiated by mumok and is implemented in cooperation with Kunstmuseum Stuttgart, where it will be shown in late 2019. *Vertigo. Op Art and a History of Deception 1520–1970* is generously supported by the Art Mentor Foundation Lucerne.

The exhibition is accompanied by a comprehensive catalogue.

Artists: Marc Adrian, Getulio Alviani, Richard Anuszkiewicz, Marina Apollonio, Giuseppe Galli-Bibiena, Alberto Biasi, David Bomberg, Vladimir Bonačić, Davide Boriani, Gianni Colombo, Toni Costa, Carlos Cruz-Diez, Marcel Duchamp, Gerhard von Graevenitz, Matthias Grünewald, GRAV, Gruppo T, Gruppo N, Erika Giovanna Klien, Peter Kubelka, Heinz Mack, Enzo Mari, Almir Mavignier, Claude Mellan, László Moholy-Nagy, François Morellet, Lev Nusberg, Julio le Parc, Helga Philipp, Ivan Picej, Giovanni Battista Piranesi, Vjenceslav Richter, Bridget Riley, Dieter Roth, Nicolas Schoeffer, Robert Smithson, Raphael Soto, Aleksandar Srnec, Abbott Henderson Thayer, James Turrell, Grazia Varisco, Victor Vasarely, Simon Vouet, Edward Wadsworth, John and James Whitney.

Curated by Eva Badura-Triska and Markus Wörgötter