

JULIA M. CAMERON
TINA MODOTTI
PIA VALENTINIS
SAUL BASS
BRIDGET RILEY

IMP

RES

SI

NE

ZVERSO DES
GIG

IL SEGNO DEL DESIGNER



Scuola del Design
Facoltà di Design della Comunicazione - C2
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Una collana dedicata
ai designer della comunicazione
immaginata come allegato
alla rivista Multiverso,
Università degli Studi di Udine.

MULTIVERSO DESIGN

"Impressione" è un termine trasversale, che abbraccia svariati rami del mondo del design. La monografia affronta queste possibili declinazioni proponendo le opere e i metodi di cinque personalità diverse per nazionalità, epoche e medium:

Julia Margaret Cameron, Tina Modotti, Pia Valentinis, Saul Bass e Bridget Riley.

"Defective Impression" è la rubrica dedicata a Julia Margaret Cameron, la prima della monografia. Inglese, a fine Ottocento rivoluziona il mondo della fotografia, facendo delle imperfezioni il proprio punto di forza.

Di fotografia si parla anche nella seconda rubrica, "Impressionare", con gli scatti di Tina Modotti. Figura rivoluzionaria e poliedrica, le sue foto hanno documentato le disuguaglianze sociali e la tensione politica del Messico degli anni '20.

Pia Valentinis è la protagonista della rubrica "Impressionismo". Attraverso le sue coloratissime opere, l'illustratrice italiana restituisce visioni giocose della realtà traendo ispirazione dai grandi maestri della corrente artistica francese.

Più concettuale è invece la declinazione che il termine "impressione" assume con Saul Bass: quello di "First Impression". Con il suo lavoro da designer, ha permesso che prodotti commerciali e cinematografici venissero valorizzati già dal primo contatto con il pubblico.

La monografia si chiude con "Optical Impression", dedicata a Bridget Riley.

In quest'ultima rubrica la parola viene trattata nel significato più astratto: quello di percezione visiva, che la designer ha messo alla prova in tutta la sua lunghissima carriera.

Nonostante le grandi differenze fra le figure affrontate, notiamo quanto il termine "impressione" leghi le rubriche fra loro, fungendo a tutti gli effetti da "fil rouge".

Ciò dimostra quanto lavori completamente differenti per tecniche e obiettivi possano essere connessi fra loro, se realizzati con il metodo e la progettualità tipici del design.

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IMPRESSIONARE

Tina Modotti

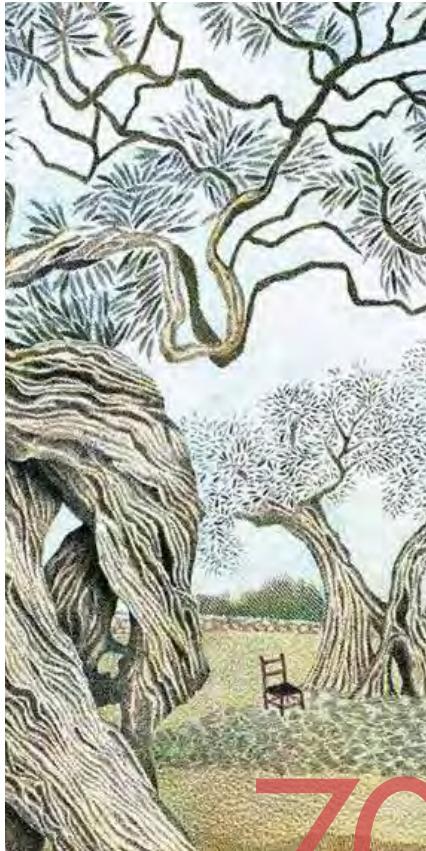
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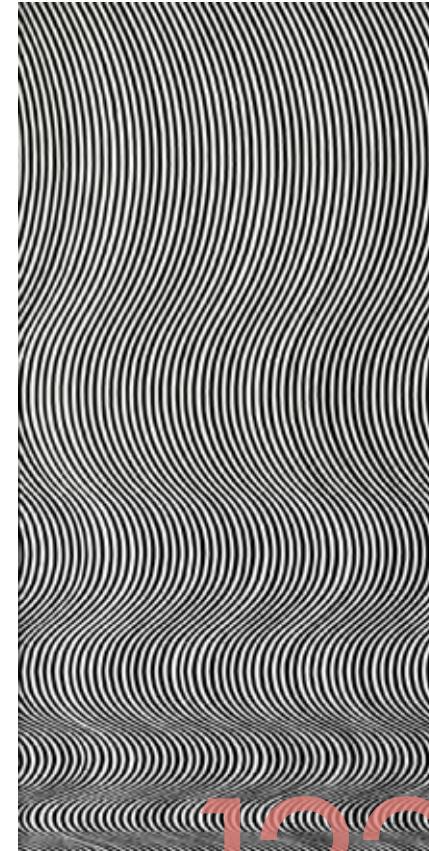
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OPTICAL IMPRESSION

Bridget Riley

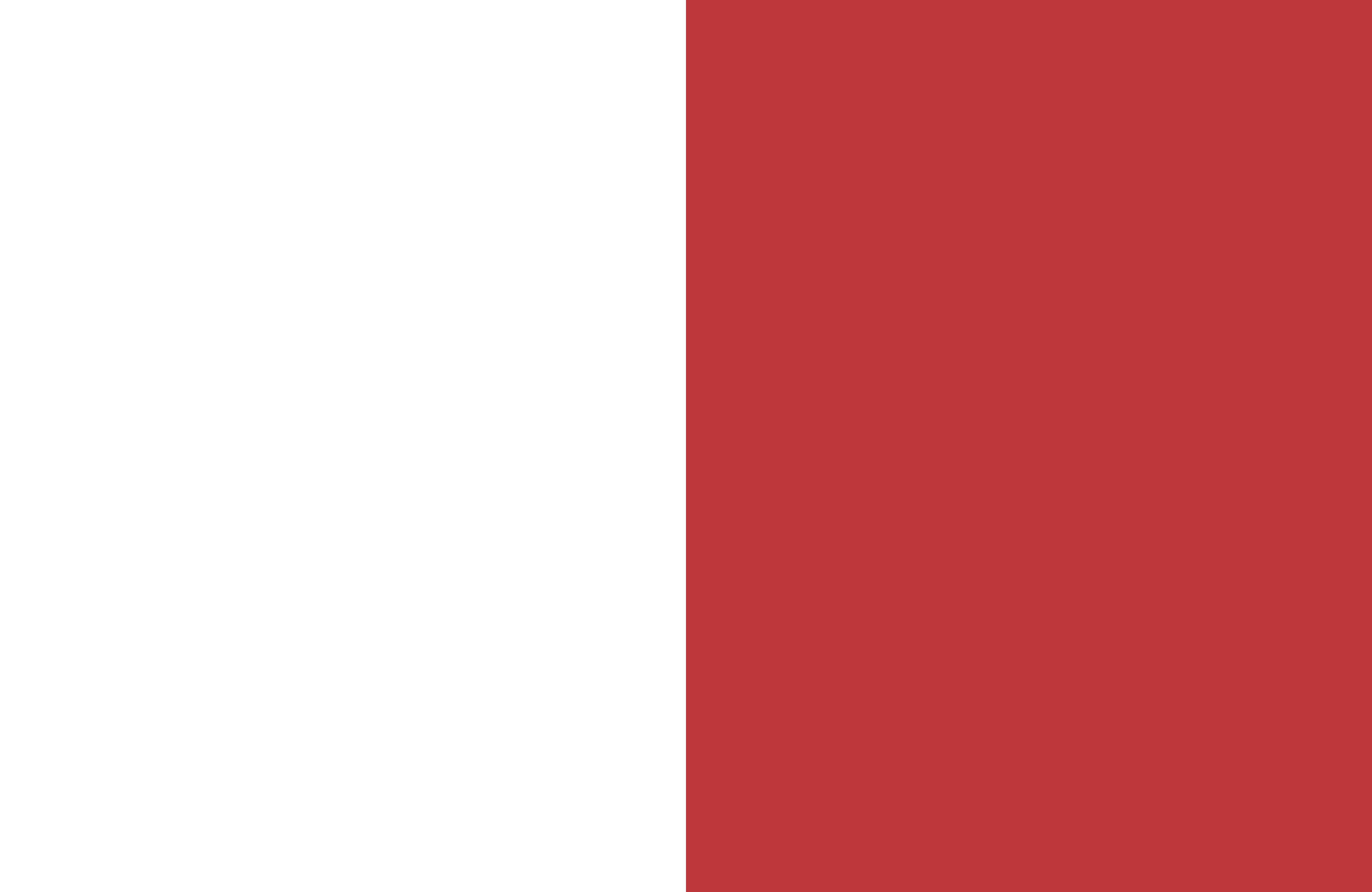
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OPERA SCELTA

Per ogni designer è stata selezionata un'opera significativa. Essa è approfondita ed analizzata in un apposito articolo situato al termine della rubrica. L'obiettivo è da un lato, entrare maggiormente in merito alle caratteristiche del designer, dall' altro, offrire al lettore un metodo efficace per riuscire comprendere il resto dell'opera omnia.

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JULIA MARGARET CAMERON

DEFECTIVE IMPRESSION

AT THE VERY DAWN OF PHOTOGRAPHY,
A WOMAN SUBVERTS THE RULES
OF A MAN'S WORLD

by Francesca Pittalis



In a vibrant career that flourished for little more than a decade, Julia Margaret Cameron created a body of work that stands among the finest achievements of the photographic art.

Armed with an iron will and irrepressible zeal, Cameron excelled in an art form in which it was virtually impossible for Victorian women to achieve recognition. She photographed many of the major figures of the nineteenth century, including Robert Browning, Thomas Carlyle, Charles Darwin, H. W. Longfellow and Alfred Tennyson. Largely self-taught, she made photographs that were intended to transcend appearances and speak directly to the human spirit. Her pictures were in bold scale and revolutionary in design, and they made an ambitious claim for photography. Using dramatic lighting and soft focus, Cameron made mesmerizing psychological portraits that exhibit an intensity of emotion not often public revealed in Victorian Society.



THE WORLD OF JULIA MARGARET CAMERON

GENIUSES, POETS AND PAINTERS

by Julian Cox

In her art as well as in her life Julia Margaret Cameron cut a redoubtable figure. A woman of robust and intrepid instincts, her wide-ranging endeavors were undertaken with a surfeit brio. She was utterly Victorian, every inch of a woman of her class, with a bourgeois and upwardly mobile, and concerned with her role, which was to help administrate the empire. Her mid-nineteenth-century intellectual background - fascinated by science and technology - made her curious and independent minded. Hardworking, morally upstanding, and devoutly religious, she was a dedicated wife and mother keenly committed to her domestic duties.

Yet she was also a woman of unexpected contradictions. For a Victorian woman to have the kind of artistic aspirations Cameron had was uncommon. That she began her career at age forty-eight —late middle age by Victorian standards — makes her achievement all the more remarkable. A veritable firebrand of energy, she marched bravely into the awkward intricacies of photography, with its cumbersome cameras, large glass plates, and precarious developing processes, and over the course of some fourteen years created one of the most distinctive and memorable bodies of work in the history of medium. She found in photography a liberating

medium well matched to her unrealized ambitions for poetic and artistic expression. A few social factors worked in her favor. While the nineteenth century was a time of codified behavior and clearly defined social restrictions, eccentricity flourished, particularly when it was played out in the name of artistic endeavor or scientific discovery. One had to know the rules in order to circulate in polite society, but the rules could be broken. Cameron was allowed her transgressions in part because she frequented the world of intellectuals, where curious and lively behavior was in no short supply, and in part because she came from a privileged

family background, albeit an unusual one. Cameron lived and worked in a period of considerable achievement in British visual and written culture, yet the number of practicing artists was small enough that most of them knew each other well. On this sophisticated and high-achieving stage, Cameron played a leading role. Thus within three years of their return from India, the Camerons had become intimate with many of the major figures of the nineteenth century. Given her unusually colorful dress and lifestyle, few who encountered her forgot the experience, and fortunately for posterity, many wrote about it. Including her beloved niece Virginia Woolf.



To the complete portraits



Details from Julia Margaret Cameron's portraits of the major figures of the nineteenth century. From the upper left: Robert Browning, 1865; Charles Hay Cameron, 1864; Sir John F.W. Herschel, 1867; Henry W. Longfellow, 1868; Alfred Tennyson, 1869; Henry Taylor, 1865; Thomas Carlyle, 1867; Charles Darwin, 1868; Philip Stanhope Worsley, 1866; G.F. Watts, 1864.

by VIRGINIA WOOLF

THE MODERNIST AUTHOR WRITES A VIBRANT ACCOUNT OF HER GREAT-AUNT'S LIFE



Little Holland House, a 19th-century home and studio of G.F. Watts, in which a variety of celebrities such as artists, scientists, and politicians gathered.
Before 1875, unknown photographer.

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Julia Margaret Cameron, the third daughter of James Pattle of the Bengal Civil Service, was born on June 11, 1815. Her father was a gentleman of marked, but doubtful, reputation, who after living a riotous life and earning the title of “the biggest liar in India”, finally drank himself to death. [...] His daughter inherited a strain of indomitable vitality. If her father was famous for his lies, Mrs. Cameron had a gift of ardent speech and picturesque behavior which has impressed itself upon the calm pages of Victorian biography. But it was from her mother, presumably, that she inherited her love of beauty and her distaste for the cold and formal conventions of English society. [...] She was the daughter of Chevalier Antoine de l’Étang, one of Marie Antoinette’s pages.

Old Madame de l’Étang was extremely handsome. Her daughter, Mrs. Pattle, was lovely. Six of Mrs. Pattle’s seven daughters were even more lovely than she was. It did not matter that the sister had been brought up by their French grandmother in a household lore rather than in book learning. “They were artistic to their finger tips, with an appreciation - almost to be called a cult - for beauty.” In India their conquests were many, and when they married and settled in England, they had the art of making around them, whether at Freshwater or at Little Holland House, a society of their own (“Pattledom” it was christened by sir Henry Taylor), where they could drape and arrange, pull down and build up, and carry on life in a high-handed and adventurous way which painters and writers and even serious men of affaires found much to their liking. “Little Holland House, where Mr. Watts lived, seemed to me a paradise,” wrote Ellen Terry, “where only beautiful things were allowed to come. All the women were graceful, and all the men were gifted.”[...]

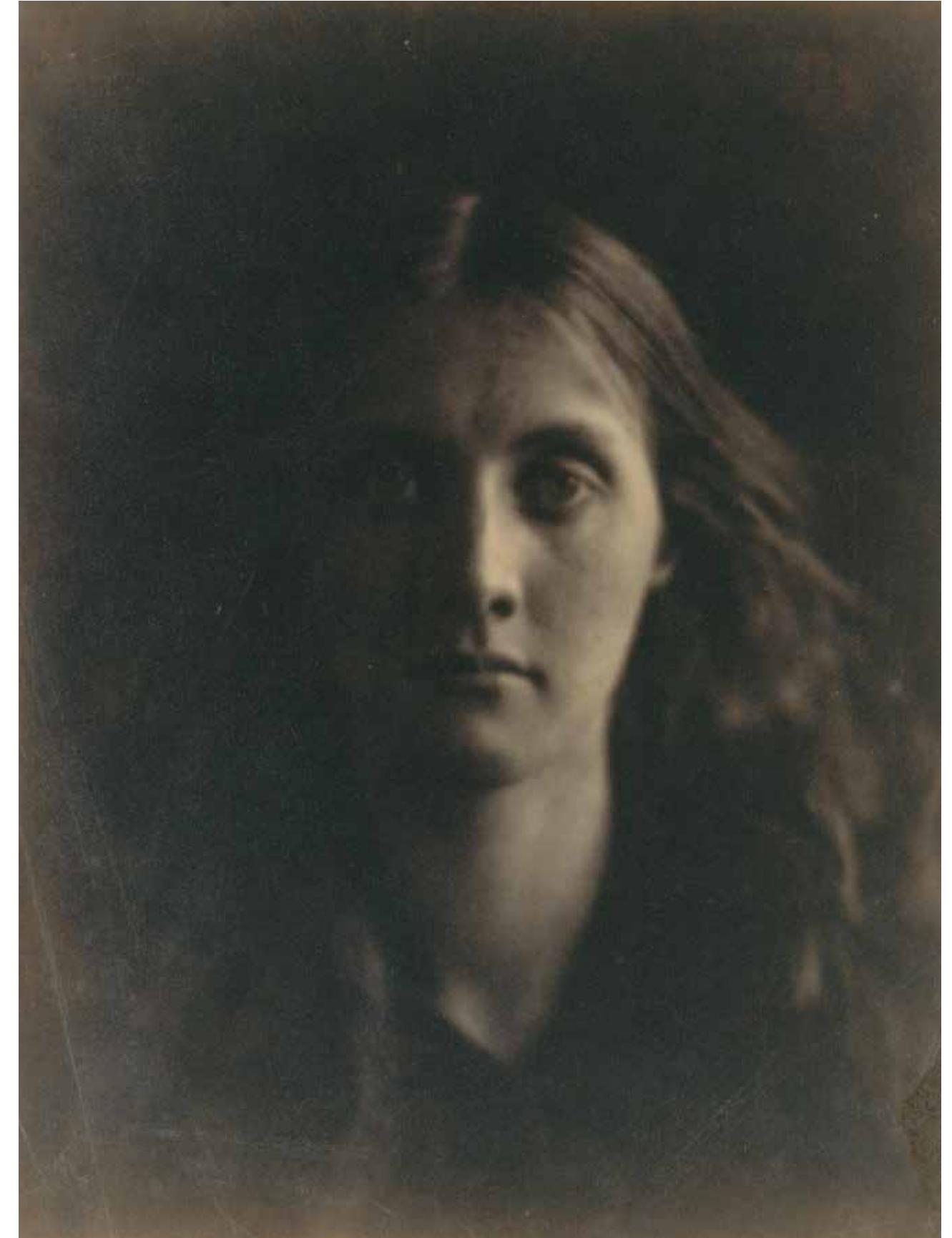
Certainly Julia Margaret Cameron had grown up an imperious woman; but she was without her sister’s beauty. In the trio where, as they said, Lady Somers was Beauty,

[Julia Jackson], 1867, by Julia Margaret Cameron. One of Cameron's favorite models was her niece and godchild Julia Prinsep Jackson, whom she photographed repeatedly over the years. Yet, unlike most of her other female subjects, whom Cameron portrayed as characters from biblical, classical, or literary sources, Julia was almost always represented as herself. Julia Jackson was Virginia Woolf's mother.

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and Mrs. Prinsep Dash, Mrs Cameron was undoubtedly Talent. "She seemed in herself to epitomize all the qualities of remarkable family," wrote Mrs. Watts, "presenting them in doubly distilled form. She doubled the generosity of the most generous of the sisters, and the impulsiveness of the most impulsive. If they were enthusiastic, she was so twice over; if they were persuasive, she was invincible. She had remarkably fine eyes, that flashed like her sayings, and grew soft and tender if she was moved ..." But to a child she was a terrifying apparition "short and squat, with none of the Pattle grace and beauty about her, though more than her share of their passionate energy and willfulness. Dressed in dark clothes, stained with chemicals from her photography (and smelling of them too), with a plump eager face and a voice husky, and a little harsh, yet in some way compelling and even charming," she dashed out the studio at Dimbola, attached heavy swans' wings to the children's shoulders, and bade them "Stand there" and play the part of the Angela of the Nativity leaning over the ramparts of Heaven.

For many years her energy and her creative powers poured themselves into a family life and social duties. She had married in 1838, a very distinguished man, Charles Hay Cameron, "a Benthamite jurist and philosopher of great learning and ability," who held the place, previously filled by Lord Macaulay, of fourth Member of Council at Calcutta. In the absence of the Governor-General's wife, Mrs. Cameron was at the lead of European's society in India, and it was this, in Sir Henry Taylor's opinion, that encouraged her in the contempt for the ways of the world when they turned to England. She had little respect, at any rate, for the conventions of Putney. She called her butler peremptorily "Man." Dressed in robes of flowing red velvet, she walked with her friends, stirring a cup of tea as she walked, half-way to the railway station in hot summer weather. There was no eccentricity that she





The Camerons' house (1860-1875), Dimbola Lodge, at Fresh Water Bay, Isle of Wight. Unknown author. It became a focal point for a crowd of bohemian artists, writers and poets.

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would not have dared on their behalf, no sacrifice that she would not have made to procure a few more minutes of their society. Sir Henry and Lady Taylor suffered the extreme fury of her affection, Indian shawls, turquoise bracelets, inlaid portfolios, ivory elephants, "etc.," showered on their heads. She lavished upon them letters six sheets long "all about ourselves." The Taylors loved her; Aubrey de Vere loved her; Lady Monteagle loved her; and "even Lord Monteagle, who likes eccentricity in no other form, likes her." It was impossible, they found, not to love that "genial, ardent, and generous" woman, who had "a power of loving which I have never seen exceeded, and an equal determination to be loved."

Meanwhile she was seeking some more permanent expression of her abundant energies in literature. [...] But the zenith of Mrs. Cameron's career was at hand. In 1860 the Camerons bought two or three rose-covered cottages at Freshwater, ran them together, and supplemented them with outhouses to receive the overflow of their hospitality, for at Dimbola - the name was taken from Mr. Cameron's estate in Ceylon - everybody was welcome. Conventionalities had no place in it.

In 1865, when she was fifty, her son's gift of a camera gave her at last an outlet for the energies which she had dissipated in poetry and fiction and doing up houses and concocting curries and entertaining her friends. Now she became a photographer. All her sensibility was expressed, and, what was perhaps more to the purpose, controlled in the new born art. The coal-house was turned into a dark room; the fowl-house was turned into a glass-house. Boatmen were turned into King Arthur; village girls into Queen Guinevere, Tennyson was wrapped in rugs: Sir Henry Taylor was crowned with tinsel. The parlor-maid sat for her portrait and the guest had to answer the bell. "I worked fruitlessly but not hopelessly," Mrs. Cameron wrote of this time. Indeed, she was indefatigable. "She used to

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say that in her photography a hundred negatives were destroyed before she achieved one good result ; her object being to overcome realism by diminishing just in the least degree the precision of the focus." Like a tigress where her children were concerned, was as magnificently uncompromising about her art. She cared nothing for the miseries of her sitters nor for their rank. The carpenter and the Crown Prince of Prussia alike must sit as still as stones in the attitudes she chose, in the draperies she arranged, for as long as she wished. She cared nothing for her own labors and failures and exhaustion, "I longed to arrest all the beauty that came before me, and at length the longing was satisfied," she wrote. Painters praised her art; writers marveled at the character her portraits revealed. She herself blazed up at length into satisfaction with her own creations. "It is a sacred blessing which has attended my photography," she wrote. "It gives pleasure to millions." She lavished her photographs upon her friends and relations, hung them in railway waiting-rooms, and offered them, it is said, to porters in default of small change.

Old Mr. Cameron became more and more obsessed with the desire to return to the East. There was peace; there was warmth; there were the monkeys and the elephants whom he had once lived among "as a friend and a brother." Suddenly, their preparations were made and friends went to say good-bye to them at Southampton. Two coffins preceded them on board packed with glass and china, in case coffins should be unprocurable in the East. They reached Ceylon safely.

Two years later (in 1879) she died. The birds were fluttering in and out of the open door; the photographs were tumbling over the tables; and, lying before a large open window Mrs. Cameron saw the stars shining, breathed the one word "Beautiful," and so died.

Annals of my Glass House, Julia Margaret Cameron



Henry Darwin, 1857 by
Julia Margaret Cameron. Albumen silver print.

HER CONCEPTION OF PHOTOGRAPHY

TURNING SCIENCE INTO ART

by Colin Ford

By the early 1860s the industrial scale photographic production was unprecedented. Photography had become fully absorbed into the worlds of trade and commerce. Portraiture led the way, as commercial studios became a ubiquitous feature of Victorian cultural life. Cameron found distasteful the implication that such works were produced by operators barely above the level of tradesmen. She saw the slavish verisimilitude of these portraits as symptomatic of both industrial progress and bland, bourgeois values of art, the very antithesis of what she was to strive for in her own work. Cameron was well attuned to the crisis of identity that accompanied the rapid industrialization of photography. Was it an art or a science? The debate over the cultural status of the medium

reached fever pitch at the time of the International Exhibition of 1862. Prints, Drawings and engravings were readily admitted into the fine art category, but the entry into this category of works was denied to photography. The implication was that the mechanistic nature of photography - requiring facility with camera, lenses, and fussy, laborious process - undermined its claim to the high ground of art.

Cameron's position on this debate was very clear. She was well aware of the growing conflict between commercial imperatives and artistic ideals, and when she turned to photography, she responded by taking great pains to distinguish and promote her work as fine art.

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MY INTENTIONS ARE TO
ENNOBLE PHOTOGRAPHY
AND TO SECURE FOR IT THE
CHARACTER AND USE OF HIGH
ART BY COMBINING THE REAL
AND IDEAL AND SACRIFICING
NOTHING OF THE TRUTH BY
ALL POSSIBLE DEVOTION TO
POETRY AND BEAUTY.

CAMERON'S CLAIM FOR PHOTOGRAPHY

“ ”



La Madonna Riposata, 1865. by Julia Margaret Cameron. Albumen silver print.



UNCONVENTIONAL FEATURES

WHAT OTHER SAW AS BAD TECHNIQUE,
CAMERON SAW BEAUTIFUL

by Julian Cox and Marta Weiss

Cameron proposed her own radical brand of photographic truth, one that dissolved the boundaries between facts and fiction and image and life, by embracing accidents of procedure and revealing rather than masking her techniques. She was not afraid to reveal the her own labor, as though leaving her work was made very consciously and by an artist rather than a machine.

The majority of portraits reveal how she experimented with soft focus, dramatic lighting and close-up compositions, unorthodox features that would become her signature style.

Although criticized at the time, these imperfections can now be appreciated as ahead of their time.



by Julia Margaret Cameron. Left page, from right:
Sappho, 1865; Zoe, Maid of Athens, 1866; James
Rogers, 1867. Right page, from the upper left:
Circe, 1865; [Study Head of St. John], 1866; I Promise, a-
bout 1865; Henry Taylor, 1867; [Head and shoulders
portrait of an elderly woman], 1865; The Mountain
Nymph Sweet Liberty, 1866.

FROM LIFE NOT ENLARGED

In the summer of 1865, Cameron began using a larger camera, which held a 15 x 12 inch glass negative. She used her new camera to begin a series of large-scale, close-up portraits, which she saw as a rejection of conventional photography in favor of a less precise but more emotionally compelling kind of portraiture.

One photograph, entitled Head of St. John, was a portrait of Cameron's niece May Prinsep. Lit from the side, with her hair loose, Prinsep appears androgynous, like a male saint. Cameron inscribed this photograph, 'From life not enlarged', to emphasize that the head was nearly life-size.

"What is focus and who has the right to say what focus is the legitimate focus?"

A letter of 1864, from Cameron to Sir J. Herschel



Left page, details from Julia Margaret Cameron's portrait of his elder son Hardinge Hay Cameron. Right page, the complete portrait of his elder son Hardinge Hay Cameron, May 1864. An albumen silver print.

SOFT FOCUS

The portrait lens she used was asymmetrical in design and somewhat undersized relative to the scale of Cameron's negatives, meaning that, at full aperture, it did not quite cover the plate.

The image suffered from fall off, softening progressively toward the outer edges of the glass. Only the center portion of the image (the sweet spot) showed sharp focus and good definition.

On the whole she photographed from close range, so consequently the lens yielded images that were more suggestive than descriptive in nature.

In Cameron's early profile portrait of her son Hardinge, we see the evidence of struggle to achieve satisfactory depth of field in the image and some of the limitations imposed by working with lens disproportionately small relative to the size of the plate. There is compression and simplification of the form, with face and head barely in focus and the hand in the left foreground reduced almost to a blur. The manner of presentation with a minimal light source, so that the sitter's facial features rebated in a suggestive, painterly chiaroscuro.





From the upper left: Julia Jackson, 1864; *The Vision of Infant Samuel*, about 1865. By Julia Margaret Cameron.

CREATIVE MANIPULATIONS

Her negatives were an arena for her own invention: if parts of an image were unsatisfactory to her, she engraved lines, scratched and painted the collodion, and doctored the image as necessary to suit her needs.

In touching, scratching, and brushing the negative, Cameron was satisfying some of her longings as an artist and articulating ideas that she believed befit the characterization of a person or a narrative. For her, touch was a natural progression of sight. Once committed, the hair, oils, dirt, fingertip smudges were eternally suspended in the plates' cutaneous layer. Cameron considered these blobs and "flaws" part of the process. To her, they

occurred automatically and without reason, thereby validating both the truth of the photograph and the appropriateness of her method.

Two of her most extreme examples of manipulating a negative can be seen in the following portraits. ¹ Cameron scratched a picture into the background of this pious portrait of her niece, to create a hybrid photograph-drawing. The drawing of a draped figure in an architectural setting evokes religious art. ² In her *Vision of Infant Samuel*, Cameron stripped the collodion from the upper portion of the negative and scratched and brushed the surface of the glass to suggest the fervor of the child's dreamlike state.



Details from Julia Margaret Cameron's: Julia Jackson, 1864; *The Vision of Infant Samuel*, about 1865.

JULIA MARGARET CAMERON'S IMPRESSION

OPHELIA

JULIA MARGARET CAMERON
1856

by Francesca Pittalis



(WHO'S OPHELIA?)
Ophelia is a young maiden in Shakespeare's play Hamlet. She is driven insane with grief over the murder of her father by her beloved Hamlet and by his subsequent denial of his love for her. In her madness she wanders in a field to pick flowers, then falls into a nearby stream. Too delusional to realize the danger she is in, Ophelia sings absentmindedly and finally drowns in the river amid the flower garlands she had gathered.

(COLOR)



The image color and tone are due to the albumen printing technique Cameron used. The image tone is warm, with gold highlights and reddish-brown shadows.

(DEFECTIVE IMPRESSION)



This image contains some of Cameron's typical features that other photographers would have rejected as technical flaws. This close-up composition is in large-scale. Cameron added 'From life' to the reverse of the negative, in order to emphasize that the head was nearly life-size. Only the center portion of the image shows sharp focus and good definition. The effect of accidental movement either in the camera or the sitter was greatly accentuated in the long exposure, producing a notably soft, fuzzy result.

(POSE)

The photograph is a head-and-shoulder study in profile view. In this image a certain spontaneity in the pose is suggested by the model's slightly open mouth and by the turn of her head, as though - true to the story - she is distracted by a spirit of her own imagining. The hair is free flowing, emphasizing her unrestrained nature.



(DEEP IMPRESSION)

In this rendition of Ophelia, nothing in the picture alerts viewers to its subject. This model could be portraying any number of characters in literature or art. Once the title of this photograph is read, we become aware that the white rosebuds at the neck - both closed, the outer petals wilting - allude to Ophelia's life cut short before its flowering. Indeed Cameron had long before concluded that there was more art to the characterization of a subject than to its photographic illustration.

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(COMPLETE IMPRESSION)



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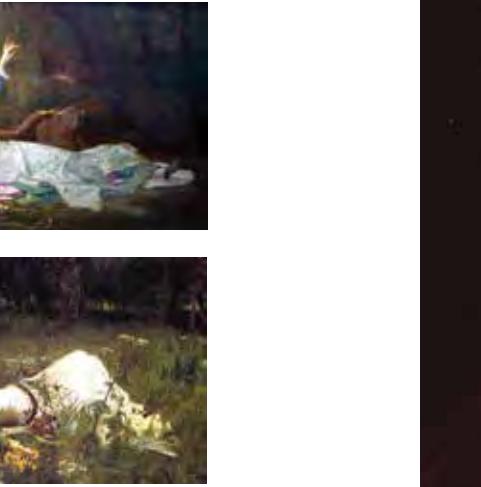


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Cameron's Ophelias subtly and surprisingly undermine oppressive ideas of Victorian femininity. There is a touch of intrigue in Cameron's rendition, and unlike so many other nineteenth-century versions that depict her dead or dying, these Ophelias are alive and resilient. Cameron reinvents Ophelia by emphasizing feminine strength through suffering and underscoring moments of Ophelia's autonomy.

from left: Ophelia Study No. 2, Julia Margaret Cameron, 1867; [Ophelia], Julia Margaret Cameron, 1875.

PRE-RAPHAELITES' IMPRESSION



from left: Ophelia, John E. Millais, 1851;
Alexandre Cabanel, Ophelia, 1883; John W.
Waterhouse, Ophelia, 1889.

Pre-Raphaelites painters almost invariably depict Ophelia as a solitary figure within a natural setting, often among dense trees or tall reeds and often beside the water that will be her undoing.

Ophelia's expression is vacant, hopeless, and epitomizes a weak and deranged woman. Most paintings and drawings of Ophelia in British art pay close attention to descriptive details in the

drama —in particular, the types of flowers Ophelia carried. In the painting by John E. Millais, each one of the flowers on the canvas signifies some aspect of the story.



...the flowers Ophelia carried. In the painting by John E. Millais, each one of the flowers on the canvas signifies some aspect of the story.

TINA MODOTTI

IMPRESSIONARE

L'AZIONE DEI RAGGI SULLA LASTRA
FOTOGRAFICA

di Valeria Scomparin



Sono gli Anni '20: l'influsso e l'espansione della rivoluzione messicana al di là delle frontiere nazionali trasformano il Messico in un crogiolo nel quale confluiscano una serie di talenti che, contagiati da un ambiente stimolante, danno il meglio di loro stessi nei rispettivi campi creativi.

È ciò che succede a Tina Modotti, che si trasferisce in Messico insieme ad Edward Weston nel 1923. Inizia a fotografare fin da subito sotto la guida di Weston, e già dopo pochi mesi i due parteciperanno insieme a un'esposizione. Lo stile e i temi sono ancora pesantemente influenzati dal formalismo westoniano, ma in pochi anni la fotografia inizia a sviluppare un proprio stile e a partecipare alla vita politica messicana.

Aderisce al movimento estridentista, collabora con i muralisti e, dopo la partenza definitiva di Weston avvenuta nel 1929, Tina abbraccia ancora di più l'impegno politico e sociale.

A questo punto della sua carriera essa non ricerca più la purezza dell'estetica formalista, ma anzi spesso manipola i propri soggetti per veicolare messaggi ideologici.

Conclude i suoi anni messicani documentando la vita degli ultimi e pone la sua macchina fotografica, con un realismo franco e diretto, di fronte al degrado urbano, terreno poco esplorato fino ad allora nella fotografia messicana e latino-americana.





Tina Modotti nel ruolo di Maria de la Guardia nel film "The Tiger's Coat", Anonimo, Hollywood 1920.



"The Tiger's Coat", unico film sopravvissuto che la veda protagonista oltre che unico documento audio-visivo ad oggi conosciuto che la ritragga

UNA NOTA BIOGRAFICA

di Mariana Figarella

Assunta Adelaide Luigia Saltarini Modotti (Udine, 1896 – Città del Messico, 1942) condusse una vita da nomade. Nacque a Udine, in Friuli, a causa delle ristrettezze economiche della famiglia trascorse parte della sua infanzia in Austria.

La famiglia era molto povera e numerosa e, nonostante i successi scolastici, nel 1908 Tina dovette interrompere gli studi per andare a lavorare in filanda prima e in una tessitura di seta poi.

Per sopravvivere si vide poi costretta ad emigrare in America, come molti altri europei pieni di speranza per le condizioni di vita offerte dal Nuovo Mondo.

All'arrivo a San Francisco, prima di dedicarsi al teatro e al cinema, fa l'operaia in una fabbrica tessile, lavoro che aveva già fatto da bambina a Udine. Nel 1917 diviene la compagna del pittore e poeta Roubaix de l'Abrie Richey, detto Robo, recita con successo nei teatri della Little

Italy e interpreta tre film a Hollywood. Robo la introduce nei circoli intellettuali di Los Angeles dove conosce il fotografo Edward Weston del quale diviene discepola, modella e amante.

Dopo una prima visita in Messico nel 1922 fatta con l'intenzione di raggiungere il marito Robo, che però muore di vaiolo a pochi giorni dal suo arrivo, Tina ritorna in messico nell'estate del 1923, questa volta con Weston, suo figlio Chandler e con l'accordo che, in cambio del suo aiuto in studio, Weston l'aiuterà ad apprendere l'arte della fotografia. Contemporaneamente avrebbe continuato a fare la modella, una professione che padroneggiava alla perfezione, posto che aveva già posato per suo marito, Robo, e per altri fotografi prima di Weston, come Jane reece e Johan Hagemeyer a Los Angeles. Poco tempo dopo il suo arrivo in Messico, Tina inizia a addentrarsi nei segreti



Tina ha posato per me ieri mattina. Da tempo avevamo pensato che io la dovesse ritrarre come più volte la vedevo, recitando poesie - nel tentativo di fissare la straordinaria mutevolezza del suo volto in azione. Non c'era niente di artificioso in questo tentativo, lei si sentì subito in uno stato d'animo in cui ignorava me e il mio obiettivo - o inconsapevolmente sentiva la mia presenza e ad essa rispondeva?

The Daybooks of Edward Weston, 4 ottobre 1924

del laboratorio fotografico e a realizzare raffinate stampe al platino seguendo gli insegnamenti di Weston. Le sue prime immagini, datate 1923 e 1924, hanno inevitabilmente l'impronta del maestro, sia a livello tematico sia per la concezione fotografica.

Dopo qualche mese entrambi espongono le loro opere nel Palacio de Minería di Città del Messico, ottenendo un premio. Weston annota nel suo diario, riflettendo su questa prima mostra in comune: "Quelle di Tina non perdono nulla al confronto con le mie, sono la sua diretta espressione".

I biografi di Tina concordano nel situare le sue prime incursioni in campo politico nel periodo che va dal 24 dicem-

bre 1924 al 20 agosto 1925, quando Weston si assenta dal Messico per far visita alla famiglia a Los Angeles.

Tina incomincia a collaborare con il giornale *El Machete* nel 1925, traducendo dall'inglese e dall'italiano articoli antifascisti. Si pensa che contemporaneamente lavorasse per la sezione messicana del Soccorso Rosso Internazionale.

Nello stesso anno Tina prende a carico lo studio commerciale di Weston.

Conosce i pittori muralisti Diego Rivera, Alfaro Siqueiros, José Clemente Orozco; qualche anno più tardi riceverà l'incarico di fotografare i loro murales.

All'inizio di giugno del 1926 assieme a Edward e Brett Weston parte per un viaggio che durerà settimane nelle regioni

“ ”

DEAR TINA,
IF I HAVE BEEN A CRUCIAL
FIGURE IN YOUR LIFE, YOU TOO
HAVE CERTAINLY BEEN ONE
IN MINE.
ALL THAT YOU HAVE GIVEN ME
OF BEAUTY AND SENSITIVITY
HAS BECOME A PERMANENT
PART OF ME AND STAYS WITH ME
WHEREVER LIFE TAKES ME.
NEED I SAY MORE?
MY LOVE WILL BE WITH YOU
FOREVER.

LETTER FROM EDWARD WESTON TO TINA MODOTTI, 11 JANUARY 1928

“ ”

Copertina della rivista americana
New Masses, ottobre 1928.

Copertina per AIZ, Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung, una pubblicazione del partito comunista tedesco, del maggio 1931.

NEW MASSES



Soldier of Christ | The Right to Death!
Did God Make Bedbugs? | Awake, Negro Poets!
The Greatest Living Criminal

15 CENTS

OCTOBER, 1928

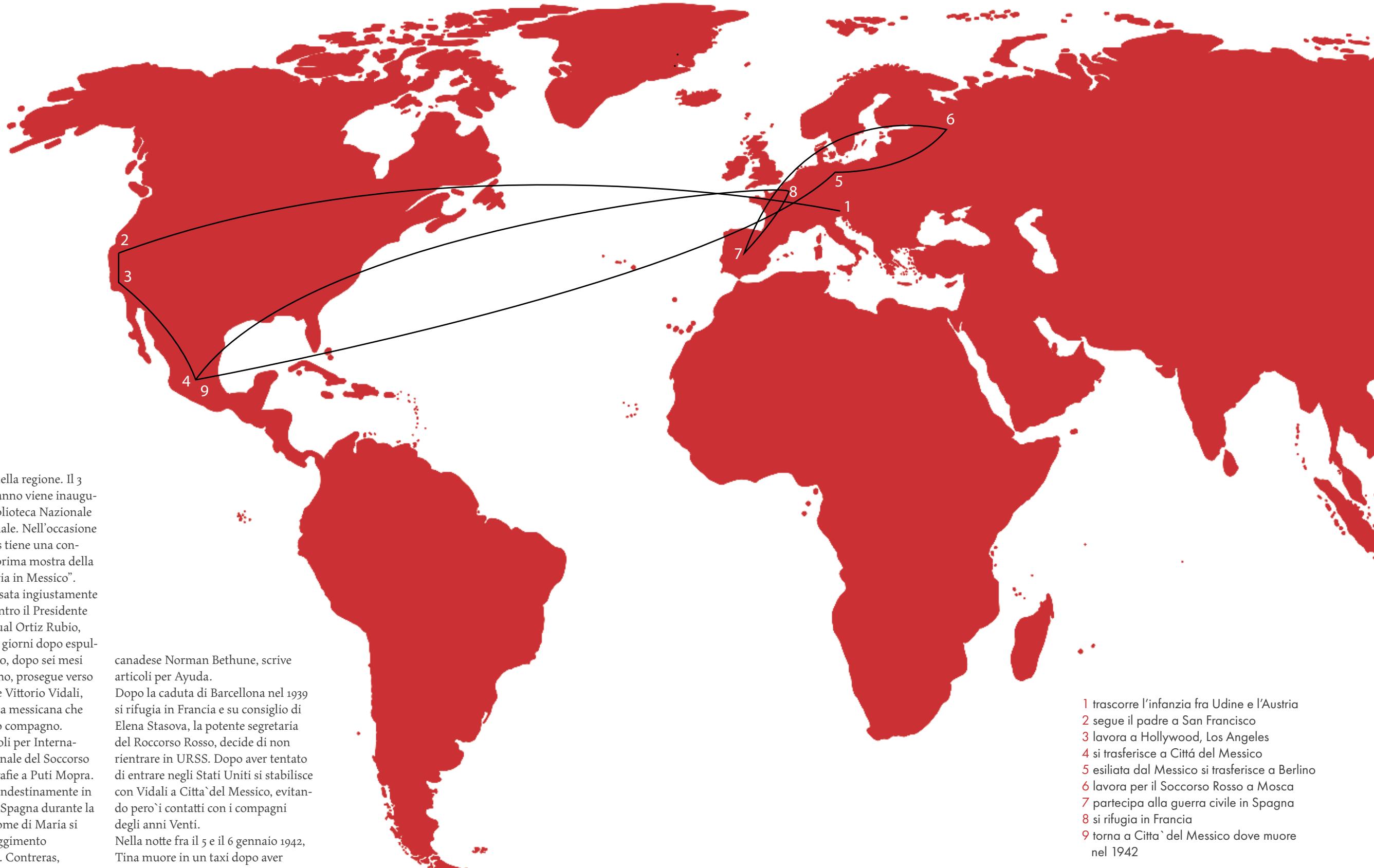


di Puebla e Oaxaca per realizzare 400 fotografie di arte e architettura popolare che illustreranno il libro di Anita Brenner Idols Behind Altars pubblicato nel 1929. Nel dicembre del 1925 Tina torna in California a visitare la madre malata. Conosce i fotografi Imogen Cunningham, Consuelo Kanaga e Dorothea Lange (che successivamente avranno un ruolo di rilievo nella fotografia americana), e decide di cambiare la voluminosa macchina fotografica Korona con una Graflex, che le consente una maggiore libertà d'azione. Dopo la partenza definitiva di Weston avvenuta lo stesso anno Tina abbraccia ancora di più l'impegno politico e sociale; si iscrive al Partito Comunista Messicano e collabora con diversi giornali e riviste: El Machete, New Masses, Creative Art, Forma. Da questo momento si osserva un allontanamento dall'estetica westoniana sia a livello formale sia tematico; è un indizio di un cambio ideologico a favore dell'impegno sociale. Da questo momento la sua fotografia prende due strade. Da un lato crea immagini di grande bellezza

formate e accurata composizione, cariche di significati ideologici e realizzate a scopo di proselitismo che contengono significati simbolici o emblematici, come le allegorie della rivoluzione messicana, Donna con bandiera, Campesinos che leggono El Machete, ecc. Dall'altro, scende nelle strade, con uno sguardo realistico vicino al fotoreportage e documenta le marce, gli scioperi, i suburbii più poveri della città, i bambini abbandonati, la vita degli umiliati e degli emarginati, oltre alle attività di propaganda del partito in cui milita. Verso la fine del 1928 conosce Julio Antonio Mella, giovane rivoluzionario cubano con cui allaccia una relazione sentimentale. Un amore intenso ma di breve durata perché il 10 gennaio del 1929 Mella viene assassinato mentre passeggiava con Tina. Tina viene accusata, e poi scagionata, di complicità nell'omicidio. Conosce la pittrice Frida Kahlo diventata nel frattempo moglie di Diego Rivera. Nel 1929 intraprende un viaggio nell'Istmo di Tehuantepec dove fotografa soprattutto

Alcuni membri del sindacato dei pittori, scultori e incisori rivoluzionari ritratti da Tina il primo maggio 1929. In prima fila Diego Rivera e Frida Kahlo.





donne e bambini di quella regione. Il 3 dicembre dello stesso anno viene inaugurata nelle sale della Biblioteca Nazionale una sua mostra personale. Nell'occasione David Alfaro Siqueiros tiene una conferenza dal titolo "La prima mostra della fotografia rivoluzionaria in Messico".

Il 5 febbraio 1930, accusata ingiustamente di aver complottato contro il Presidente della Repubblica Pascual Ortiz Rubio, viene arrestata e pochi giorni dopo espulsa dal Messico. Nel 1930, dopo sei mesi di permanenza a Berlino, prosegue verso Mosca dove già risiede Vittorio Vidali, una vecchia conoscenza messicana che diventerà il suo ultimo compagno.

A Mosca traduce articoli per Internatsionalnij Majak, il giornale del Soccorso Rosso e fornisce fotografie a Puti Mopra. Inizierà a viaggiare clandestinamente in Europa. Nel 1936 va in Spagna durante la guerra civile e con il nome di Maria si arruola nel Quinto Reggimento comandato da Carlos J. Contreras, ovvero Vittorio Vidali. Lavora nel Soccorso Rosso spagnolo, collabora all'assistenza sanitaria al fianco del medico

canadese Norman Bethune, scrive articoli per Ayuda.

Dopo la caduta di Barcellona nel 1939 si rifugia in Francia e su consiglio di Elena Stasova, la potente segretaria del Soccorso Rosso, decide di non rientrare in URSS. Dopo aver tentato di entrare negli Stati Uniti si stabilisce con Vidali a Città del Messico, evitando però i contatti con i compagni degli anni Venti.

Nella notte fra il 5 e il 6 gennaio 1942, Tina muore in un taxi dopo aver trascorso la serata nella casa dell'architetto Hannes Meyer, già direttore del Bauhaus.

- 1 trascorre l'infanzia fra Udine e l'Austria
- 2 segue il padre a San Francisco
- 3 lavora a Hollywood, Los Angeles
- 4 si trasferisce a Città del Messico
- 5 esiliata dal Messico si trasferisce a Berlino
- 6 lavora per il Soccorso Rosso a Mosca
- 7 partecipa alla guerra civile in Spagna
- 8 si rifugia in Francia
- 9 torna a Città del Messico dove muore nel 1942



Tina Modotti nella sua
mostra di fotografie,
Anonimo 1929

SULLA FOTOGRAFIA

IN OCCASIONE DELLA GRANDE MOSTRA CHE
REALIZZA NEL DICEMBRE DEL 1929 NELL'ATRIO
DELL'UNIVERSITÀ NAZIONALE TINA SCRIVE
QUELLO CHE SARÀ IL SUO MANIFESTO SULLA
FOTOGRAFIA.

di Tina Modotti

Sempre, quando le parole "arte" e "artistico" vengono applicate al mio lavoro fotografico, io mi sento in disaccordo. Questo è dovuto sicuramente al cattivo uso e abuso che viene fatto di questi termini.

Mi considero una fotografa, niente di più. Se le mie foto si differenziano da ciò che viene fatto di solito in questo campo, è precisamente perché io cerco di produrre non arte, ma oneste fotografie, senza distorsioni o manipolazioni.

La maggior parte dei fotografi vanno ancora alla ricerca dell'effetto "artistico", imitando altri mezzi di espressione grafica. Il risultato è un prodotto ibrido che non riesce a dare al loro lavoro le caratteristiche più valide che dovrebbe avere: la qualità fotografica.

Negli anni recenti si è molto discusso se la fotografia possa o non possa essere un lavoro artistico comparabile alle altre creazioni plastiche.

Naturalmente ci sono molte opinioni diverse. Ci sono quelli che accettano veramente la fotografia come mezzo d'espressione alla pari con qualsiasi altro, e altri che continuano a guardare in modo miope al ventesimo secolo con gli occhi del diciottesimo, incapaci di accettare le manifestazioni della nostra civiltà meccanica. Ma per noi che usiamo la macchina fotografica come uno strumento, proprio come il pittore usa il pennello, queste diverse opinioni non hanno importanza. Noi abbiamo l'approvazione di coloro che riconoscono i meriti della fotografia nei suoi aspetti



Railway Worker's
Daughter, Mexico City,
Tina Modotti 1928



Misery, Tina Modotti
1928

multipli e l'accettano come il più eloquente, il più diretto mezzo per fissare, per registrare l'epoca presente. Sapere se la fotografia sia o non sia arte importa poco. Cio` che e` importante e` distinguere tra buona e cattiva fotografia. Per buona si intende quel tipo di fotografia che accetta tutte le limitazioni inerenti la tecnica fotografica e usa al meglio le possibilità e caratteristiche che il medium offre. Per cattiva fotografia si intende cio` che e` fatto, si potrebbe dire, con una specie di complesso d'inferiorità, senza apprezzare cio`che la fotografia in se stessa offre, ma al contrario ricorrendo ad ogni sorta di imitazioni. Le fotografie realizzate in questo modo danno l'impressione che l'autore quasi si vergogni di fotografare la realta`, cercando

quasi di nascondere l'essenza fotografica stessa della sua opera, con trucchi e falsificazioni che puo` apprezzare soltanto chi possiede un gusto deviato.
La fotografia, proprio perché puo` essere prodotta solo nel presente e perché si basa su ciò`che esiste oggettivamente davanti alla macchina fotografica, rappresenta il medium più soddisfacente per registrare con obiettività la vita in tutti i suoi aspetti ed è da questo che deriva il suo valore di documento.
Se a questo si aggiungono sensibilità e intelligenza e, soprattutto, un'idea chiara sul ruolo che dovrebbe avere nel campo dello sviluppo storico, credo che il risultato sia qualcosa che merita un posto nella produzione sociale, a cui tutti noi dovremmo contribuire.

Mother and child of Tehuantepec, Tina Modotti 1929



LA MIA TINA

FOTOGRAFA IRREGOLARE, RESILIENTE, MATRIOSKA

di Gianni Pignat

Il mio interesse per Tina Modotti è nato nei primi anni settanta, quando avevo avuto un incarico di docenza all'Istituto d'arte di Udine, come insegnante di fotografia: all'epoca, nella città friulana, si era costituita da poco una associazione che stava curando - dopo un oblio di trent'anni - una raccolta di foto e documenti su Tina Modotti, in vista di una pubblicazione, "Tina Modotti, garibaldina e artista", che uscì nel 1973. Più tardi, nel 1978, vennero realizzate esposizioni nell'ambito del Festival Internazionale delle donne ad Arezzo e alla Galleria dell'Obelisco a Roma e, nel 1979, l'importante mostra alla Biennale della Fotografia di Venezia con foto sia di Tina Modotti che di Edward Weston. È passato un decennio fino alla grande mostra del 1992, curata da Cinemazero con Valentina Agostinis e Piero Colussi, a cui ho potuto contribuire e nella quale è stato possibile vedere per la prima volta

una notevole quantità di foto dell'artista tutte assieme. Sono stato sempre avvantaggiato nella mia ricerca dal fatto che il mio lavoro di fotografo mi portasse in varie parti del mondo. Così, non appena mi trovavo in paesi visitati da Tina Modotti, in cui era vissuta, o luoghi che potevano avere un'attinenza con questa figura di artista impegnata anche politicamente e socialmente, dedicavo un po' di tempo alla ricerca. In particolare mi appassionava il fatto che ogni volta che scoprivo qualcosa su Tina, pensavo che sl nuovo tassello rendesse possibile una sua migliore conoscenza per ricredermi poco dopo: la sua biografia mi si rivelava sempre più movimentata, piena di pagine misteriose. Al riguardo c'è un fatto accaduto una volta a Mosca che per me ha un significato simbolico: nella vetrina di un banco di pegni acquistai una macchina

fotografica per documentare i passaporti di Tina Modotti appena scoperti nel fondo Modotti degli archivi del Komintern, per i quali non avevo ottenuto il permesso di riproduzione. Vicino alla fotocamera c'era una matroska aperta, scomposta nelle varie bamboline che la costituivano. In quel momento, ho capito l'essenza di Tina Modotti: una matroska, tante vite una dentro l'altra.

Quando si legge un libro sulla sua vita nel complesso, ci si fa di lei una certa immagine. Se si pensa a un determinato periodo della sua biografia, ci si fa di lei una certa idea, smentita della successiva fase della sua vita... e così` avanti. Un altro elemento cruciale che ha motivato la mia passione è "l'affascinante confusione" intesa come massa d'ipotesi di storie che si sono raccolte intorno alla figura di Tina Modotti. La ricercatrice Elisa Paltrinieri ha pubblicato al riguardo

un libro davvero significativo fin dal titolo, "Tina Modotti: fotografa irregolare". Mi ha sempre colpito la sua non linearità sia come fotografa tout court, sia come persona. C'è chi l'ha osannata come eroïna del femminismo, chi come grandissima fotografa. La questione, secondo me, è che nel caso di Tina Modotti il giudizio sulla sua opera può essere falsato dalle sue vicende biografiche, indubbiamente straordinarie. Le grandi fotografie sue coetanee le conosciamo tutti: Berenice Abbott, Margaret Bourke-White, Imogen Cunningham, Dorothea Lange, Lotte Jacobi, Lee Miller, Georgia o' Keeffe. Tuttavia solo la notorietà di Tina è dovuta a questa rara intersezione fra arte e vita straordinaria. Allo stesso modo, non credo sia corretto affrontare scindendole dalla sua vita le tre produzioni cinematografiche (delle quali peraltro ne sopravvive fisicamente una sola, *The Tiger's Coat*, 1920) che



Tina's eyes, Edward Weston 1924



Tina interrograta dalla polizia dopo l'omicidio di Mella, 1929

la vedono protagonista: probabilmente nulla di così magistrale, niente da ricordare al di là dell'affascinante elemento biografico. Lei stessa si prende in giro, dialogando con Weston, ammettendo di aver avuto ruoli che non la rappresentavano pienamente. Ed anche per queste possibilità d'interpretazione della sua parabola artistico-biografica che molti hanno sfruttato la sua figura - spesso facendole torto: fin troppo facile trasformare in mito il mistero costante delle sue molteplici nature. Uno dei topoi modottiani più diffusi e che fosse una donna fatale, seducente e determinata. Incontrando diverse persone che avevano stretto amicizia con lei (Nella Masutti, Carolina e Ornella Misiano, Maria Luisa Laffita, Clara Rosen, German List Arzubide, Kati Horny, Lola e

Manuel Alvarez Bravo) nessuno mi ha confermato che fosse quel tipo di donna, anzi. Tutti mi raccontavano di una persona molto fine, seppur di origini umili, e che, nonostante gli studi forzatamente interrotti, riusciva sempre a destare interesse intellettuale; ciò che colpiva maggiormente i suoi interlocutori era una riservatezza coniugata a un fascino particolare.

Da questi racconti mi sono fatto l'idea di una Tina algida, con un forte autocontrollo. A questo proposito, la sequenza fotografica che la ritrae dopo l'omicidio del suo compagno Julio Antonio Melia, un rivoluzionario cubano, è sicuramente esemplificativa: non c'è ombra di emozione nel viso di Tina. E nella sede della polizia, viene interrogata, le viene chiesto di ricostruire i fatti, di cui è stata

Julio Antonio Melia sul letto di morte
1929, Tina Modotti



testimone diretta, dato che l'amato è stato ammazzato al suo fianco mentre rincasavano, eppure negli scatti appare come se non fosse toccata personalmente della tragedia. E a questo si aggiunge il fatto che ha persino la forza d'animo di fotografare il cadavere alla morgue. Il risultato è straordinario, una delle sue foto più intense: Melia, morto, sembra stia riposando, sereno, bellissimo, vivo. Come succede spesso nell'arte, il rapporto con il suo maestro ha sviluppi alterni: qualche volta Edward Weston sembra invidioso di lei, esprimendo questo sentimento con battute irriverenti, riscontrabili nei diari del fotografo. A proposito di uno scatto per realizzare il quale Tina prende un foglio di plastica lo stropiccia e poi lo fotografa, operazione eccessivamente astratta e dunque per Weston di nessun senso, dice: "Tina si è messa a fare foto alla maniera di Man Ray". È palese che tecnicamente la Modotti non sia confrontabile con Weston. Le foto di Tina sono talvolta un po' "sporche": o un micromosso, oppure una resa non ottimale, che stride con la perfezione formale di Weston. Le foto di Weston sono rigorose dal punto di vista compositivo e della perfezione tecnica; Weston lavorava con una macchina 8x10 pollici, Tina usava un formato quattro volte più piccolo; Weston metteva molta attenzione nell'operazione d'inquadratura, Tina scattava a mano libera: a quei tempi si usavano pellicole da 12, 25

Carol Armstrong analizza così la differenza che fin da questo primo periodo affiora fra il lavoro fotografico di Tina Modotti e quello del maestro Weston.

"The photograph that best exemplifies, indeed emblematises Modotti's difference from Weston in this regard is Cloth Folds of 1924. More than that, the particular abstracting drive of Cloth Folds, in which the taut platinum surface of photograph itself seems to have slackened to produce a beige field of falling fabric, figures the discrepancy between Modotti's work more generally and the larger tendencies of New Vision photography: her unsublimated attraction to a tactile field and the flaws within it; her preference for frangible materiality over the metallic or the adamantine, for the mutable and mortal over the immutable and immortal, and for in-between gray tones over the full black-to-white range of what would be the "zone system"; her photographs' appeal to the hand and lack of distance from the eye. In all of these ways, it couldn't be more different from a related photograph by Weston from the same year, Circus Tent, which gives dramatic black-and-white form to the tautly stretched fabric that it represents, deemphasizing the warp and woof of that fabric in favor of the radiating lines made by its sectioning."



in alto a dx:
Circus tent, Weston,
1924
in basso a sx:
Cloth folds, Modotti,
1925
in basso a dx:
Crumpled tinfoil,
Modotti, 1926





Ricardo Gómez Robelo
travestito da geisha,
Tina Modotti 1923

vista compositivo nello stile da lei usato altre volte e che definiva caras inmortales "facce immortali"; inoltre è sicuramente uno dei primi scatti di Modotti, poiché Robelo moriva nel dicembre del 1924, l'anno in cui lei iniziava a fotografare. Il collezionista messicano Ava Vargas era arrivato a supporre che, dato che le condizioni di Robelo si erano aggravate agli inizi del 1924, quella foto potesse essere addirittura del 1923: mi piace credere che sia la prima in assoluto di Tina Modotti nonostante tutti gli storici citino Il circo sovietico a Città del Messico e Tenda del circo, scattate il 13 marzo del 1924. Al di là del primato lo scatto è interessante anche per il suo contenuto. Robelo è stato l'artefice della venuta in Messico di

Bambina con airone
bianco impagliato, Tina
Modotti 1926 ca.



Tina Modotti: frequentava lo studio-atelier della coppia Tina Modotti/Roubaix "Robo" de l'Abrie Richey, e nel 1920 commissionò proprio a Robo una serie di schizzi da inserire nel suo libro di poesie *Satíros y Amores*. Il soggetto di questi schizzi era Tina. Nel 1922 Robo e Robelo intraprendono un viaggio in Messico dove Robelo è stato nominato direttore dell'Accademia di Belle Arti. Robo muore poco tempo dopo, e Tina, assieme alla suocera, raggiunge il Messico per il funerale del marito. L'anno dopo si stabilirà in Messico con Weston, grazie all'invito di Robelo. È qui che lo fotografa vestito da geisha. Una foto, dunque, che sposa nello stesso tempo valore artistico, biografico e, per me, affettivo

di PABLO NERUDA

TINA MODOTTI HA MUERTO, L'EPITAFIO SCRITTO
PER L'IMPROVVISA MORTE DI TINA NEL 1942.

“ ”



La tomba di Tina Modotti nel cimitero
Panteón de Dolores, a Città del
Messico. 'Abbás 'Attār, 1983

Tina Modotti, hermana, no duermes, no, no duermes:
tal vez tu corazón oye crecer la rosa
de ayer, la última rosa de ayer, la nueva rosa.
Descansa dulcemente, hermana.
La nueva rosa es tuya, la tierra es tuya:
te has puesto un nuevo traje de semilla profunda
y tu suave silencio se llena de raíces.
No dormirás en vano, hermana.
Puro es tu dulce nombre, pura es tu frágil vida:
De abeja, sombra, fuego, nieve, silencio, espuma:
De acero, línea, polen, se construyó tu férrea,
tu delgada estructura.
El chacal a la alhaja de tu cuerpo dormido
aún asoma la pluma y el alma ensangrentada
como si tú pudieras, hermana, levantarte,
sonriendo sobre el lodo.
A mi patria te llevo para que no te toquen,
a mi patria de nievae para que a tu pureza
no llegue al asesino, ni el chacal, ni el vendido:
allí estarás tranquila.
¿Oyes un paso, un paso lleno de pasos, algo
grande desde la estepa, desde el Don, desde el frío?
¿Oyes un paso de soldado firme en la nieve?
Hermana, son tus pasos.
Ya pasarán un día por tu pequeña tumba,
antes de que las rosas de ayer se desbaraten,
Ya pasarán a ver los de un día, mañana,
donde está ardiendo tu silencio.
Un mundo marcha al sitio donde tú ibas, hermana,
avanza cada día los cantos de tu boca
en la boca del pueblo glorioso que tú amabas.
Tu corazón era valiente.
En las viejas cocinas de tu patria, en las rutas
polvorrientas, algo se dice y pasa,
algo vuelve a la llama de tu dorado pueblo,
algo despierta y canta.
Son los tuyos, hermana: los que hoy te dicen tu nombre,
los que de todas partes, del agua, de la tierra,
con tu nombre otros nombres callamos y decimos,
porque el Fuego no muere.

Tina Modotti, sorella, tu non dormi, no, non dormi:
forse il tuo cuore sente crescere la rosa
di ieri, l'ultima rosa di ieri, la nuova rosa.
Riposa dolcemente, sorella.
La nuova rosa è tua, la nuova terra è tua:
ti sei messa una nuova veste di semente profonda
e il tuo soave silenzio si colma di radici
Non dormirai invano, sorella.
Puro è il tuo dolce nome, pura la tua fragile vita:
di ape, ombra, fuoco, neve, silenzio, spuma,
d'acciaio, linea, polline, si è fatta la tua ferrea,
la tua delicata struttura.
Lo sciacallo sul gioiello del tuo corpo addormentato
ancora protende la penna e l'anima insanguinata
come se tu potessi, sorella, risollevarsi
e sorridere sopra il fango.
Nella mia patria ti porto perché non ti tocchino,
nella mia patria di neve perché alla tua purezza
non arrivi l'assassino, né lo sciacallo, né il venduto:
laggiù starai tranquilla.
Non odi un passo, un passo pieno di passi, qualcosa
di grande dalla steppa, dal Don, dalle terre del freddo?
Non odi un passo fermo di soldato nella neve?
Sorella, sono i tuoi passi.
Verranno un giorno sulla tua piccola tomba
prima che le rose di ieri si disperdano,
verranno a vedere quelli d'una volta, domani,
lì dove sta bruciando il tuo silenzio.
Un mondo marcia verso il luogo dove tu andavi, sorella.
Avanzano ogni giorni i canti della tua bocca
nella bocca del popolo glorioso che tu amavi.
Valoroso era il tuo cuore.
Nelle vecchie cucine della tua patria, nelle strade
polverose, qualcosa si mormora e passa,
qualcosa torna alla fiamma del tuo adorato popolo,
qualcosa si desta e canta.
Sono i tuoi, sorella: quelli che oggi pronunciano il tuo nome,
quelli che da tutte le parti, dall'acqua, dalla terra,
col tuo nome altri nomi tacciamo e diciamo.
Perché non muore il fuoco.

BICCHIERI

TINA MODOTTI
1925

di Valeria Scomparin

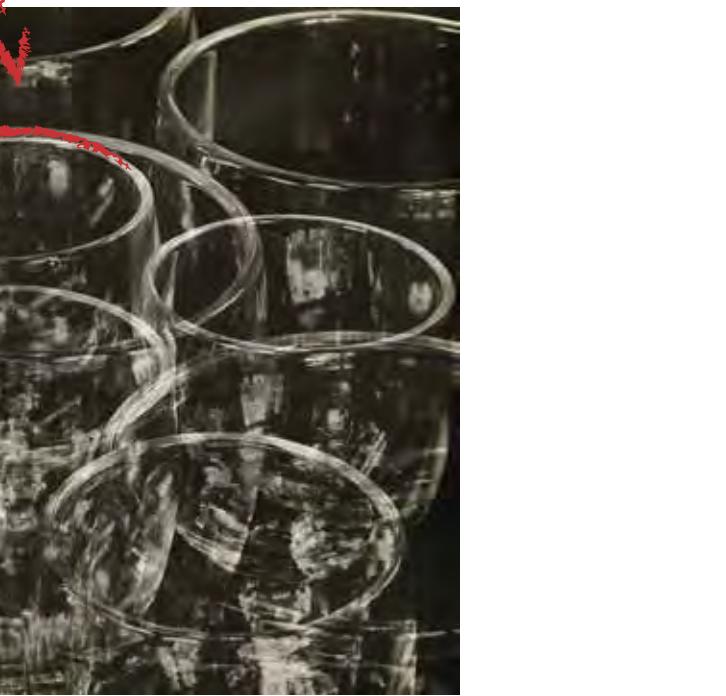
BICCHIERI, 1925

Il nome alternativo di questa fotografia è `EXPERIMENT IN RELATED FORM, esperimento sulla forma continua, riferito alla confusione dei piani e alla sovrapposizione degli ellissi.

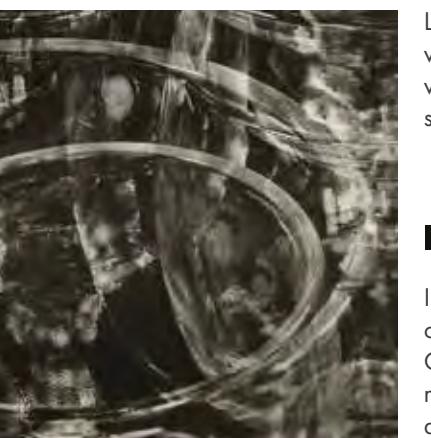
Medium fotografico
(stampa al platino)
19x24 cm

La ricorrenza degli ellissi forma un **pattern**, più fitto verso il centro e che digrada man mano verso i margini

Le circonferenze dei calici saturano il campo, senza gerarchie evidenti, ad eccezione della circonferenza che risalta per la sua posizione centrale, le dimensioni minori e il fatto che sia l'unica che vediamo per intero, non interrotta dall'incrocio con altre forme geometriche.



A prima vista l'immagine appare incomprendibile, ma dopo poco riconosciamo la forma di dei bicchieri, incastriati l'uno nell'altro in maniera impossibile, che si sovrappongono e riflettono l'uno nell'altro. **La comprensione dell'opera ondeggiava fra leggibilità e astrazione.**



Le imperfezioni della lastra e le caratteristiche del vetro formano una sorta di patina, particolarmente visibile in alcuni punti, una **texture** che pervade e storicaizza l'opera.

I colori della fotografia sono quelli prescritti dall'epoca e dalla tecnica usata, la stampa al platino. Questa tecnica è il processo fotografico monocromatico in grado di restituire la più ampia gamma di tonalità che si possa realizzare con uno sviluppo chimico.

Una doppia impressione per un risultato sorprendente

COME

L'immagine è un **fotomontaggio**: lo sdoppiamento non avviene sulla carta fotografica, ma precedentemente sul negativo, che viene impressionato due volte, con due immagini di dimensioni lievemente differenti.

Questa fotografia non nasconde la sua origine meccanica, la sua riproducibilità, in opposizione alle mode pittorialiste dell'epoca, una scelta che Tina Modotti difenderà nel suo manifesto (vedi p.50).

PERCHÉ

Il significato dell'immagine non è scontato; la moltiplicazione ordinata dei bicchieri può alludere al ritmo della produzione di massa, ma la stessa immagine potrebbe evocare **sinteticamente** il tintinnare dei bicchieri che si scontrano, far pensare a una festa affollata.

QUANDO

E' il 1925, Tina Modotti fotografa da qualche anno e sta ancora collaborando strettamente con il maestro Weston. Nonostante sia all'inizio della sua carriera scatta già fotografie che vanno contro gli ideali sulla fotografia di Weston e dimostrano la sua indipendenza dall'insegnante.

Bicchieri si inserisce nel primo periodo formalista di Tina, in cui essa sta ancora imparando e si cimenta soprattutto con elementi statici in ambito domestico. La scelta potrebbe anche dipendere dalla pesante apparecchiatura fotografica, munita di treppiede ed abbastanza scomoda da portare in strada se prima non ci si sapeva destreggiare alla perfezione.

Le forme rotondeggianti e la saturazione del campo ricordano un'altra fotografia iconica di Tina Modotti: rose, dello stesso anno. La differenza sta nell'**impressione tattile** suggerita dai due lavori, che non potrebbe essere più diversa.

La superficie liscia, fredda e artificiale dei bicchieri si contrappone alla morbidezza esasperata dei petali delle rose sul punto di sfiorire.



Weston infatti sviluppa uno stile che con una quasi maniacale cura dell'immagine cerca di cogliere l'es-senza atemporale dell'oggetto, estraendone una forma pura e perfetta. L'astrattismo e ancora di più il fotomontaggio sono quindi in opposizione ai suoi dogmi, Tina sviluppa queste immagini attraverso una ricerca autonoma, influenzata dal fenomeno internazionale della fotografia modernista. La sovrapposizione di negativi era infatti prescritta dalla fotografia diretta, era anzi uno dei ricorsi formali utilizzati dall'avanguardia sperimentale degli anni Venti.



Una testimonianza interessante dell'**influenza reciproca** dei due artisti. Questa foto di Weston è affine a *Bicchieri* per soggetto e uso dello spazio, ma allo stesso tempo lontana dall'astrattismo di Tina.

Ollas no.2, Edward Weston 1926

UNA FOTOGRAFIA CHE
HA LASCIATO IL SEGNO.

Bicchieri, come la gran parte dei lavori di Tina, ha influenzato una generazione di fotografi messicani, fra i quali Manuel Alvarez Bravo e Augustin Jimenez, le cui composizioni matematiche di bicchieri devono molto a quest'immagine. La stessa Tina ne riprenderà alcuni elementi in sue opere successive.



Tina infatti utilizzerà di nuovo il fotomontaggio nel 1928 in *Eleganza e povertà*. Questa volta si tratta di una sovrapposizione di due negativi, che insieme formano la suggestiva immagine di un uomo poveramente vestito seduto ai piedi di un cartellone che pubblicizza abbigliamento elegante; il taglio dei negativi è ben visibile e il muro alle spalle dell'uomo suggerisce il suo isolamento e l'immobilità sociale. La tecnica è di nuovo il fotomontaggio, ma il soggetto e la finalità sono cambiati completamente.

DUE SCOPI DIVERSI,
L'EVOLUZIONE DI TINA.

Se in *Bicchieri* il fotomontaggio era stato un esperimento, quasi un gioco con un risultato molto artistico e astratto in *Eleganza e povertà* Tina Modotti non si fa scrupoli: taglia i negativi e crea una messa in scena in contrapposizione ai fondamenti di veridicità della fotografia documentarista. L'unica cosa che sembra interessarle è di rimanere in linea con il suo impegno ideologico.



PIA VALENTINIS

IMPRESSIONISMO

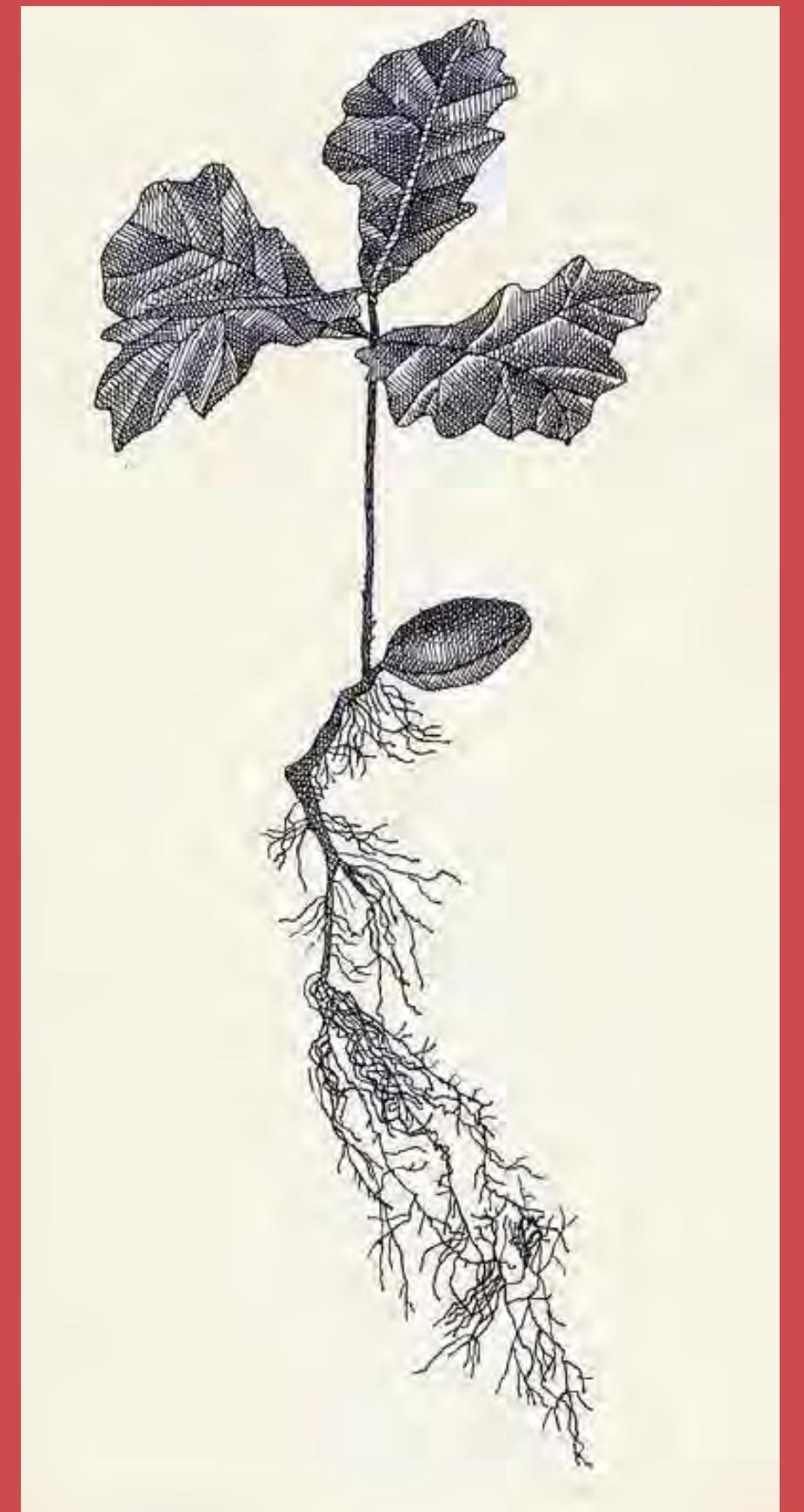
UN'ILLUSTRAZIONE CHE NASCE DALLA
SUGGESTIONE DELLA REALTÁ

di Viola Gatti



Pia Valentinis è un'autrice e illustratrice italiana nata a Udine nel 1965 che vive attualmente a Cagliari. Diplomatisi all'Istituto d'arte di Udine, nella sua carriera ha illustrato libri per bambini con case editrici nazionali e internazionali e le sue illustrazioni sono state esposte in varie mostre collettive e personali, tra cui Matite Italiane alla Fiera del libro per ragazzi di Bologna e "Bravo" Italian Illustration Exhibition a Taipei. È stata selezionata alla Mostra degli illustratori della Fiera del libro di Bologna, alla Biennale d'Illustrazione di Bratislava e alla Biennale di Catalogna. Raccontare gli alberi, libro illustrato assieme a Mauro Evangelista per Rizzoli, è riuscito a vincere il Premio Andersen come Miglior libro di divulgazione per ragazzi nel 2012 e la sua prima graphic-novel Ferriera, edita da Coconino Press-Fandango, è stata premiata come Miglior libro a fumetti al Premio Andersen 2015. Inizia una collaborazione artistica con il collega autore e illustratore Giancarlo Ascari con il quale pubblica The Green Fingers of Monsieur Monet (per la Royal Academy of Arts, Londra, 2015), la collana Storie strane ma vere (Franco Cosimo Pani), Leonardo in Festa, Ponti non muri per Bompiani, Boldoni il grande seduttore per Fondazione Ferrara Arte. Collabora inoltre con Chiara Carminati, autrice di poesie per bambini e ragazzi, per la quale illustra numerosi libri.





Pia Valentinis,
La quercia.

IDENTITÁ DI UN ILLUSTRATORE

INTERVISTA A PIA VALENTINIS

di Anna Castagnoli

Illustrare è...?
Raccontarsi.

Quale è il tuo rapporto con il colore/la linea/la carta?

Lavoro poco a colori, quel poco è sempre segno (ad esempio, l'acrilico: tante pennellate con pennello sottile. O la matita: tantissime linee una a fianco all'altra), sempre molto controllato.

Ti mando però un disegno che ho fatto per Raccontare gli alberi.

In questo disegno ho fatto prima la pianta che sbuca dal terreno. Quando sono arrivata alle radici ho lasciato andare la mano. Le radici sono venute tremolanti, molto più vitali. Credo che a volte sia bello lasciar andare le mani, concedersi imprecisioni, tentennamenti. Vorrei riuscire a farlo più spesso.

La carta è un gran piacere, tattile soprattutto, ma anche olfattivo.

Quale è il tuo rapporto con i limiti della pagina (o doppia pagina) del libro?
Mi danno sicurezza.

Nella tua opera, quale è il tuo rapporto con la realtà?

Nel tempo è migliorato. Sono più attenta ai dettagli reali, o almeno verosimili. Mi rendo conto che più mi avvicino al reale, meno ho paura dell'indefinito. Guardo

quasi sempre prima di disegnare, non invento niente.

Nella tua opera, quale è il tuo rapporto col tempo?

Mi viene da dire: non basta mai. Alla fine dei libri (quando non ne posso più) per esperienza so che devo rallentare, per non perdere concentrazione e piacere.

All'interno del foglio è importante mantenere la stessa intenzione dall'inizio alla fine perché ci sia freschezza, quindi bisogna trovare un equilibrio tra velocità e lentezza.

Di solito disegno scene lente, i miei personaggi non corrono quasi mai, e se lo fanno il paesaggio parla lentamente per loro.

Illustrazione e parola: quale dovrebbe essere la loro relazione ideale?
Relazione alla pari: rispetto, comunicazione e comprensione profonda reciproca.

Se dovessi riassumere in una frase quello che hai cercato attraverso la tua opera durante la tua carriera? E domani?

Un tempo cercavo lo stile, ora cerco l'autenticità. Cerco la più sincera espressione di me. E' difficile, credo non mi basterà questa vita.



Più interviste e illustrazioni.

LE DITA VERDI DI MONET

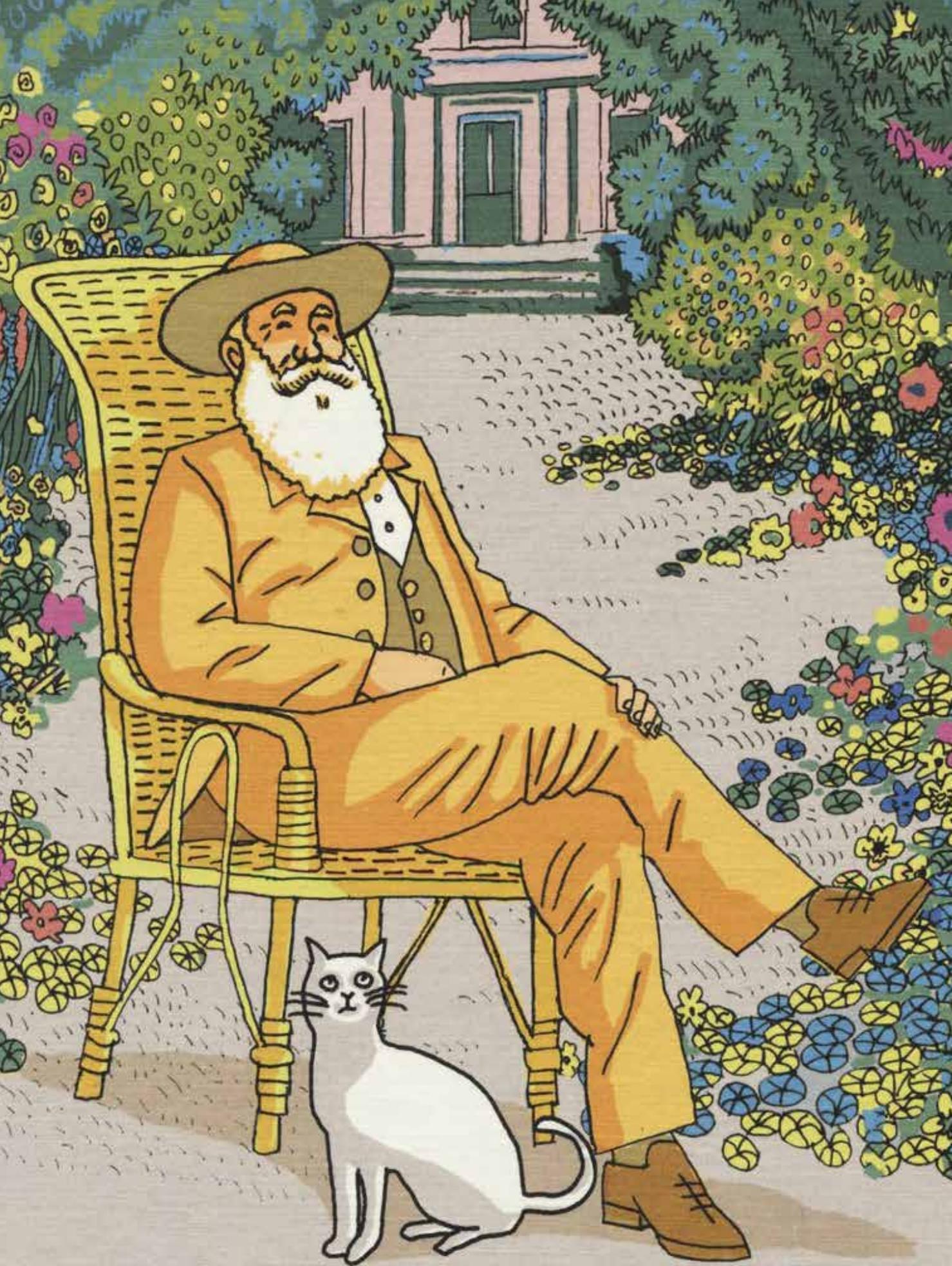
ATTRAVERSO IL GIARDINO

di Carlo Poesio

Un importante riconoscimento della valida creatività italiana nell'ambito del libro illustrato per ragazzi ci viene dalla Gran Bretagna. Dal libro edito nel 2015 dalla Royal Academy of Arts di Londra col titolo *The Green Fingers of Monsieur Monet*, le edizioni Lapis hanno subito acquistato i diritti: è nato Oltre il giardino del signor Monet (Roma, 2015, trad. di S. Marconi), titolo che è qui in esame. La Royal Academy aveva affidato il progetto a Debbie Bibo di cui sono ben conosciute nell'ambito mondiale dei libri sia la competenza editoriale sia la conoscenza e la valutazione della produzione libraria internazionale. È motivo di grande soddisfazione per noi italiani apprendere che per questo (il primo dei libri illustrati per bambini previsto nel programma editoriale della Royal Academy) Debbie Bibo abbia scelto due noti italiani: Giancarlo Ascarelli come autore del testo e Pia Valentinis

come autrice delle illustrazioni. I nostri due connazionali hanno ben saputo conformarsi al clima previsto nel progetto di Debbie Bibo, sottolineando con una narratività verbale e visiva, insieme agevole e interessante, gli aspetti sia dell'uomo sia dell'artista Monet. Fette della sua vita quotidiana come il «minicorteo» di familiari e inservienti al suo arrivo a Giverny, o il suo frenetico adoprarsi per modificare la proprietà acquistata e farla sua all'interno e all'esterno, le sue abitudini quotidiane, come sceglie i suoi abiti, come dipinge all'aperto e, più tardi, come vive durante la prima guerra mondiale, come fronteggia la graduale perdita della vista. Il famoso giardino di Giverny, quasi un personaggio d'eccezione con le bellissime illustrazioni che gli sono dedicate, è il cuore del libro. Da un saporito accenno agli arnesi per coltivarlo allo spettacolo della fioritura dei gigli profumati

The green finger of
Monsieur Monet,
Giancarlo Ascarelli e
Pia Valentinis, Royal
Academy of Arts,
2015.





“Il pittore trascorre ore in silenzio a contemplare i riflessi che la luce fa sullo stagno. Un giorno le ninfee sono germogli, il seguente sono in fiore.”

offerto a pochi spettatori di riguardo si passa all'originalità, alla ricchezza, alla varietà di piante e fiori che fanno pensare a un tappeto surreale variopinto in cui figura anche un laghetto che riflette la sagoma del pittore assorto. Tra le illustrazioni più suggestive e più tipiche dell'opera di Monet, c'è quella del laghetto delle ninfee, anch'essa surreale per forme e colori. Qui il pittore, seduto in barca, è intento a dipingere tra magnifiche isolette di ninfee che lo circondano a pelo dell'acqua, vibranti anch'esse di surrealità. L'ultima parte del percorso verbalmente e visivamente narrativo, che giustifica in pieno il titolo italiano Oltre il giardino di Monet, ci presenta lo scoppio e lo svolgersi della Prima guerra mondiale. Monet si chiude nel suo studio dove dipinge grandissime tele. I semi delle sue amate piante

si propagano ben oltre il giardino di Giverny, come nota il testo riferendosi alla illustrazione di Pia Valentinis con la magnifica ondata di strani volatili multicolori. Parole e immagini evidenziano la grande capacità comunicativa sia di Valentinis che di Ascari, la loro abilità nel provocare sensazioni ed emozioni nei giovani e anche giovanissimi lettori. E un libro, questo, su cui molti di coloro che lo hanno letto ritorneranno volentieri più volte su varie pagine per rievocare ciò che non possono o non vogliono dimenticare: sia le forme e i nomi molteplici dei fiori, sia le tappe della vita di Monet che lo hanno reso famoso (è noto il regalo che egli fece alla Francia di alcune tavole del ciclo delle ninfee oggi all'Orangerie di Parigi), sia la breve ma sostanziosa e chiara visione de La Belle Epoque in apertura di libro.



“ ”

MONET DICEVA
CHE IL GIARDINO
ERA IL SUO
CAPOLAVORO, MA
I SEMI CHE HA
PIANTATO SONO
CRESCIUTI BEN
OLTRE IL GIARDINO.

“ ”



Montagna
Sainte-Victoire
(1902-04) di Paul
Cézanne illustrata
da Pia Valentinis.

CHE PAESAGGIO! UN LIBRO ILLUSTRATO GUIDA AL DISEGNO EN PLEIN AIR

di Zazie Vostok

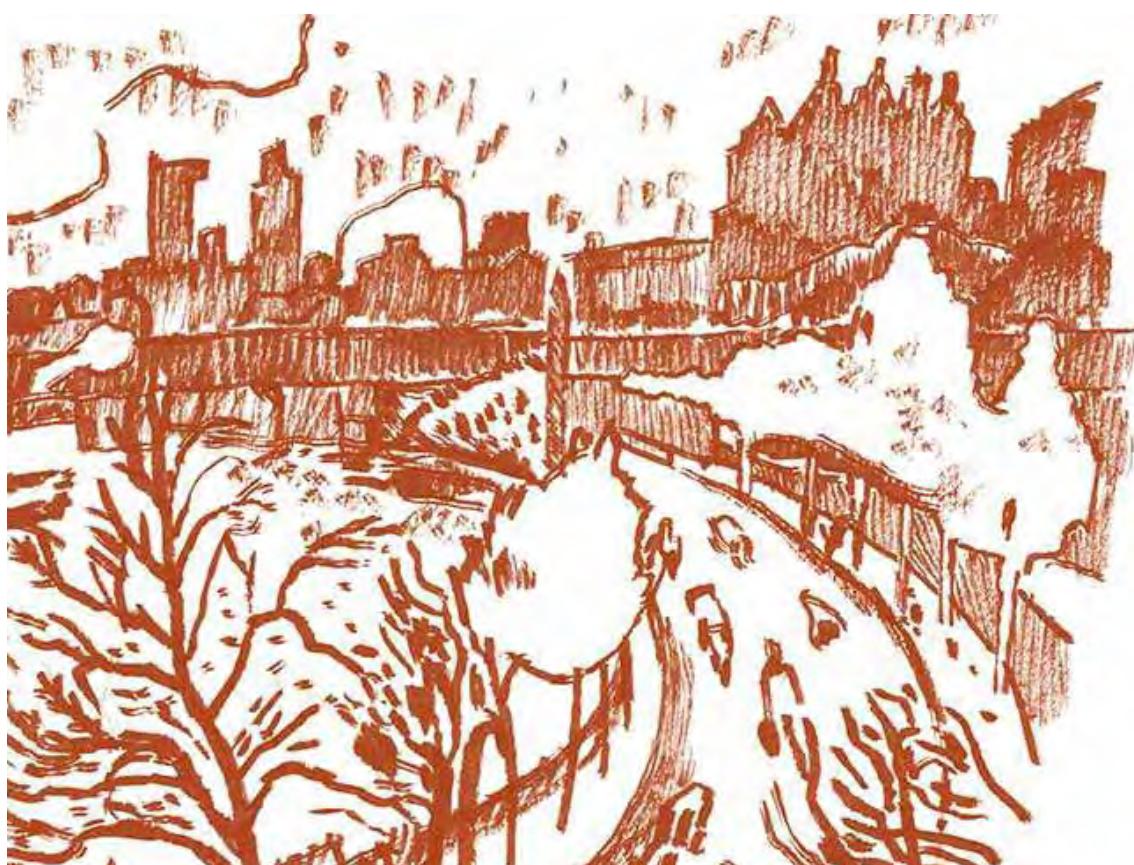
Per chi non lo sapesse, la casa editrice Topipittori ha nominato una delle proprie collane PiPPo, (Piccola Pinacoteca Portatile, progetto di divulgazione vincitore del Premio Andersen 2017 insieme al progetto PiNo, del quale ho già parlato qui).

A questa collana appartengono una serie di pubblicazioni volte a sviluppare la conoscenza e la curiosità nei confronti non solo dell'opera artistica ma anche del processo che porta alla produzione di un'opera d'arte, mantenendo come fine fondamentale lo sviluppo di

un'immaginazione creativa e attiva. Il loro valore aggiunto è costituito dal fatto che, spesso, i volumi sono elaborati in collaborazione con musei e case d'arte nazionali. Si pensi ai Musei Civici di Firenze, per la "sotto-collana" Piccole storie a colori (Giallo, Blu, Bianco, Rosso), la Gipsoteca Canoviana di Possagno e i Musei Civici di Bassano del Grappa, per Le meravigliose favole di Antonio Canova di Monica Monachesi e Gabriel Pacheco, o ancora il MART e la Casa d'Arte Futurista di Fortunato Depero di Rovereto per Depero e la casa del mago.



Ponte di Langlois,
raffigurato in un
quadro di Van Gogh
e da lui descritto al
fratello Theo in una
lettera del 16 marzo
1888.



Scorcio di un viale
di Londra nel 1800.

*"Il Louvre è il libro su cui impariamo a leggere.
Non dobbiamo però accontentarci (...).
Usciamo a studiare la bella natura, cerchiamo
di liberare lo spirito e di esprimerci secondo il
nostro temperamento personale."*

Lettera di Paul Cézanne
a Emile Bernard, 1905

Tra i molteplici albi date alle stampe c'è *Che paesaggio!*, dedicato alla pittura en plein air, al ritratto paesaggistico, alla pittura dal vero. Le autrici sono Marta Sironi, ai testi, e Pia Valentinis, per le illustrazioni. Nonostante il formato cartotecnico sia lo stesso della collana PiNo — un quaderno di grandi dimensioni ma leggerissimo — l'organizzazione interna è totalmente differente. A Pia Valentinis è stato affidato il compito di riprodurre grandi opere del passato — la prima che ci accoglie è *Artisti al lavoro sulle White Mountains (1868)* di Winslow Homer, l'ultima *La montagna Sainte-Victoire vista da Lauves (1902-04)* di Paul Cézanne, passando attraverso molteplici dipinti, fra cui *Estate. Campo di papaveri (1875)* di Claude Monet — mentre Marta Sironi ci offre, a lato di ogni tavola, una panoramica complementare sul modo nel quale i pittori di un tempo gestivano la loro arte e il loro tempo, proponendo spunti, accendendo idee, suggerendo di guardare spazi da punti di vista differenti, dando consigli

diretti ed indiretti su come liberare la propria creatività, e citando Courbet, De Pisis, Utrillo, Klimt, Matisse, Van Gogh...

Non manca quasi mai lo spazio bianco dove scrivere, disegnare o colorare. Il risultato del proprio estro o le bellissime illustrazioni di Pia Valentinis potranno essere poi ritagliate (ogni pagina reca il tratteggio con il simbolo delle forbici) e appese alle pareti della propria stanza, in modo da creare una piccola pinacoteca, nell'attesa che nasca la curiosità di cercare gli originali sul web e di visitare i musei nei quali queste opere sono custodite.

Come augurio per tutti gli artisti che si apprestano alla lettura, il volume si conclude con un invito che viene offerto direttamente dalle parole di Paul Cézanne: «Esci di casa e studia la bella natura, cerca di liberare lo spirito ed esprimerti secondo il tuo temperamento personale. Questa pagina bianca è per te». Invito che è anche un augurio per una primavera che sta quasi per arrivare.



e ho

ripreso

respiro

all'improvviso

mi sentivo

nella pelle e

oh!

talmente vivo!

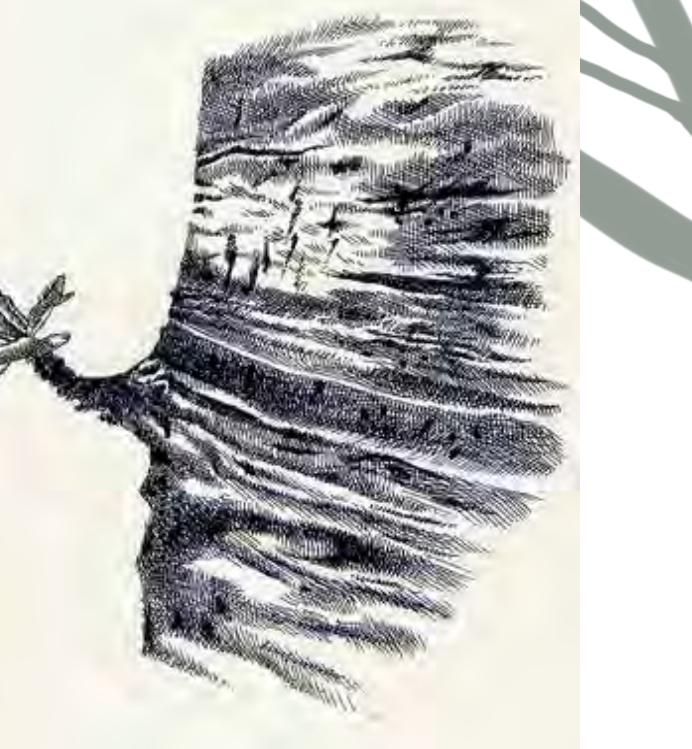
RACCONTARE GLI ALBERI

PIA VALENTINIS
2013

di Viola Gatti

L'IMPRESSIONE DI PIA

L'illustratrice scandisce le forme con un tratteggio a china fine, fatto di chiaroscuri dettagliati, e linee intricate come rami, un tratto duro come corteccia e allo stesso tempo vivo e organico come i particolari che riesce a cogliere.
Il suo stile riesce a fondersi con le illustrazioni colorate di Mauro Evangelista sempre definite da piccoli tratti.



IMPRESSIONE D'INSIEME

Da tavole dettagliate delle varie componenti di un albero affiancate da annotazioni botaniche e descrizioni scientifiche, si passa a visioni macroscopiche degli ambienti nel quale gli alberi si collocano nella loro interezza ridisegnando il paesaggio, suggerendo da sempre storie e versi poetici a chi li osserva.
Serie di piccoli schizzi in bianco e nero su un taccuino da disegno affiancano immagini elaborate ed ampie come quadri.



IMPRESSIONISMO

Le tavole sono come istantanee di paesaggi che avvolgono il lettore in un'atmosfera fatta di sensazioni e luoghi che ricordano ricordi. Colori, suggestioni e profumi suggeriti dalle immagini e dalle parole colgono il passare del tempo e delle stagioni, affrontato con maestosità dagli alberi, proprio come nelle tele degli artisti impressionisti di fine Ottocento.



L'IMPRONTA DELL'UOMO

La presenza dell'uomo è percepibile solo attraverso piccoli particolari. Oggetti abbandonati nella quiete della natura denotano il passaggio dell'uomo, senza che venga mai rappresentato, si integrano e intrecciano nel paesaggio suggerendoci una connessione molto forte e antica, ma allo stesso tempo quasi impercettibile: quella tra l'uomo e la natura.

CODICE CROMATICO

GERARCHIE VISIVE



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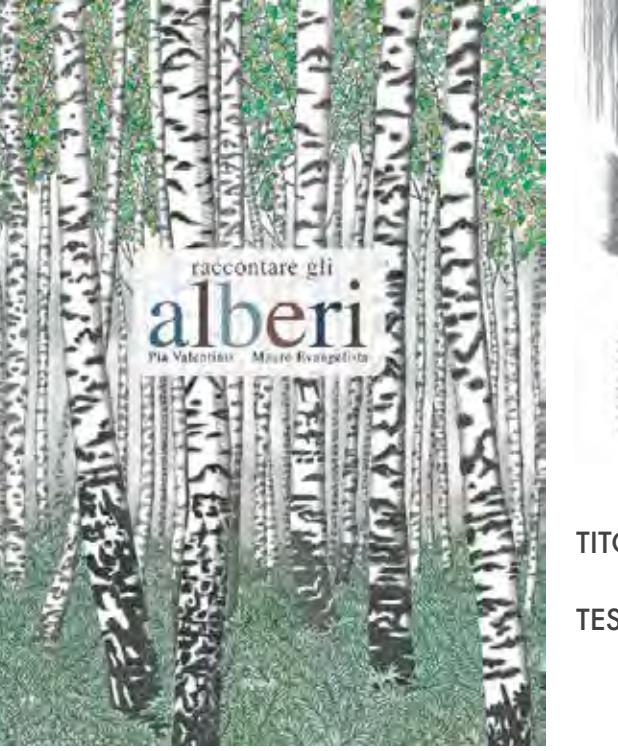
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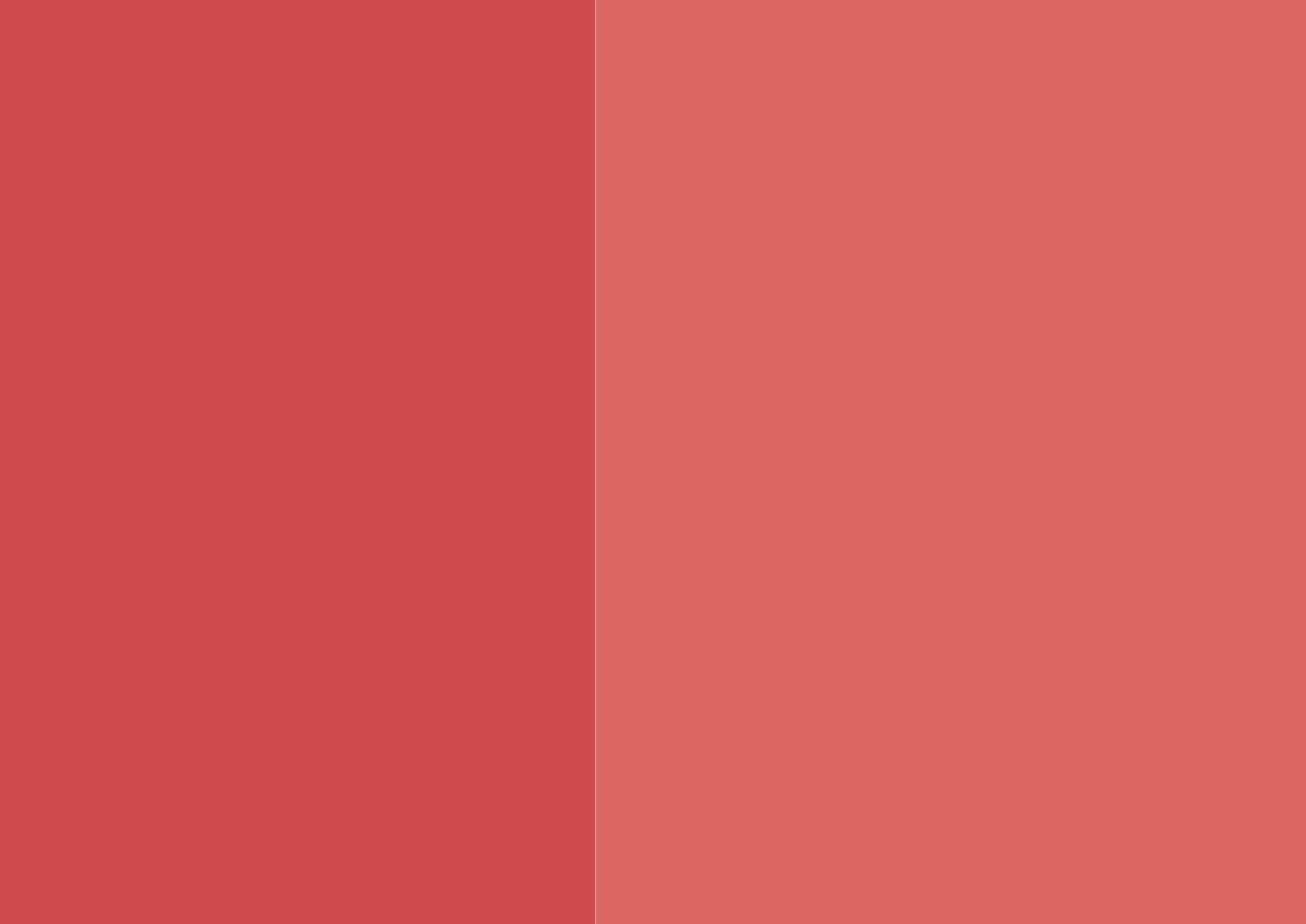


TITOLO: Nimbus Roman

TESTI: Garamond

Poesie, storie, leggende e miti, presi in prestito da narratori di tutti i tempi che hanno trovato negli alberi una fonte d'ispirazione, si fondono armoniosamente con le tavole illustrate.

"I libri che preferisco sono quelli in cui né le parole né le immagini avrebbero senso, prese singolarmente."



SAUL BASS

FIRST IMPRESSION

YOU NEVER GET A SECOND CHANCE
OF MAKING A FIRST IMPRESSION

by Eleonora Nitopi



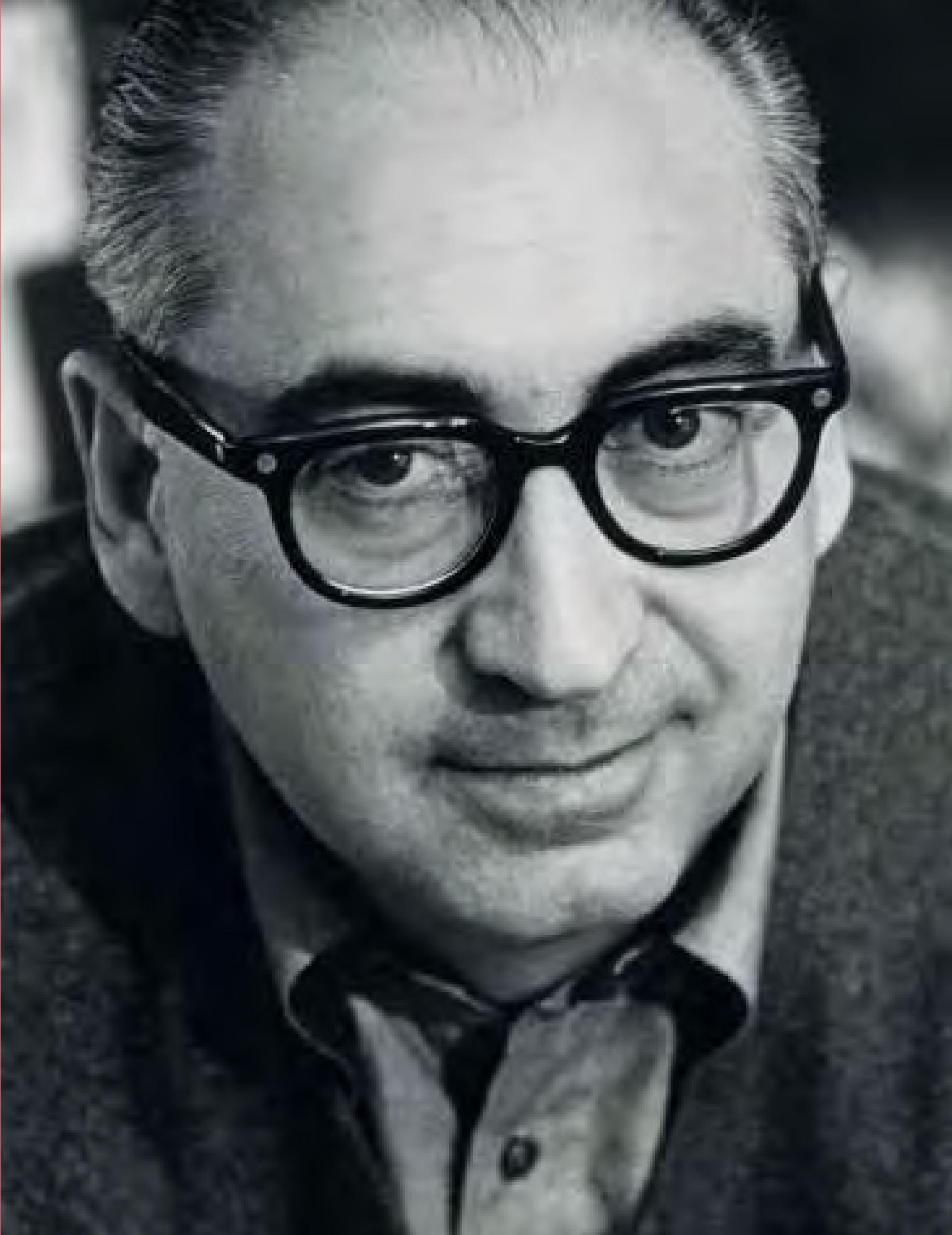
Saul Bass was one of the great figures of twentieth century design and filmmaking. This talented, influential and versatile visual communicator enjoyed a sixty-year professional career (1936-1996) during which he produced a body of work that is as diverse as it is powerful. In the mid to late 1950s he expanded the boundaries of graphic design to include film title sequences – a genre that he transformed.

Thereafter, in collaboration with his wife Elaine, he continued to create stunning openings for a wide range of films.

Saul was one of the most influential graphic designers of post war America. He established his own design office in 1952 so that he could work across a broad range of graphics, and later became known as a leading designer of trade symbols and corporate identity programs.

Besides all those areas of work already mentioned, Saul also created commercials, sponsor tags and show openers for television and designed a wide range of advertisements, as well as packaging, retail displays, album and book covers, lettering, typefaces and exhibitions.

It is difficult to pinpoint a definitive "Bass aesthetic" because he drew on a wide range of visual and cultural references. He had a tendency to use single strong graphic images, and he was fearless with color. His versatility was often remarked upon, as was his problem-solving approach to design.



“ ”

THE IDEAL TRADEMARK IS ONE THAT IS PUSHED TO ITS UTMOST LIMITS IN TERMS OF ABSTRACTION AND AMBIGUITY, YET IS STILL READABLE. TRADEMARKS ARE USUALLY METAPHORS OF ONE KIND OR ANOTHER. AND ARE, IN A CERTAIN SENSE, THINKING MADE VISIBLE.

“ ”

PUTTING ON A SHOW

THE IMPACT OF CORPORATE IDENTITIES

by Jennifer Bass & Pat Kirkham

Corporate identity design is the creation of a distinct and unified visual identity for a company or institution, usually centering on a trademark. According to Saul, “The fundamental objective of altering the visual look and house mark for any corporation is to make the change faithfully represent the company, and reflect the role it plays in the environment. On the surface that sounds simple. But, before you start changing anything, you have to clearly understand what you are changing, and why you are changing it.”

“Usually we become involved because

a company has a practical problem. They’ve changed their name. They’ve merged. They’ve had a trademark for a long time and their business has changed so the trademark no longer reflects what they do. Or, there may be a basic need for updating.”

“We’ve developed a way of approaching the task that makes what we do more comprehensible to non-designers. It’s a straightforward problem-solving technique that has come to be used by many design consultants these days.”

Saul with staff members, in the midst of what was, at that time, one of the most extensive corporate identity programs ever undertaken



"It starts with a study and analysis phase, during which we arrive at the critical strategic decisions that will guide our efforts. There's nothing mysterious about what we do. We start by learning the client's business as thoroughly as we can. Products or services: we learn their history, their unique characteristics, their strengths, their weaknesses. We analyze competitors. Who is doing well or poorly and why.

"We collect and analyze all the client's communication materials, everything that carries the corporation's identity. If market research exists, we enlist it. If it doesn't, we might recommend that it be undertaken, and though we don't do the research ourselves, we participate in creating the design of the research to make sure that our questions are answered.

"In corporate identification, you're looking for the essence — the metaphor for the company's activity. But there are certain general things that any identity must achieve. It has to have an impact, a presence, yet also be timeless rather than particular to a hat moment in time. Because of the long-range nature of corporate identity — a company doesn't go through an identification program more than once or maybe twice in its lifetime — you must be very careful not to do something that will prompt people five years later to say, 'Oh, yes. That's what they used to do five years ago.'"

Scan the QR code
to watch a video on
the Bell System's logo
redesign





REINVENTING MOVIE TITLES

MARKERS OF MODERNITY

by Jennifer Bass & Pat Kirkham

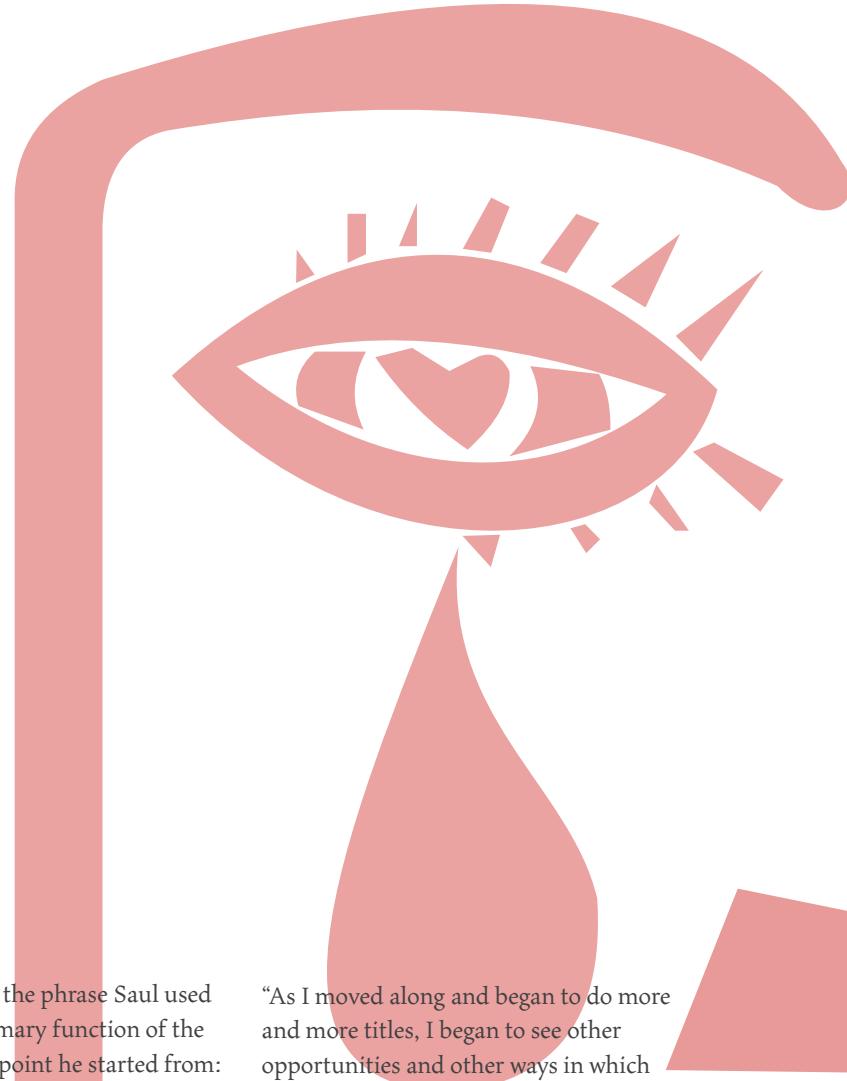
Saul believed that film, like a symphony, deserved a mood-setting overture, and used ambiguity, layering and texture as well as startlingly compact imagery to reshape the time before the film proper began. He explained, "My position was that the film begins with the first frame and that the film should be doing a job at that point." Indeed, his title sequences so effectively captured and distilled the essence of the films to come that they came to be regarded as part and parcel of the film itself.

In all his work, Saul said that he "looked for the simple idea." But Saul's work in film was about more than just simplicity: his designs shaped complex ideas into radically simple forms that offered audiences a set of clues, a sort of hermeneutic

to deeper meanings under the surface of the movie.

Saul described the ideal title as having "a simplicity which also has a certain ambiguity and a certain metaphysical implication that makes that simplicity vital. If it's simple, it's boring."

In later years when artistic titles became an essential feature in many movies, Saul was often asked to speak and write about title sequences. He found himself in the curious position of having to analyse and define something he had reinvented as he went along. Never a fan of fixed categories or absolute statements, Saul came up with a series of open-ended notions, keys to understanding the role his titles could play in the work of the film.



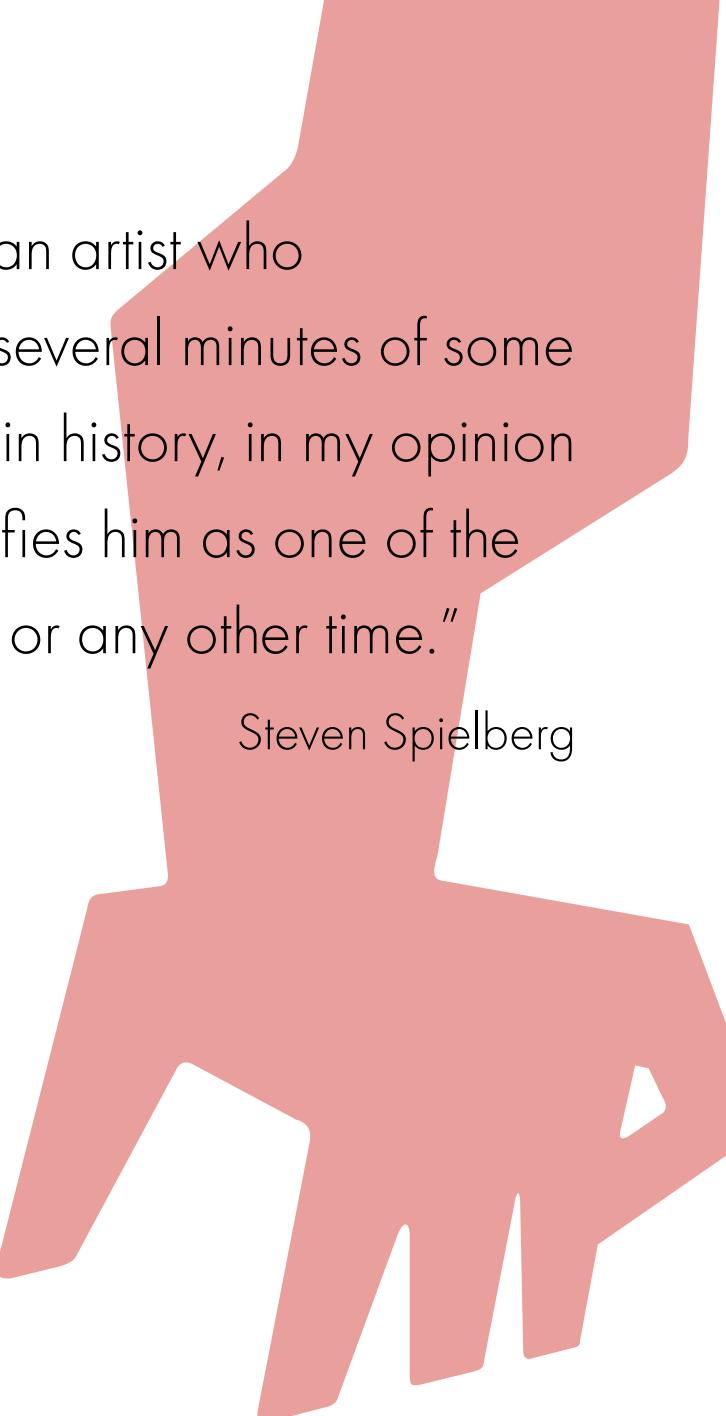
"In the mood" was the phrase Saul used to describe the primary function of the title sequence, the point he started from: "I began dealing with titles in terms of setting the mood, creating an atmosphere, an attitude and a generalised metaphor for what the film was about. And setting up the subtext of the film."

Thus, the title sequence is a sort of passage, a transitional vehicle that helps the audience cross from the world outside the theater into the world of the film. In "The Man with the Golden Arm", the titles created a mood of intense anxiety. In "Seconds" the mood is horror; in "Bonjour Tristesse" it's bitter-sweet regret, and in "It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World" one of good cheer and old-fashioned fun.

"The time before" was Saul's way of describing titles that expanded the time period covered by the film. Saul wrote,

"As I moved along and began to do more and more titles, I began to see other opportunities and other ways in which the titles could serve the film. A title can act as a prologue. It can actually tell you about the time before the film. Sometimes it actually becomes part of the story."

"Seeing for the first time" is perhaps the most interesting perspective Saul offered on his work, because it suggests titles were not limited to summarising what was already there, but could serve as a lens through which to view the film in a different light. He encouraged audiences to see things in hitherto-unconsidered ways in order to heighten awareness, create ambiguities or raise expectations that something was about to happen.

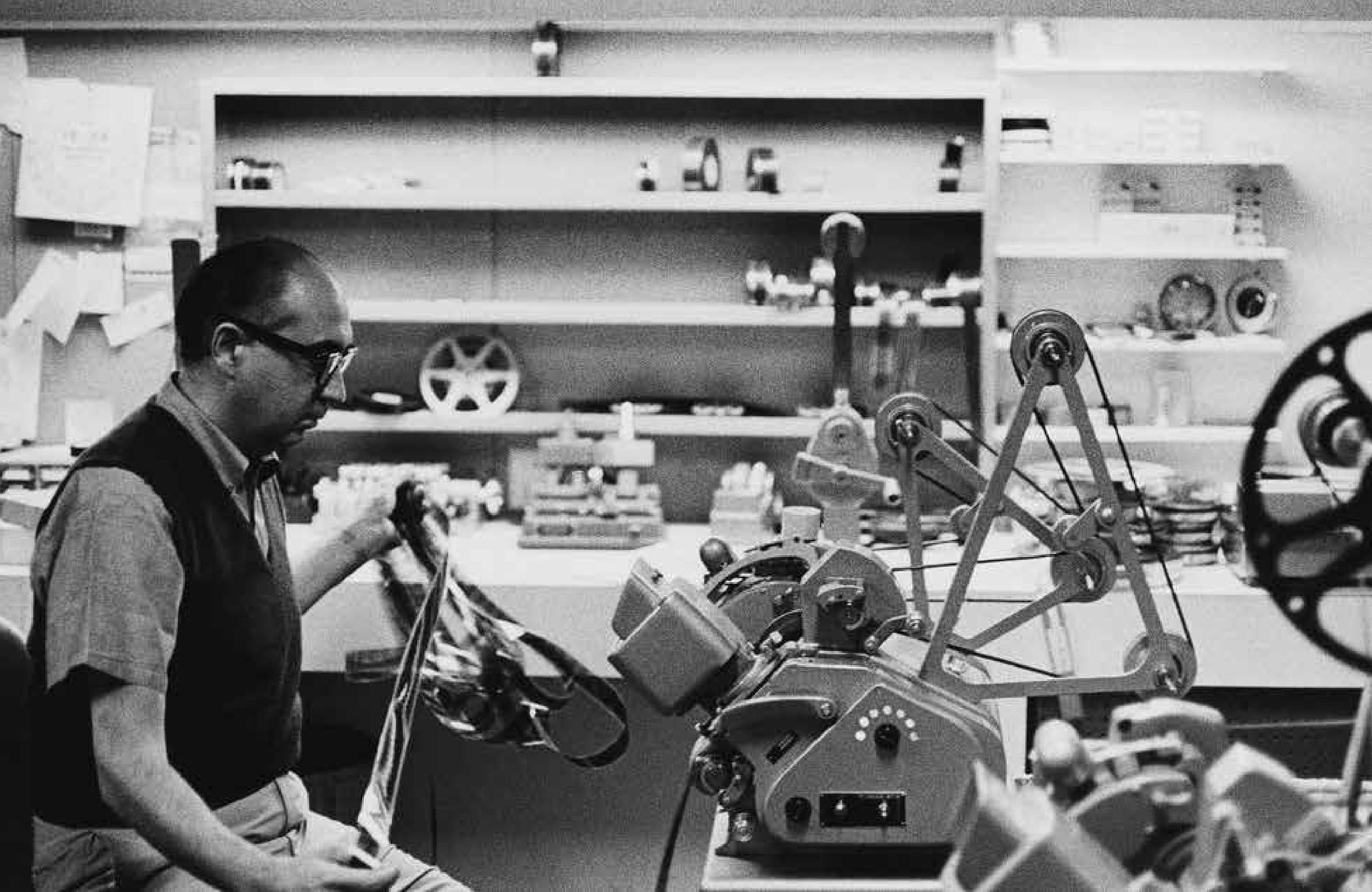


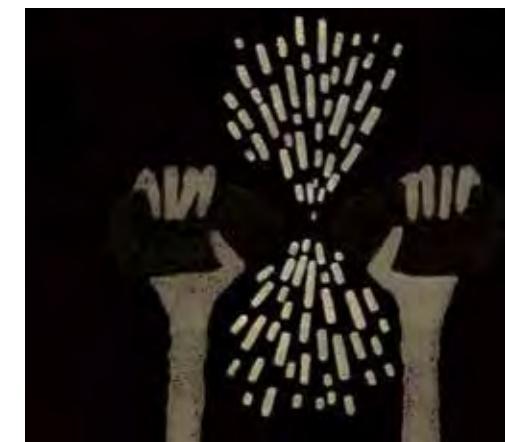
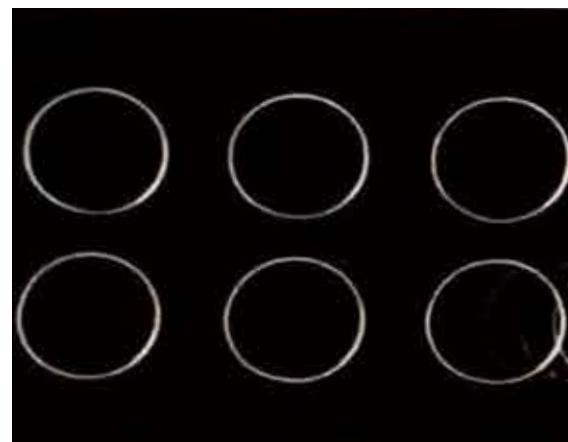
"Saul Bass wasn't just an artist who contributed to the first several minutes of some of the greatest movies in history, in my opinion his body of work qualifies him as one of the best filmmakers of this, or any other time."

Steven Spielberg

Scan the QR code to
watch a Saul Bass'
documentary about
Main Titles







TELEVISION

THE ART OF SOFT SELLING

by Jennifer Bass & Pat Kirkham

Hallmark Hall of Fame
(1964)
An animated translation
of the existing company
logo

History of Invention,
IBM (1962)
This extended
commercial aimed at
demystifying the idea of
the computer by com-
paring it to the important
inventions of the past

Television graphics was one of the fastest-growing straw of commercial advertising in the United States in the 1950, thanks to the rapid postwar spread of television into American homes.” Top agencies, such as Carson Roberts, Ogilvy, Benson & Mather, W.B. Doner and J. Walter Thompson, were involved and high standards were set by individual art directors, designers, artists and animators such as Georg Olden, Robert Guidi, John Hubley, Leo Langlois, Herb Lubalin and Gene Deitch.”

Given Saul’s growing reputation, it is not surprising that he too was offered work in this new medium. From the mid-1950s, he undertook a variety of commissions, from commercials and

show openers to short films. Clients ranged from media companies such as ABC Television, CBS and RCA (Radio Corporation of America), to Blitz Beer, Mennen skincare products, IBM and Hallmark Cards. Saul found television less creatively satisfying than film because of the smallness of scale, the extremely tight time restrictions (openers rarely ran more than thirty to forty seconds) and technology incapable of producing images as crisp and clear. With television, he explained, “you’re more of a mason than an architect.” His caveats notwithstanding, he was well suited to work that demanded clarity, directness, compression and constraints of scale and time.

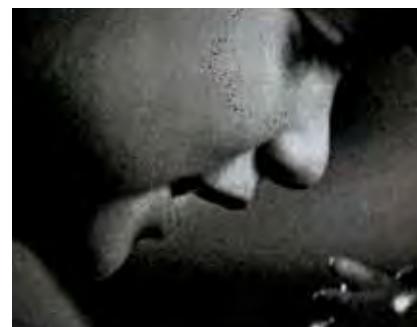
"Saul understood and harnessed the power of images, and his energy and ideas transcended the boundaries that have traditionally separated design, film, architecture and art. He helped transform our visual landscape and shaped our sense of it and was irrepressible in his search for the best solution"

Harold M. Williams

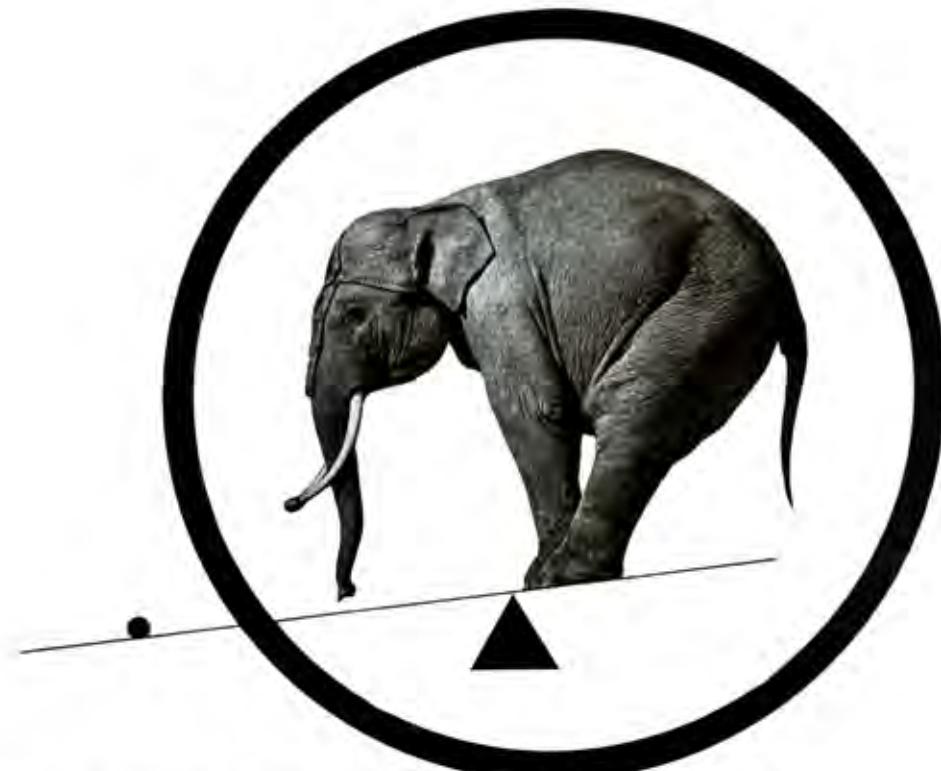
Saul disliked "table-pounding" commercials, preferring a softer sell: "I feel there is more than one way to do a selling job... there is a positive, consistent, coherent way, one that respects the intelligence, good taste and capacity of an audience." In *The Kid*, a one-minute commercial for RCA about the Company's commitment to the future, a child struggles to learn to tie his shoelaces while a voice-over speculates about the world the child will inherit and RCA's role in that future. For IBM, Saul created two extended commercials to help allay fears about computers, a relatively new invention. "History of Inventions" associated the computer with famous inventions of the past, while "Men Against Cancer" focused on the role of the computer in the fight against cancer.

Saul featured his four-year-old daughter Jennifer in a commercial for Mattel's Baby Tenderlove doll (1968) that

featured "fluid close-ups of a child experiencing the fantasy of playing mother to a doll?" Those for Mennen company's Genteel shampoo and Baby Magic lotion focused on close-ups of a baby and a caring adult (Elaine). Described by a journalist as "poetic," Saul said of the Mennen commercials: "I sought to express the tenderness between mother and child in terms of the practical concern a mother has for her newborn. There is no massive repetition, no zooming in on the package, no freeze frame on the name. It identified the product only once, during the last ten seconds. Yet... the commercial did everything hoped for: test survey revealed that women were reading back such keywords as love, tenderness, health, warmth, security. Their own feelings were associated with the commercial."



Baby Tenderlove,
Mattel (1968)
This commercial focused
on close-ups of a child
playing with Mattel's
popular Baby
Tenderlove doll.



OKAY, YOU CAN GET DOWN NOW, GERTRUDE...

We were thinking how to show you the kind of absolute control you get with Tylon, and in walked Gertrude. We'd forgotten the appointment. She hadn't, of course. You know how it is with elephants. We persuaded her to demonstrate what we mean. Cost us a few bales of hay, but it seems worth it. • Absolute control and perfect balance in all Tylon cold wave solutions—that's gospel. (Okay, you can get down now, Gertrude.) That's what keeps its popularity soaring. • That, plus the fact that you can give three Tylon cold waves in the time it takes for two others. Makes it nice for everybody. Speed . . . simplicity . . . absolute control. Just what you're looking for, isn't it? (Okay, you can get down now, Gertrude!) • And that reminds us, big things are happening at Tylon. More excitement than a circus! George Barrie came over as vice-president and general manager, and John Zerbo joined us as technical director in charge of product development. (Gertrude, get down will you—the performance is over!)

Tylon COLD WAVE • contains genuine TYO

Tylon Products, Inc., 251 E. 139th St., N.Y. 51, N.Y.

INFLUENCES

GYORGY KEPES & EUROPEAN MODERNISM

by Jennifer Bass & Pat Kirkham

It was while he was working at Blaine Thompson that Saul met Gyorgy Kepes, the Hungarian-born artist, designer and teacher, who was to have an enormous influence upon him. Saul often told the story of how, casually browsing in a bookshop, he discovered Kepes's *Language of Vision* (1944), a seminal publication that featured contemporary American advertising and student exercises — all heavily influenced by the Bauhaus and other European Modern Movement design. To Saul's astonishment, the blurb on the book's cover noted that Kepes, who had worked in Germany with his compatriot and former Bauhaus teacher, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, and had headed the Light and Color Department at the New Bauhaus in Chicago, taught advertising design, and was now teaching at Brooklyn College. Saul enrolled immediately.

Kepes helped transform the ways in which Saul thought about design, helping him make the transition from

a talented designer with a burgeoning interest in Modernist graphics to a major player. It is difficult to know exactly how well acquainted with Modern Movement design Saul was before he met Kepes. He was familiar with some modern art and design through Trafton's classes, with of "modern" expression in French, German and Soviet cinema, loved surrealism — especially Magritte — and greatly admired Man Ray, Cassandre, Paul Rand and others whose designs appeared in Kepes's book. He had read Moholy-Nagy's *The New Vision: From Material to Architecture* (first published in English in 1932), but his knowledge was piecemeal and mainly visual. That would change with Kepes's class. Kepes took a highly intellectual approach to design. He believed that visual tensions produced by certain combinations of visual elements form the basis of a universal language of vision, and that graphic design and motion pictures could play

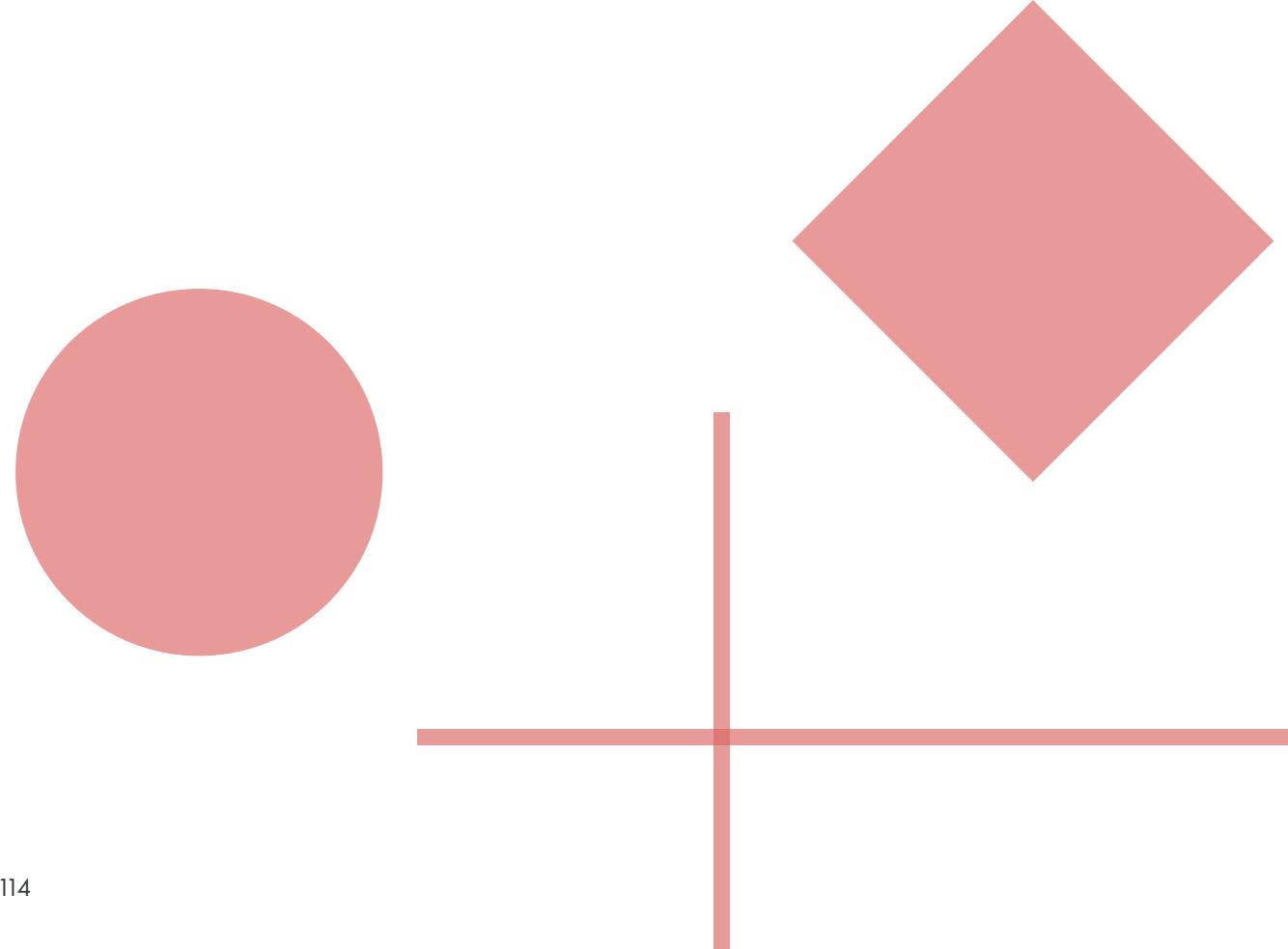
a major role in changing the world because they were less hidebound by tradition. Such ideas resonated with Saul's political beliefs and artistic sensibilities, while the elevation of graphics and moving images to the top of the artistic hierarchy validated Saul's own area of work in ways that no one else had done.

Many graphic designers besides Saul have testified to the excitement of studying with this most gifted and evangelical of teachers.⁷ Reminiscing about the fast learning curve he experienced, Saul said that he felt as if he had discovered "The Word" and described Kepes as opening up a new world for him. He really just set me on fire ... I felt like my pores were palpitating, you know? I was so excited and so upset — in a good way — that it would take me hours to settle down after each class. And indeed I had plenty of time. It was

a two-hour subway ride from Brooklyn College to where I lived ... but it was well worth it."⁸

Although the basis of his training with Kepes was in Bauhaus-style graphics and the "New Typography," Saul increased his familiarity with other aspects of European Modernism, from Cubism and Constructivism to De Stijl and Surrealism. Saul's fascination with psychology ensured that he soaked up Kepes's views on the importance of the psychological responses to design.

Saul's work changed dramatically, becoming more dynamic and abstract. The Modernist concern with pairing away the extraneous and the decorative marked Saul's work thereafter, and he developed greater facility with, among other things, montage and the expressive possibilities of lettering and typography.



“ ”

THE BASIS OF EVERY LIVING
PROCESS IS AN INNER
CONTRADICTION, THE LIVING-
QUALITY OF AN IMAGE IS
GENERATED BY THE TENSION
BETWEEN THE SPACIAL FORCES;
THAT IS, BY THE STRUGGLE
BETWEEN THE ATTRACTION AND
REPULSION OF THESE FORCES.

“ ”

Gyorgy Kepes

SPARTACUS

SAUL BASS
1960
by Eleonora Nitopi

ROMAN LAW IMPRESSION

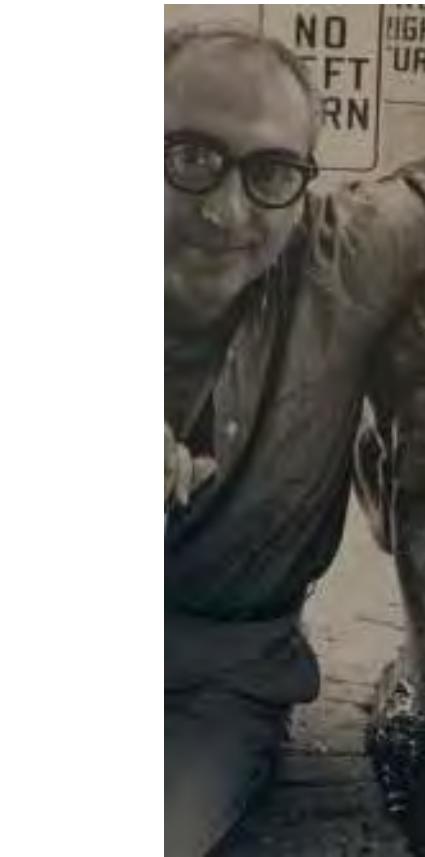
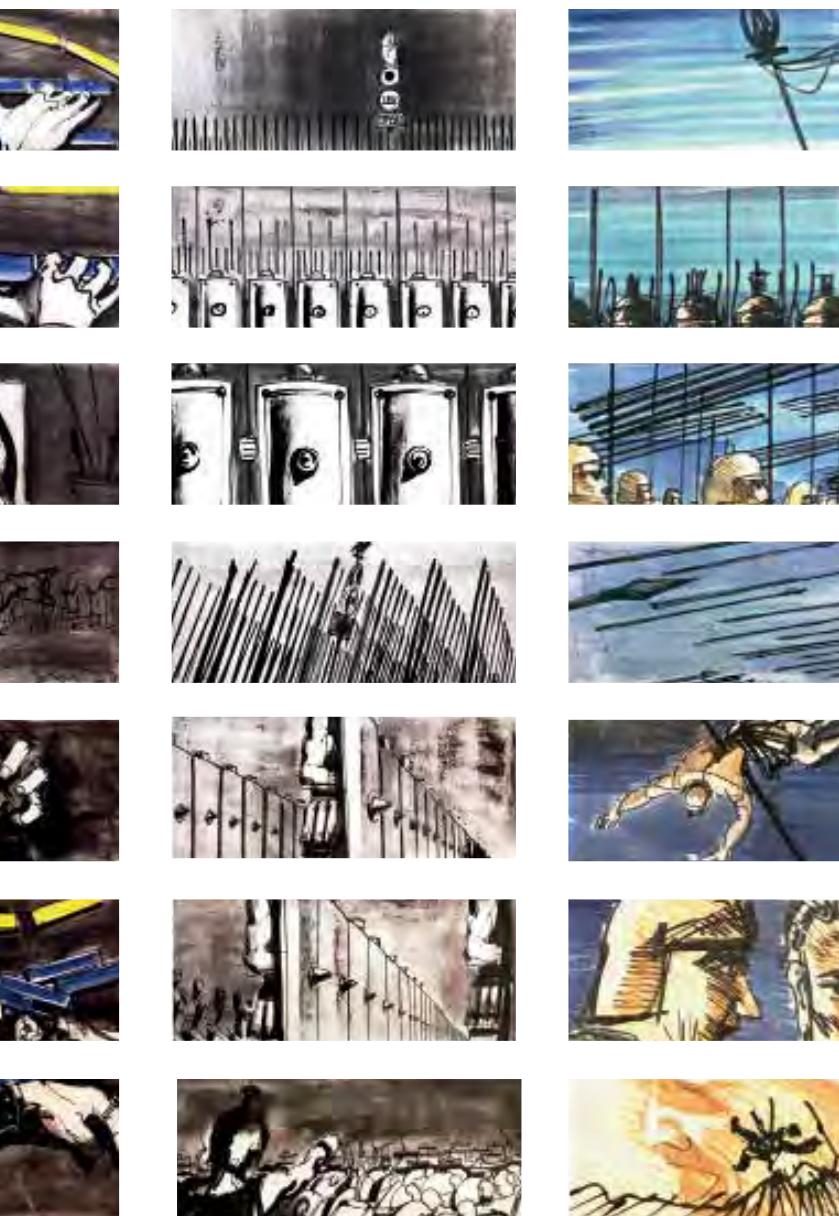
"What we were going for in the Spartacus title was the multiple layers of elegant and disdainful faces, which express the duality of Roman rule, the oppressiveness and brutality, as well as the sophistication that made possible so many contributions to Western civilization. It seems very rich to see the growth of those profiles forming a full face, and full faces dissolving into profiles before the final face starts to crack apart and the camera zooms into the empty eye, signaling that all is not well."



Scan the QR code to watch
the entire title sequence

IMPRINT ON PAPER

Saul conceptualised and storyboarded the final battle between the slaves, led by Spartacus, and the well trained forces of the Roman state.

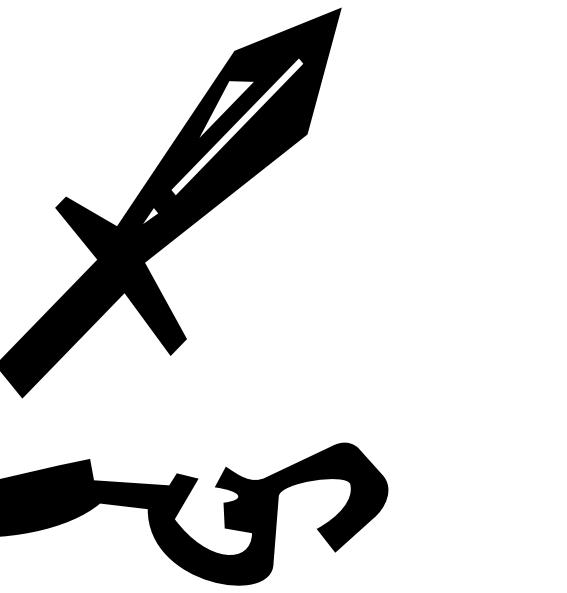


ILLUSIVE IMPRESSION

The tendency is to think of gladiators as ruffians who were just thrown into the ring – but gladiators were viewed as prized animals, they were carefully treated, though not as individuals or human beings. Saul considered this statement and sensed that the "circus allusion", with animals in cages, was a good one. That's what led to the eventual set, which was really a large-scale circus with bars and barred pathways into the practice ring."



VISUAL IMPRESSION



The poster represents a slave with a sword and a broken chain:
when you see that you know that the issue is freedom



NCS S 2070-Y90R



NCS S 0300-N



NCS S 8010-R90B

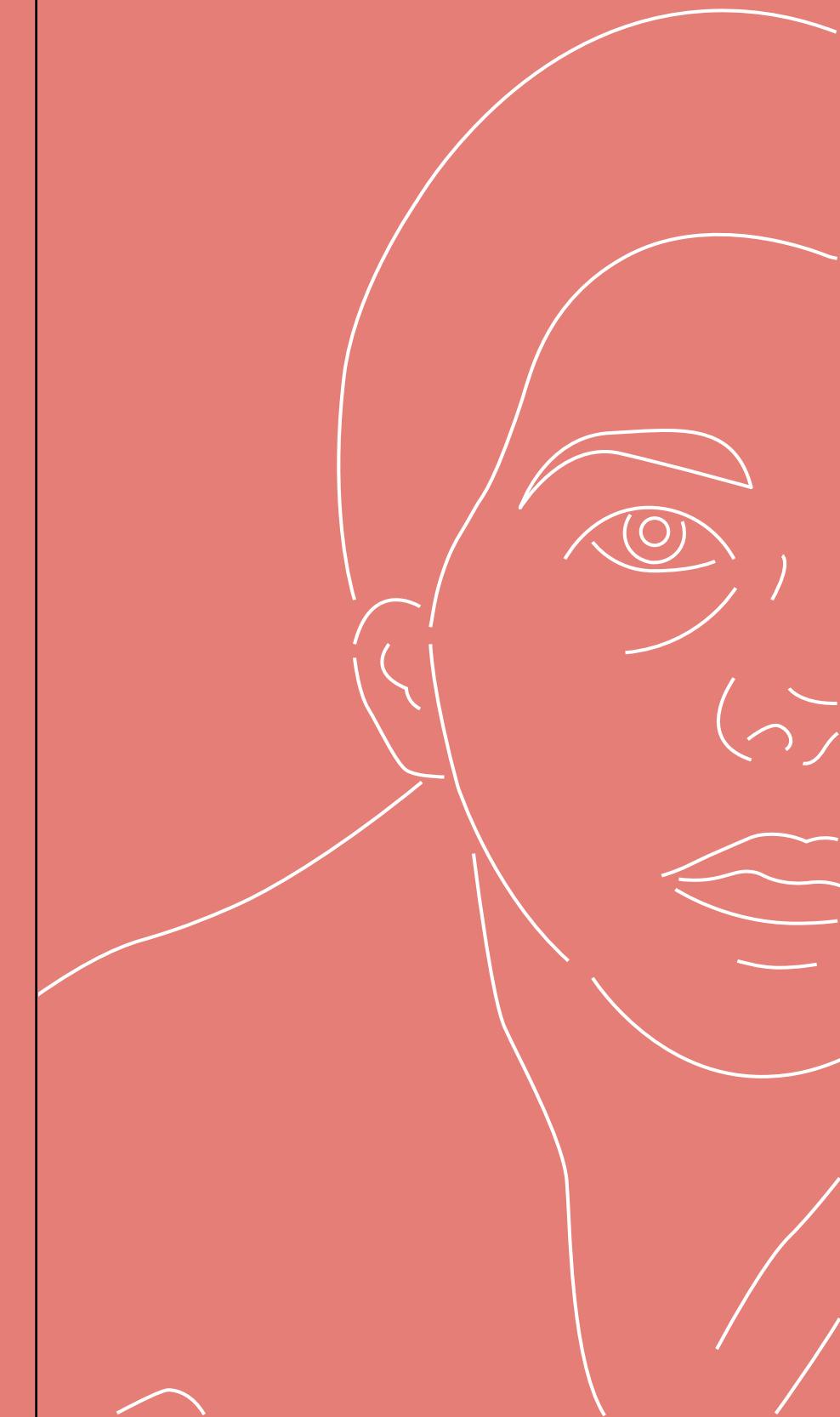


BRIDGET RILEY

OPTICAL IMPRESSION

TRICKING THE EYE TO BROADEN
THE PERCEPTION OF REALITY

by Mercedes Vitali

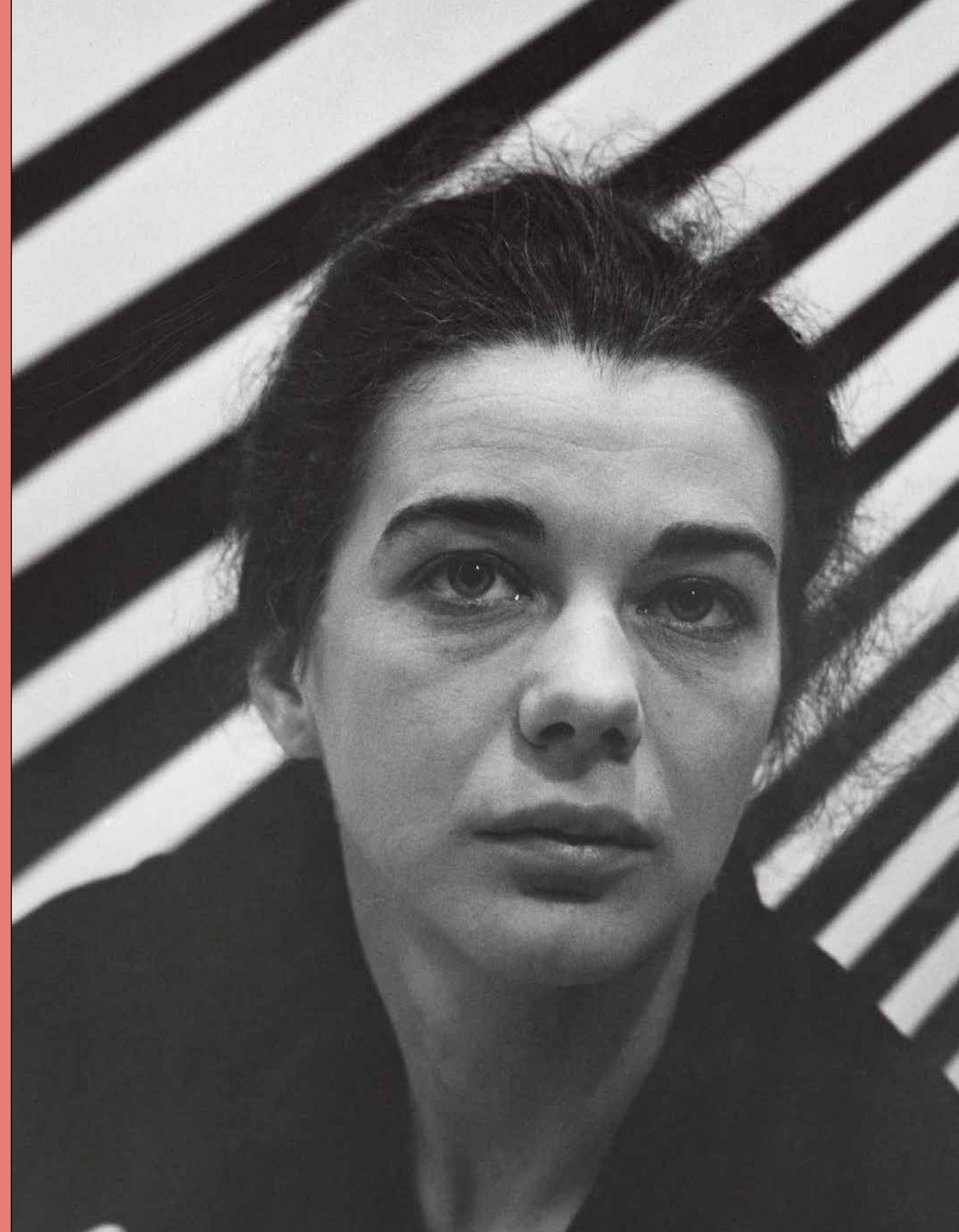


Bridget Riley was born in 1931 in London, where her father worked as a painter and owned a local printing business. During World War II, she was sent to live in Cornwall with her sister and mother, and it was this rural seaside landscape that would go on to inspire her work throughout her life. After her father was seriously injured in a car accident, she delayed her career in art to help support him.

A trip to Italy in 1960 reawakened Riley's creative spirit. She spent the early 1960s creating and refining her first pieces of Op Art, limiting herself to a pared-down color palette of only black and white. In 1967, a seismic shift occurred in Riley's work as she introduced color to her palette for the first time. Though examples of her early work show the clear Pointillist treatment of color, now Riley began to experiment with the combination of color, and the potential for narrative and emotion that it brings.

Moving away from the lines and primary shapes that defined her earlier work, with "Rhomboid" compositions from 80's and early 90's emerged as the artist sought to find new ways to generate interaction between colors. Later in 00's the artist introduces "Curve" compositions.

Today, Riley continues to live and work in London and Cornwall, as well as Vaucluse, France. As one of the most important living British artists, Riley has been the subject of numerous solo and group exhibitions at famed institutions like the Tate and the Serpentine in the United Kingdom as well as Dia:Chelsea in the United States.





CONSUMING RILEY

BRIDGET RILEY AND OP ART HISTORY

by Simon Rycroft

Op Art came to prominence in Europe and the United States during the early 1960s. Its name, a shorthand for “optical art” and coined, like so many other 1960s monikers, by Time magazine in 1964, probably stuck more for its rhythmic echoes of another spectacular aesthetic prominent during the same period, Pop Art. Although it is difficult to delimit a commonality in style and presentation, Op Art has provoked common critical responses, perhaps the most prominent being the notion that, although essentially formal, abstract, and exact, the aesthetic concerned illusion above all else. For some, this concerned activating a new way of seeing where the primary aim of the art was not beauty of form, tasteful relationships, nor equilibrium in the old sense, but the activation of vision, heralding the emergence of a new level of visual sensibility. The act of perceiving a painting, therefore, was enhanced in Op Art to the point where the viewer was requi-

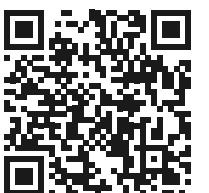
red to be a partner in reciprocal perceptual experiences. [...] This dialogical reading of Op Art painting was one often used with respect to Riley, who in her art was involved in establishing situations in which the spectator was drawn into a dialogue taking place in the uncharted territory of the visual response. Though labeled “the math book muse” by Time magazine, Riley herself arrived at the style by studying the impressionist painters and, in particular, painstakingly recreating Georges Seurat’s pointillist *Le Pont Courbevoie* (1886). Her aim in this was to dismember and dissect the visual experience presented by the painting and, in doing so, separate out its constituent elements of colour, form, linear axis, and tone, in effect paring the representation down to its elemental forms. In Riley’s paintings, however, the equilibrium suggested by a dominant formal pattern is in constant threat of dissolution

"Certain of the painters and constructors to be shown proceed as coldly and programmatically as computers. Others are poetic, musical or mystical in spirit, and these two extremes sometimes exist together."

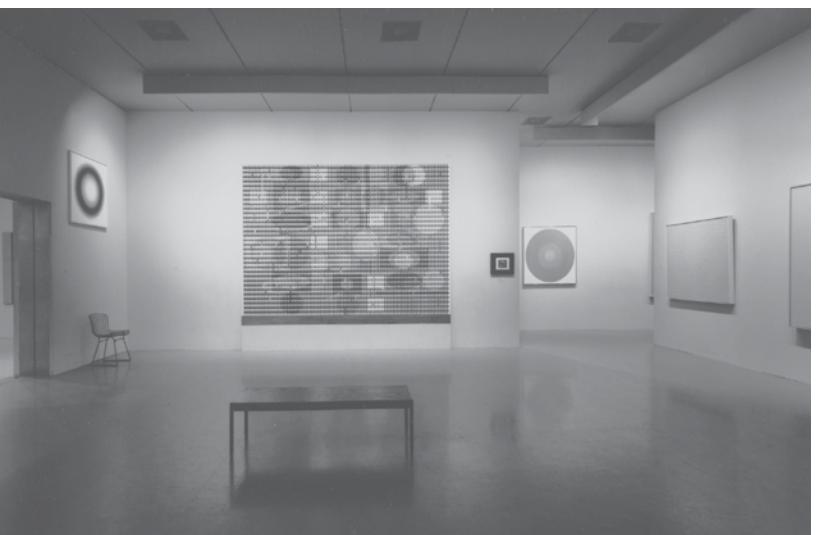
William Seitz, from the MoMA press release for "The Responsive Eye" exhibition (1964)

and disintegration as the eye moves over the painting and encounters apparent movement across the plane of the picture or a suggestion that the dimensions of that plane are being disrupted. Op Art came into popular consciousness in the early 1960s and especially in the 1965 New York Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) exhibition, *The Responsive Eye*. The reception of Riley's paintings and other Op Art at the MoMA exhibition set the tone of how the aesthetic would be understood in popular consciousness. Two paintings, *Current* (1964) and *Hesitate* (1964), were selected for the exhibition, both from Riley's first batch of black-and-white perceptual work which she completed between 1960 and 1965. They prompted reactions that were equally black and white. As the anthropologist and Op Art enthusiast Ehrenzweig noted about one of Riley's earlier exhibitions at Gallery One in 1963: "We sometimes speak of 'devouring' something with our eyes. In these paintings the reverse thing happens, the eye is attacked and devoured by the paintin-

gs... We have to submit to the attack in the way in which we have to learn to enjoy a cold shower bath. There comes a voluptuous moment when the senses and the whole skin tingle with a sharpened awareness of the body and the world around". The "Riley sensation" arose from the formal structure of her paintings and particularly in a disequilibrium and disturbance that seemed to characterise the patterns at some point on the canvas. This disturbance brought on acute physical sensations apprehended kinesthetically as mental tension or mental release, anxiety or exhilaration, heightened self-awareness or heightened awareness of unfamiliar or even alien states of being. But even these positive accounts of her work have not avoided the accusation that something more sinister was in operation, that Riley's work, and that of Op Art more generally, was engaged in some sinister act of programming and brainwashing. Invariably, though often implicitly, this unease connected to a broader concern that the paintings



The two pictures with the pink filter are from the documentary "The Responsive Eye", 1966, by Brian De Palma. Full film can be seen scanning the code. The picture in the middle by George Csere is an installation view of the exhibition.



were redolent and emblematic of a technocratic project. Nevertheless, a powerful and long-lived discursive connection was made between technocratic control and Op Art: the paintings, it was felt, tended to subjugate the viewer through a forced physical reaction that was mysteriously created by the games that the art played with sight and perception. As one critical reviewer noted in 1965, "Op uses TV... its image made up of hundreds of tiny dots which the eye reads by filling in the gaps... Like the TV viewer, the Op audience passively participates, conditioned into giving up critical faculties, or at least suspending disbelief. Peripatetic zombies". The viewing of the Op Art painting, then, was taken as part of the mass confusion wrought by the brutalising, potentially anesthetizing images of television. [...] These allegorical connections between Op Art and the sublime realm of modern science and technology, made in the mid-1960s, partially explain the ease with which the Op Art style was incorporated into commercial products. The excitement that surrounded new developments in science, technology, and electronic communication during the period meant that an aesthetic which presented shifting patterns of elemental forms, light, and waves of energy was familiar, so that those logo-like, buzzy, cheeky, and confrontational op paintings

were too easily absorbed into the commercial style-revolution of the sixties. Riley was perhaps the first Op Art victim of this appropriation. Around the time of The Responsive Eye exhibition Riley was invited to drinks by Larry Aldrich, the owner of a boutique in New York and an avid art collector. Upon arrival at the party she was presented with a sealed cardboard box that contained a dress sewn from fabric which copied the patterns of her painting *Hesitate* (1964). This was the first of a number of such commercial appropriations, and a series of legal challenges ensued, most of which were settled out of court. In her words she "began to grow restive, if not angry" over the fact that the imagery she had so scrupulously brought into being was beginning to be plagiarised by manufacturers of fabrics, wallpapers, and a number of other commercial products. "I found myself being vulgarized, plagiarized, trivialized, and put firmly out of court as an artist... I saw my images appearing on women's dresses, on matchboxes, on linens, on towels with your name it! It was incredible! Well, I sued everybody I could for plagiarism....Finally I left America and didn't come back for 10 years". After this experience Riley thought that it would take twenty years before she would be treated seriously as an artist again; commercialism, she felt, "polluted" her hard-won aesthetic.

Many fashion designers have been inspired by Op Art in the 60's. Rudi Gernreich was one of those, playing with basic shapes and contrasts. Here his "Silver and White evening dress (1966)", worn by Peggy Moffit in this photo by William Claxton.





OUR LYING EYES

**Q: HOW DO YOU GET THE BEST OUT
OF BRIDGET RILEY'S MESMERISING ART WORKS?
A: TAKE AN EYE SPECIALIST ALONG
TO THE GALLERY WITH YOU.**

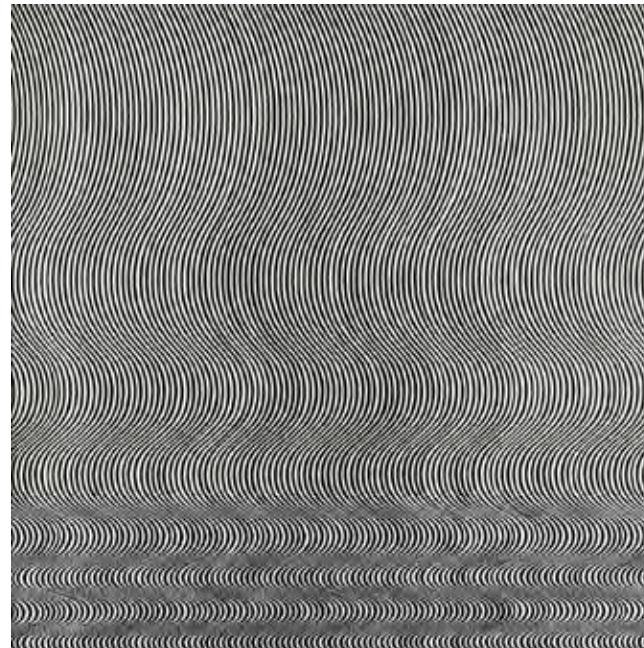
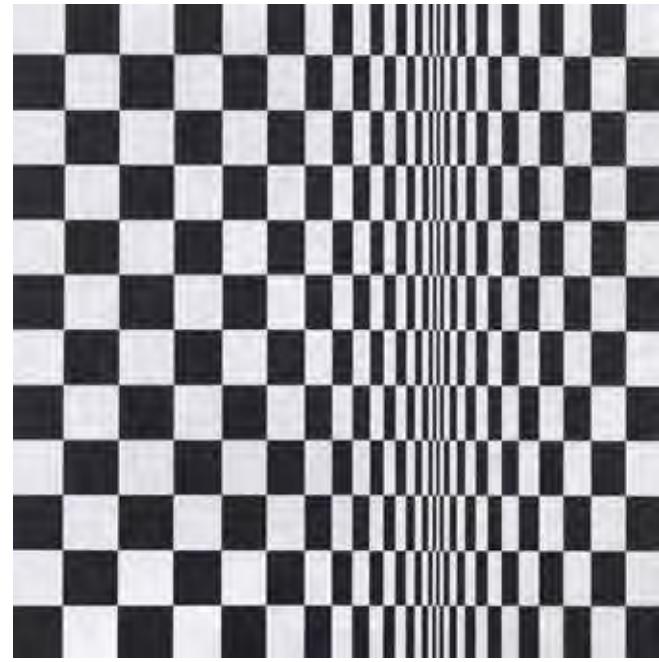
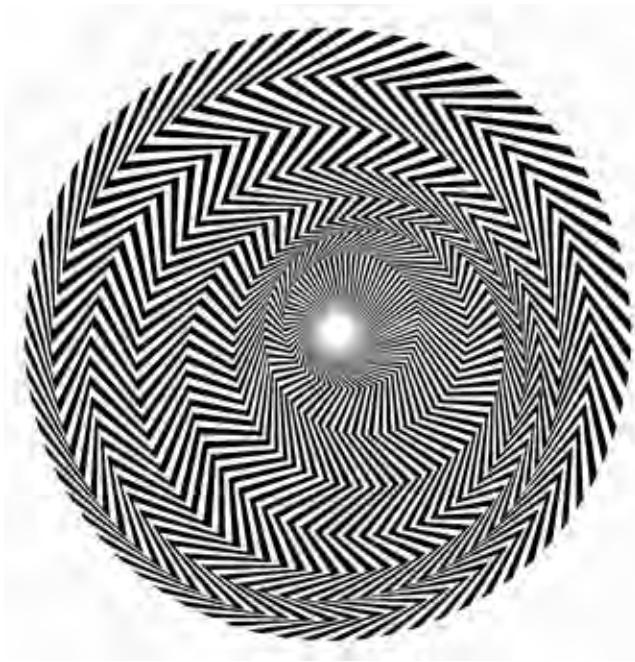
by Libby Brooks, and Adam Sillito

In the picture: a woman looking at "Red with Red 1" (2007) during the exhibition that took place in National Galleries of Scotland (from October, 2019 to January, 2020).

It was once said of Riley that no painter, alive or dead, had made us more aware of our eyes. From the dazzling early black-and-white paintings to the gentler colour contrasts of her Egyptian palette, her work is celebrated for its disorienting optical effects. But what, deliberately or intuitively, is Riley doing to our visual perception? And why is it impossible to see *Blaze*, the flat canvas in front of which we are standing, as anything other than curved?

"You are unable to see it as flat," says Sillito. "Your brain has learned through evolution to react to things that are in the natural world. You've learned to see things, you have a hypothesis about them, and there's an expectancy that comes

from certain arrangements of stimuli. If you take this painting, anywhere in the natural world that would be a curved, non-flat surface. What Riley has done is force a dissonance, where part of your brain knows that it is flat, and another part thinks that the only interpretation that fits is if it's a curving surface." One of Riley's earliest pieces, *Movement in Squares*, depicts a chequered board of varyingly spaced squares that appear to curl into the canvas. Sillito is a huge fan of Riley, and his hands flutter affectionately across the painting. "If you look from top to bottom your brain is constantly confused by what appears to be a pattern but is actually uneven. What you're expecting in the natural wor



From top-left corner
to bottom-right corner:
Blaze 1, 1962; Movement in Squares,
1961; Fall, 1963; Shift, 1963

"In order to change a colour
it is enough to change its background."

Michel Eugène Chevreul

Id is something that shows regularity. So as you look down, your mind tries to take a hold of it. You come up with all sorts of different hypotheses, and the whole thing seems to move before your eyes. You naturally move your eyes up and down and, as you do, they get all sorts of transitions, which confuse them. So you think there's movement, and then you think there isn't."

What Riley exploits, he says, is her knowledge of the methods by which the brain interprets the world. "The work of art sits between the observer and the picture. It interacts with the observer, and produces an effect on you." Her work goes beyond standard optical illusions, he argues. "She's understood the processes without actually having any knowledge of what goes on in the brain. She's intuitively picked up on those things which the brain uses to make decisions about the visual world and then she plays games with them. She draws you into her world and it's much more than simply a set of visual stimuli."

The next gallery is filled with Riley's jolting colour stripe paintings - Veld, Rattle,

Late Morning. This is the artist at her most eye-ache-inducing. "I don't quite understand these in the same way," says Sillito. "If you look at it for a while, you'll find that the very bright colours 'adapt out' your visual system."

Adapting out results in an inability to see as sensitively. It occurs, for example, if someone shines a bright light into your eye, or you enter a dim room. "In the same way, you can adapt out components of your visual system, and then when you move your eyes, you mask some of the other colours.

By looking at these vertical stripes you can adapt out those components of the visual system that process vertical stripes, and at the same time you are adapting out a colour channel, so if you move your eyes then it all jumps about."

He tips his head sideways to view the stripes horizontally. "But if you move your head to the side, then the bits of your brain that process horizontal information haven't been affected so you see everything OK again." I try it. It works. But why should it be that some of her paintings are actually uncomfortable

to view? "The brain processes form and colour separately, then puts them together later," he says. "These paintings give you confusing information, which makes you feel uncomfortable because you know there's something wrong. It actually hurts to look at them after a while. It's the visual equivalent of discordant music." Sillito also notes that the optical effects of the works can vary depending on where one stands in relation to them. "You can't be too close or you don't experience the full effect. The eye can't accommodate it sufficiently." He worries. "I can imagine this will be a terrible exhibition to go around because there will be all these people standing a foot away from the painting."

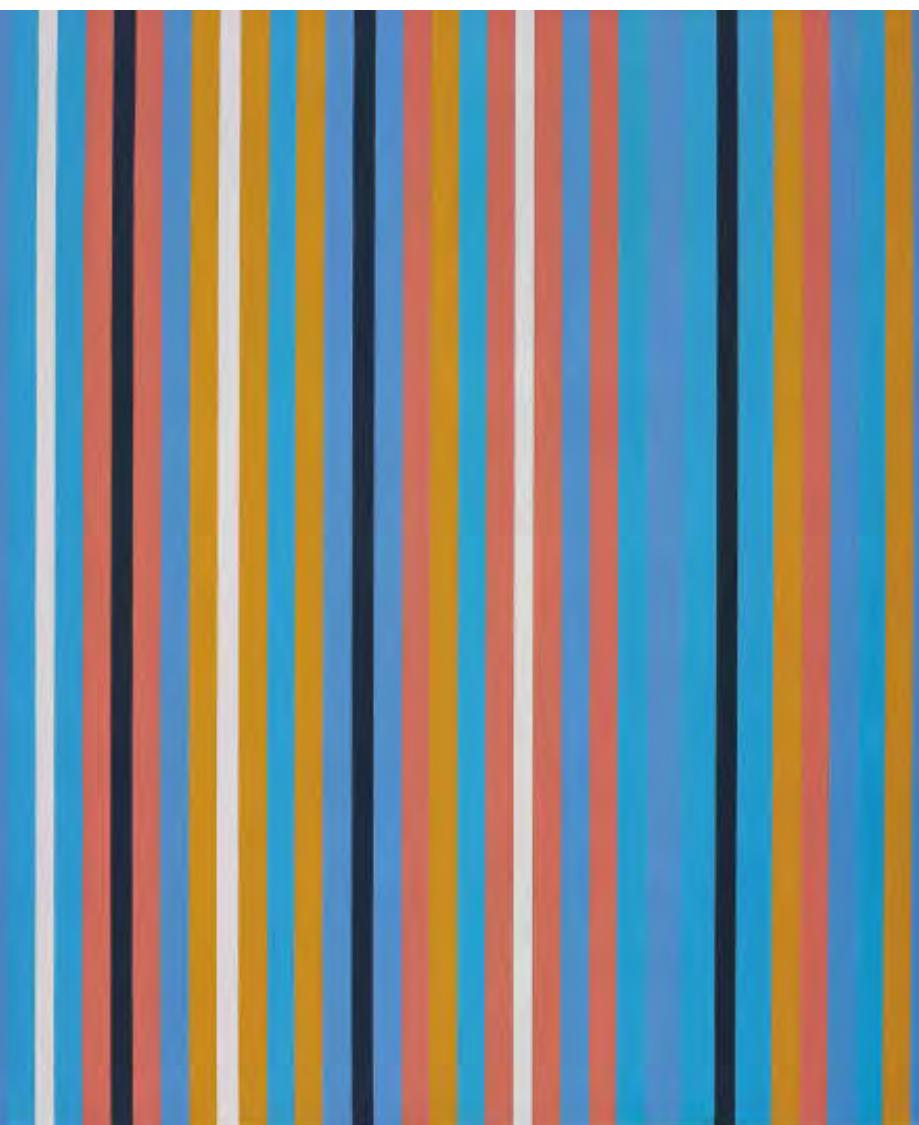
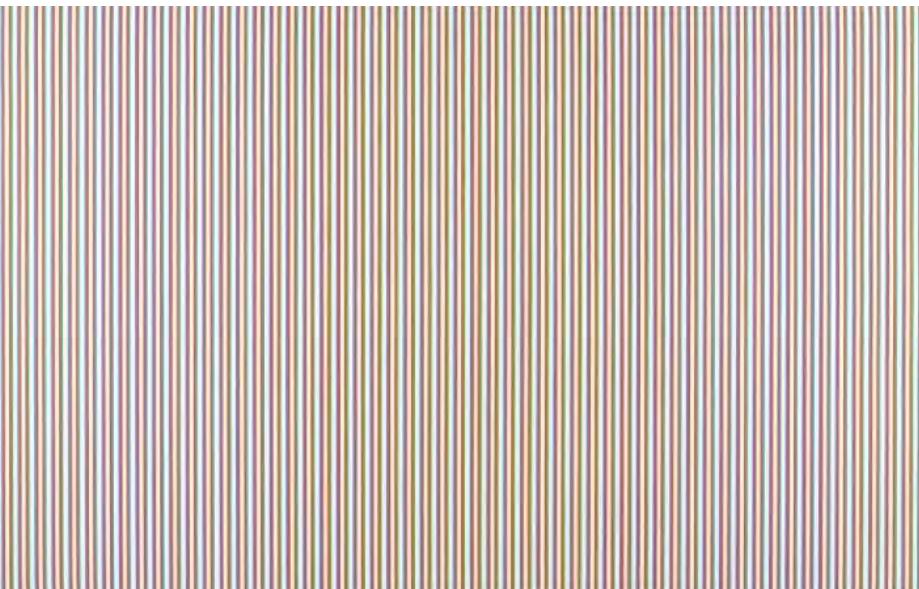
In the final gallery are the paintings based on the palette of colours that Riley developed after a trip to Egypt in 1979. The curator of the exhibition argues that this moment marked a shift from perception to sensation in her work, and Sillito notes that the colours are much more freely organised. "She is using different cues here. She's moved to colour, and she's using different ways of mixing the colour to produce more subtle contrasts. She's broken out of rigid structure." These works are certainly easier to look at. "They don't mess your system up in the same way," he says. "These

are pleasing patterns. Some of the earlier works are worrying because they produce quite big contradictions. As you look at this you can get all sorts of surfaces out of it that seem to be slanting. It does beg to be interpreted, but it's a rather easier game to play. The cues are more subtle." The brain can be made to see one colour differently by the arrangement of contrasting colours around it, he explains. "We interpret every single event in the context of all the ones that go on around it. With colour, we interpret it in terms of the wavelengths that are coming back from the whole image, so you can make something appear to be a different colour by arranging the ones around it." Many people misunderstand what Riley's palette is, he argues. "If you like, her palette is made up of the things that upset how you see the world and she does truly artistic things with them." It amounts to far more than optical distraction, he believes. "She stands well on the aesthetic value side. She's playing very deliberate games that have nothing to do with something being an object like a vase or a face and everything to do with the mechanisms that make us see. She's taken all these special cues that the brain uses to interpret the world and put them together in a work of art."

"Art is harmony. Harmony is the analogy of contrary and of similar elements of tone, of color and of line, conditioned by the dominant key, and under the influence of a particular light, in gay, calm, or sad combinations."

Georges Seurat

From top to bottom:
Late Morning, 1967-68; KA2, 1980



“ ”

“FOR ME NATURE IS NOT LANDSCAPE, BUT THE DYNAMISM OF VISUAL FORCES, AN EVENT RATHER THAN AN APPEARANCE. THESE FORCES CAN ONLY BE TACKLED BY TREATING COLOR AND FORM AS ULTIMATE IDENTITIES, FREEING THEM FROM ALL DESCRIPTIVE OF FUNCTIONAL ROLES.”

BRIDGET RILEY

“ ”

THE NATURE OF PERCEPTION

BRIDGET RILEY AND COSMIC NATURE

by Simon Rycroft

Riley's paintings themselves have been considered spontaneous acts of nature: in arranging forms and elements in defined patterns she is showing us what we did not know before, actually bringing acts of nature into existence. These are not, however, representations of nature out there, but the natural processes invoked in the mind and the body when perceiving one of her images. This arose from the essentially abstract forms of her work, abstracted to the extent that they did not recall in the viewer any conceptual associations, references to prior experience, or a sense of the artist's ego. Rather, they activated an innate process of vision that would be altered or deflected only by figurative association.

[...] By allowing visual phenomena to speak for themselves in patterns that evoked physical expressions of psychic states, she was engaged in releasing dormant or previously invisible energies from colour and light”. This process of representing nature can be under-

od with reference to the development of her aesthetic. She drew lessons from her reconstruction of Seurat's “Le Pont Courbevoie” where she attempted to dismember and dissect the visual experience to understand the visual experience of nature.

The “pleasures of sight” for Riley are not achieved from sustained observation of nature; rather, it is in the briefest of glimpses that its essential character is revealed and made meaningful to the observer: “in a mere glance one can see more than in the close scrutiny of a thousand details”, says Riley. Above all, those pleasures of sight are innate, they take one by surprise; they are sudden, swift, fleeting, elusive, and enigmatic and, in terms of representational practice, impossible to prolong or recapture. Logically, for her, these qualities could not be latent in nature itself but arose from an interaction between the perceiver and the view, a convergence which “releases a particular alchemy, momentarily turning the commonplace

into the ravishing". She is engaged in a form of phenomenological reductionism, stripping away extraneous influences and distractions in an attempt to uncover pure vision: "Whatever diminishes constraint diminishes strength. The more constraints one imposes, the more one frees one's self of the chains that shackle the spirit".

Op artists were engaged in bringing to our senses the basic forces of a newly conceived nature, giving a visual equivalent of certain aspects of natural heat, energy, the action of light by causing us to experience through visual and pictorial means something of the effects of these immaterial or invisible forces". As a partner in the construction of meanings the viewer would be awakened from his or her submissive drowsiness and attain an enlightened understanding. There was an identifiable shift in the understanding of nature and the universe in part brought on by advances in visual technologies that finds expression in the everyday environment during this period. Added to an evolutionary understanding of nature which suggested that humans were symbiotically entwined with natural processes was a revolutionary shift, suggested by Einstein and others, in the ways in which we understood the very matter of that nature. What was solid could easily become invisible as energy and vice-versa. In Riley's art it manifests itself in both

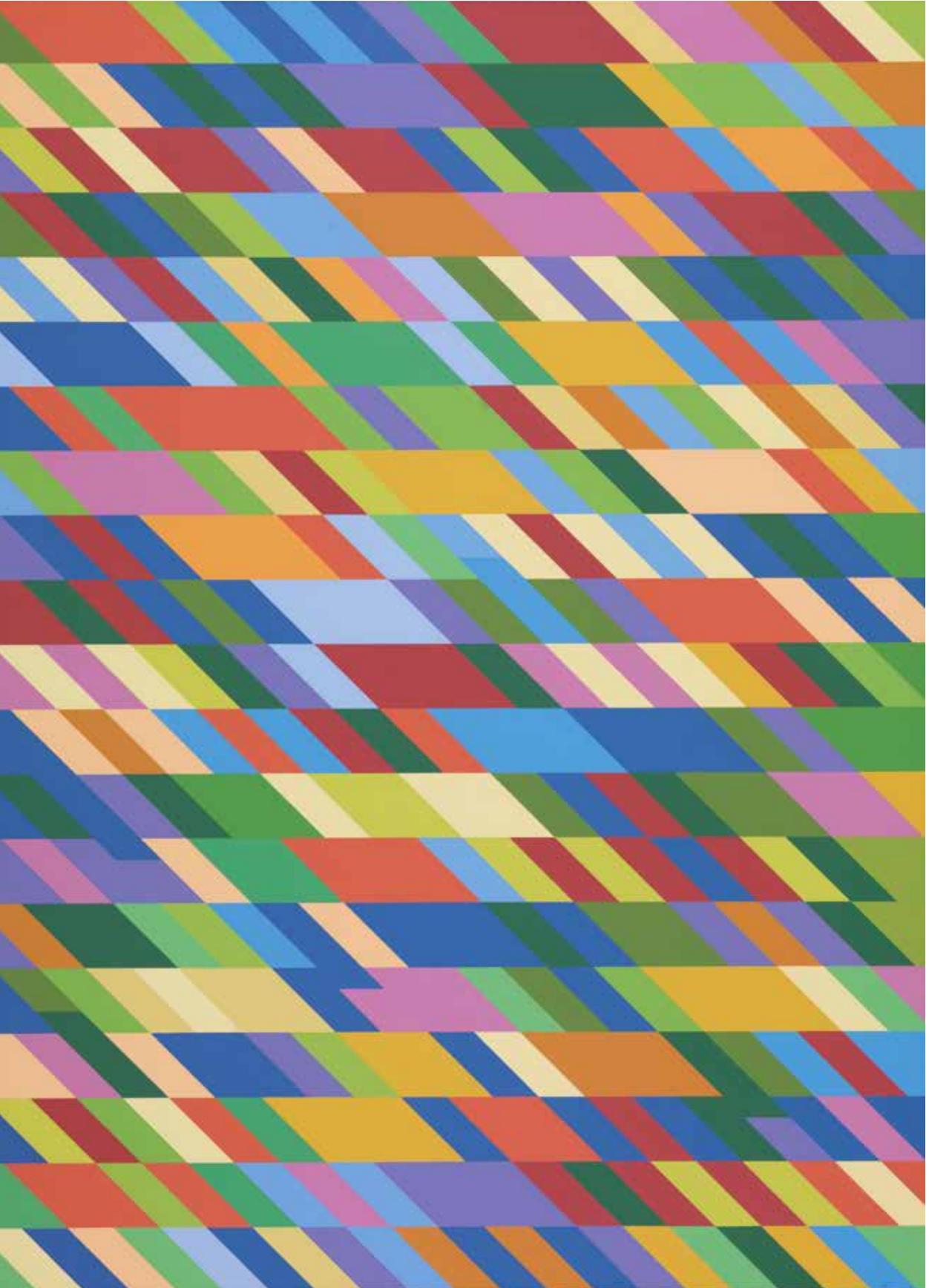
the paintings themselves and in her own and others writings about her work which muse upon the interaction of light, heat, and energy as they interact with the body of the viewer: the vast reserves of energy in everything can best be released she feels by relieving them of the burden of carrying figurative meaning, by allowing them to operate freely within her formal framework thereby stimulating or realising a truly creative power.

[...] This she feels has "something to do with allowing the energies room to breathe... If they are handled freely, those energies will come through fullcharted. I never feel that I confer any energy on anything, it's all there to be unlocked and articulated".

Aesthetically, then, these fundamental energies are revealed in her work through pure plastic relations gleaned through a phenomenological approach that isolates and amplifies essential forms and relationships, bringing to the senses of the viewer previously invisible energies. This is an intentionally intuitive method that directed itself towards the unconscious, precognitive being of both artist and viewer with the pictorial methods acting as agents in this process of transformation from form to energy. It was only in the act of perceiving that both artist and viewer could comprehend the conception of a cosmic nature and then with both mind and body.

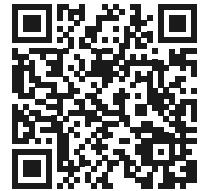
Nataraja, 1993.

Nataraja is a term from Hindu mythology, which means Lord of the Dance. It refers to the Hindu god Siva (Shiva) in his form as the cosmic dancer. Riley's use of the term refers to the central elements of the painting: emphasis on rhythm and counter-rhythm. Rotate the page ninety degrees to look at it.





Bridget Riley working in
her studio, c. 1980



To see the whole
documentary by the Art
Council of Britain, 1979

THE PRIVILEGE OF SIGHT

BRIDGET RILEY EXPLAINS THE DEEPEST
PRINCIPLES BEHIND HER PAINTINGS

The painting is an invented space, a place independent of nature but relying on the same modes of perception by which one experiences nature.

[...] Paintings have to obey the laws of painting: the invented space or place of the artist creates its own world and its own experience, not exactly the same experience as that of the world we live in and see around us but parallel to it, equivalent to it, above all dependent on it. You finish a painting and send it out into the world. To me it's like pushing a boat out into the sea: it's on its own from now, a thing into the world, present. It must do the best it can by itself is to offer an experience, offer a possibility.

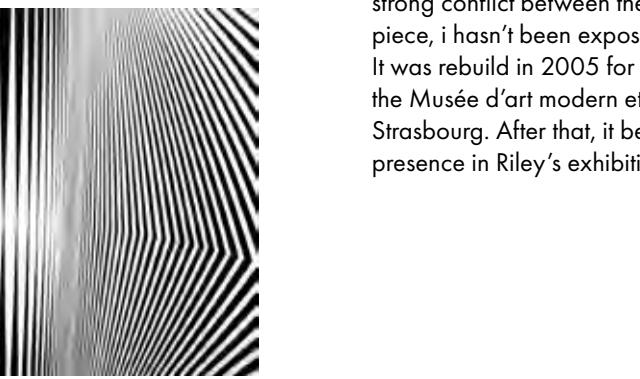
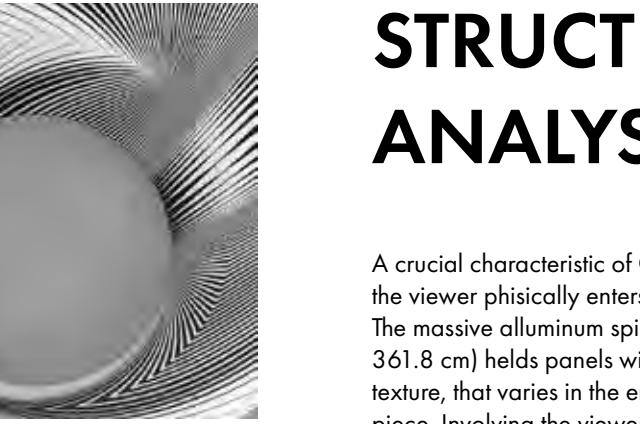
To explore the truths of what one can see is a great privilege of sight and sometimes I wonder if people take as much advantage of that as they could, of what a pleasure, a gift, side is to us.

Looking is a pleasure, a continual surprise that might seem too trivial in aim, but pleasure is at one end of a scale that runs up to joy. Sight, the activity of looking, helps us to be more truthfully aware as a condition of being alive.

CONTINUUM

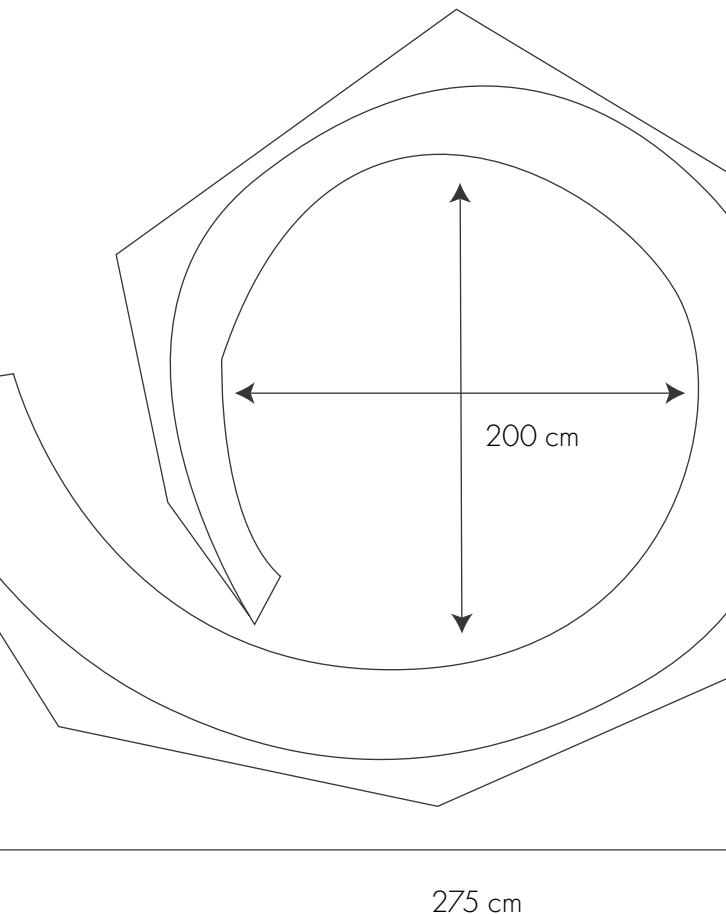
BRIDGET RILEY
1963-2005

by Mercedes Vitali



IMPRESSIVE EXPERIENCE

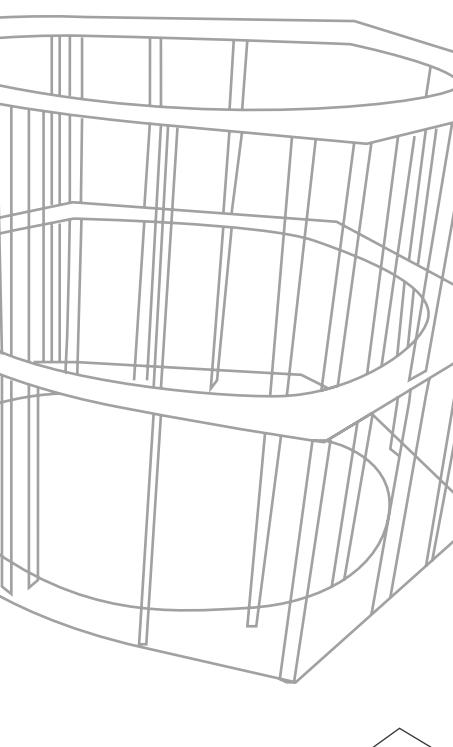
"Continuum" is an art installation piece firstly made by Bridget Riley in 1963. It consists in canvas held by a free-standing curved support, that allows the viewer to walk into and be surrounded entirely by it. Due to a strong conflict between the artist and the art piece, i hasn't been exposed for forty years. It was rebuild in 2005 for an exhibition at the Musée d'art modern et Contemporain, Strasbourg. After that, it became a common presence in Riley's exhibitions.



STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS

A crucial characteristic of Continuum is that the viewer physically enters the work. The massive alluminum spiral ($209 \times 275 \times 361.8$ cm) holds panels with black-and-white texture, that varies in the envelope of the art piece. Involving the viewer was pretty common during the 60s, as it has been shown by performances and Happening during that period (magari nomi artisti?)

Continuum,
2005's version.



GRAPHIC REPETITION

All the panels are covered with black and white arrows. Stroke varies between the different lines, building up tons of different visual sensations.

COLOR

Black and white create the strongest perception that can be made. The painting, due to the tension created by the two opposites, exists in a more indeterminated space in front of the viewer, including vibrant after-images.

DESIGNER'S IDENTITY

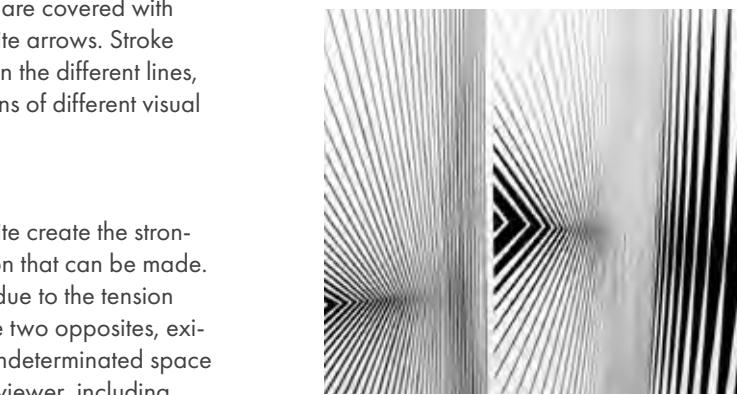
Surely there's a visual and conceptual connection between Continuum and Riley's other works from the 60's: she used black and white only to create the most impressive distortion.

PERCEPTION'S ANALYSIS

As previous work by Riley, Continuum created stimulated the eye-brain dialogue of the viewer. But they were too "impressive" due to his dimension: tensions were too amplified, cause severe physical responses (like headache, nausea, fainting). Critic was strict: it has been described as a "fairground attraction". Riley was strict at herself, too: she judged that Continuum pursued the logic of previous work too far, and it disappeared from public view.

From top to bottom:
detail of Continuum, 2005;
Fragment 1, 1965; Ascending
and Descending Hero, 1965.

AMPLIFIED IMPRESSION

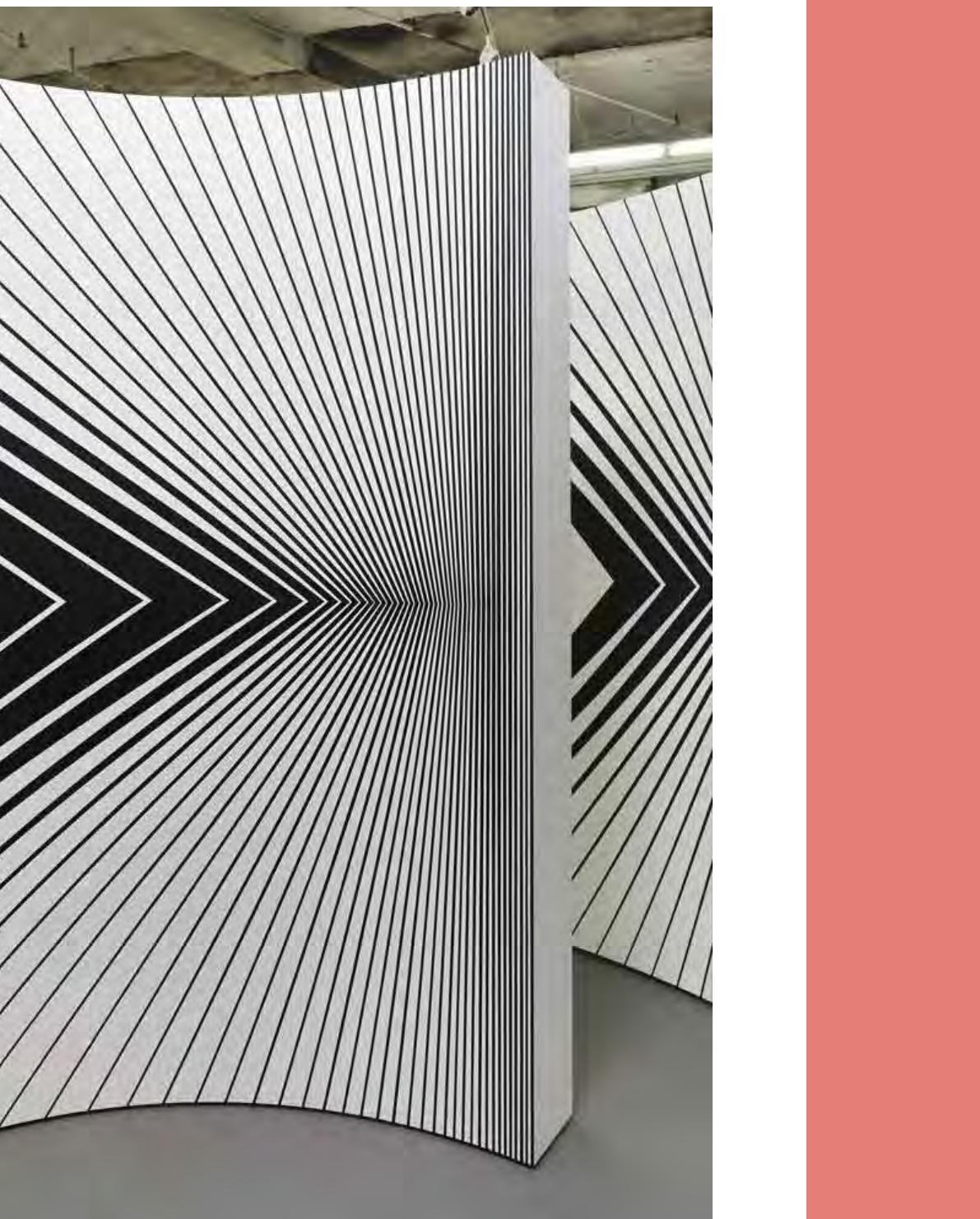


BEYOND IMPRESSION: LEARNING FROM MISTAKES

The recreated Continuum allows us to see it as a highly significant work in the context of those movements that co-existed under the banners of Op and Kinetic art. Asked about her willingness to reconstruct Continuum, Riley has said that, although she "abandoned" the work in the early 1960s, "I can see however that it may be of interest from today's point of view". Even though Riley decided not to follow through certain aspects of Continuum, it provides, as recreated, a valuable point of reconsideration for her subsequent development. If black-and-white period hadn't existed, maybe she wouldn't have achieved some goal during her "visual research" journey. For example it was a starting point for her wall-paintings, realised from the 80s. Huge improve has been made: more than visual stimulations, these works want to convey sensations with consistent use of colour.



Bridget Riley working at first Continuum's canvas in the 60's.



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VALERIA SCOMPARIN
VIOLA GATTI
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