

**FLUSSO**



Curatori della rivista

Giacomo Villanese  
Marta Cuccurullo  
Lorenzo Valentini  
Thomas Ghilardotti

Docenti

Daniela Anna Calabi  
Cristina Boeri  
Raffaella Bruno

Cultori della materia

Monica Rosa Fumagalli  
Marco Valli  
Lorenzo Rabaoli

Note tecniche

Font  
titoli e citazioni\_Druk Wide  
testo e didascalie\_Helvetica  
Carta utilizzata: Tintoretto Neve 95 gr  
Inserto: Arcoset Usomano Fedrigoni 170 gr  
Copertina: So Wool Merinos 250 gr  
Stampato e rilegato da SEF di Massimiliano Mainardi

DesignVerso: una collana dedicata ai migliori designer della comunicazione del ventesimo secolo immaginata come allegato alla rivista Multiverso, Università degli Studi di Udine.

designverso.it

Anno accademico 2019/2020  
Lab. di Fondamenti del Progetto,  
Design della Comunicazione C2, Scuola  
del Design, Politecnico di Milano



# Editoriale

Tre personaggi, tre vite, tre carriere lavorative e tre filosofie di pensiero radicalmente diverse l’una dall’altra. Una tematica comune, tanto astratta quanto comune in tutte le nostre esistenze. Un concetto primordiale che si può solo accettare, un fluire nel quale ci si può solo immergere. Tre declinazioni dello stesso. Una vita che non possiamo scegliere, ma che dobbiamo gestire al meglio delle

nostre possibilità. Un’ispirazione ribelle, incontrollabile ed effimera, da prendere al volo quando c’è, da non cercare quando manca. Infinite idee che convergono in una filosofia, in un punto di vista, non giusto e nemmeno sbagliato, senza dubbio personale e unico. Vi presentiamo il magazine Flusso, una raccolta di esperienze e di opinioni di alcune grandissime personalità nella storia del design.

01 TINA MODOTTI

08 Una passione senza patria  
*Pino Bertelli*

13 A new mexican point of view  
*Sarah Margaret Lowe*

16 Il velo dell'apparenza  
*Pino Bertelli*

20 Hand of the puppeteer, 1929  
*Tina Modotti*

22 MASSIMO VIGNELLI

24 The man who streamlined design  
*Ellen Lupton*

29 A monastic modernism  
*Justin Reynolds*

30 A deceptive simplicity  
*Justin Reynolds*

35 Intellectual elegance  
*Justin Reynolds*

38 Poster Knoll, 1967  
*Massimo Vignelli*

VICTOR VASARELY

42

44 Down the wrong path  
*Phillip Barcio*

48 Vasarely the scientist  
*Sarah Gottesman*

53 Art for all  
*Tiphaine Guillermou*

56 Vega Mir, 1973  
*Victor Vasarely*

VICTOR VASARELY

58

60 Vasarely seen through new eyes  
*Andrew Ayes*

62 The musicality of Vasarely plastic works  
*Frédéric Rosille*

66 Un artiste engagé  
*Foundation Vasarely*

70 Keple Gestalt, 1969  
*Victor Vasarely*

# TINA MODOTTI



Spotify playlist:  
**Life traveler**



*rubrica a cura di Thomas Ghilardotti*

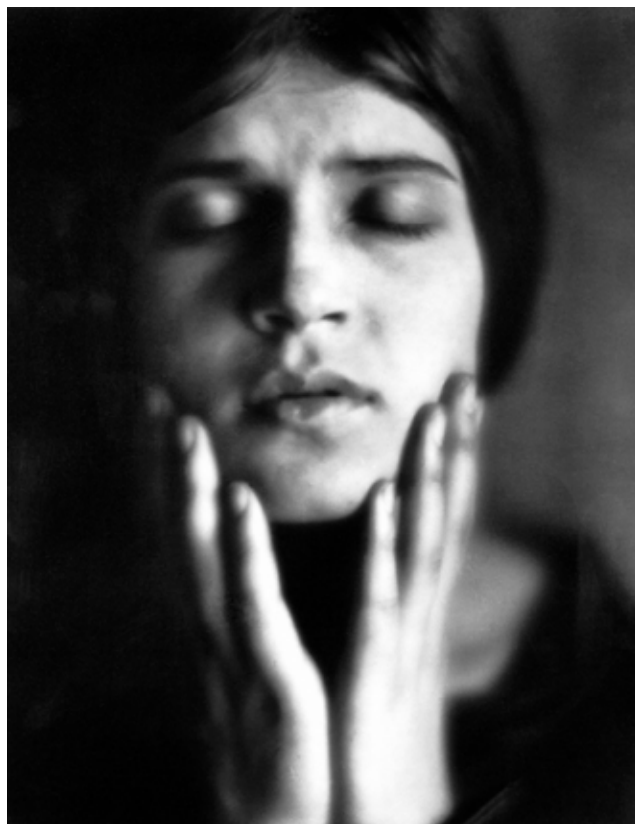


## UNA PASSIONE SENZA PATRIA

by Pino Bertelli

Creatura nomade per antonomasia, Assunta Adelaide Luigia Modotti Mondini, figlia di una cucitrice e di un carpentiere, nasce in Italia sul finire del XIX secolo. Già la prima infanzia viene segnata da un breve percorso migratorio, quando viene portata temporaneamente nella vicina Austria. Ben più consistente sarà poi il viaggio negli Stati Uniti, dove nel 1913 si ricongiunge ancora adolescente alla famiglia nel frattempo emigrata; si trasferisce in seguito da San Francisco a Los Angeles e, nel 1923, dalla California al Messico. Espulsa sei anni dopo con il pretesto ufficiale di aver partecipato a un attentato al presidente, viaggia su una nave diretta a Rotterdam ottenendo asilo politico a Berlino; vola a Mosca, dove la sua attività per il Comintern la porta a Parigi; poi tra il 1935 e il 1939, con Soccorso Rosso Internazionale, partecipa alle convulse vicende della guerra civile in Spagna. Dopo un breve rientro alla volta della Francia torna in Messico, sua patria d'adozione, e lì vi muore nel 1942, a soli quarantacinque anni.

*Tina che recita,*  
Messico, 1924,  
E. Weston



Considerando i due soggiorni, «la permanenza quasi decennale in Messico [...] fu, nella sua esistenza adulta, il periodo più lungo trascorso in un solo paese». In questa terra, Tina matura il suo impegno verso la fotografia, l'attività per la quale verrà in primo luogo ricordata, in una fusione costante tra tensione estetica e impegno politico. Vicina sin da bambina a questa

forma di espressione artistica, in età adulta perfeziona le basi tecniche con Edward Weston, maestro e per alcuni anni compagno di vita, e radicalizza poi il suo stile di pari passo con la crescente militanza. Alle scelte già condivise con quest'ultimo, infatti, cioè l'abbandono della fotografia "pittorica", dagli effetti sfumati e dai contorni imprecisi per prediligere invece i tratti

*Woman with Olla,*  
Messico, 1926,  
Tina Modotti

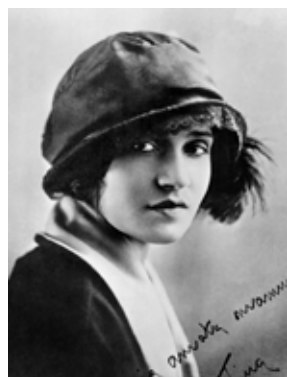
**“VOGLIO POTER AMARE CHIUNQUE,  
UOMO O DONNA, GIOVANE O VECCHIO,  
IN COMPLETA LIBERTÀ E SECONDO  
IL MIO SENTIMENTO.”**

Tina Modotti





1. *Tina che recita*, California, 1920, E. Weston
2. *Child in sombrero*, Messico, 1927, Tina Modotti
3. *Calla Lilies*, Messico, 1925, Tina Modotti
4. *Tina che recita*, California, 1920, E. Weston



*A Life of Photography*  
Unfolding maps #1  
Steve McCurry



“ANCHE SE C'È FORSE UN  
CAMPO IN CUI LA  
FOTOGRAFIA NON PUÒ  
DIRCI NULLA DI PIÙ DI CIÒ  
CHE VEDIAMO CON  
I NOSTRI OCCHI, CE N'È  
UN ALTRO IN CUI CI  
DIMOSTRA QUANTO POCO  
I NOSTRI OCCHI CI  
CONSENTANO DI VEDERE.”

*Paul Cezanne*

ben marcati degli oggetti e dei luoghi della vita reale, aggiunge un decisivo allargamento della gamma dei possibili soggetti. Arte e politica costituiscono per molti anni un binomio inscindibile. Iscritta nel 1927 al Partito Comunista messicano, partecipa con Frida Kahlo e Diego Rivera attivamente alla vita rivoluzionaria. Recenti riletture del percorso biografico della Modotti tendono a decostruire il mito della femme

fatale che viene condizionata dai suoi amanti nei comportamenti pubblici. Si ipotizzano anzi che a partire dal periodo messicano la scelta dei suoi compagni di vita fu dettata dal suo orientamento politico e ideologico. Si meglio comprende così la presenza di figure maschili – tutti leader politici – che la accompagneranno. Su tutti Vittorio Vidali, comunista italiano con il quale Tina condivide il soggiorno moscovita, l'attività

per il Comintern, l'intensa esperienza delle Brigate Internazionali in Spagna e il rientro in Messico, fino a pochi mesi prima della morte; un episodio tragico quanto inatteso che fonti non confermate, vedrebbero attribuire a Vidali stesso; una morte che sotto forma di arresto cardiaco la coglie improvvisamente in un taxi, in una notte di gennaio, portandola via nel fiore degli anni e legando così ancor più la sua storia al mito.





## A NEW MEXICAN POINT OF VIEW

by Sarah Margaret Lowe

Tina Modotti took her first photograph in Mexico during late 1923 or the spring of 1924. Her earliest dated image is a portrait of Weston. Both photographers used large-format cameras: Modotti took her earliest photographs with a 4 by 5" Corona, a stationary view camera that required a tripod. A few years later, during a trip to San Francisco, she shopped for a 3 1/4 by 4 1/4" Graflex, a hand-held, single-lens reflex camera that freed her from the tyranny of the tripod, which she felt restrained her. After 1926, she used both: she found the precision of the Corona was ideal for formal portraiture and for documenting murals, and the Graflex gave her more flexibility and allowed for more spontaneous images. Nevertheless, like Weston, Modotti subscribed to the all-importance of composing an image on ground glass and to rigorous formal construction, evident in much of her work. Modotti's printing technique matched Weston's, and for the most part, she used a contact

method, placing a negative directly on sensitized paper and exposing it to light. In Mexico, she used sunlight; later in Germany, it became immediately apparent to her that Berlin lacked sufficient natural light, and she found it was impossible to print without an enlarger. Two other observations about Modotti's early work are in order. Modotti never experimented with pictorialist imagery although she was familiar with it. A second point with regard to the importance of Modotti's life in California should be made. Between 1918 and 1923, Modotti was a successful stage and film actress, and modeled for painters, illustrators, print makers, and most importantly, photographers. Working on the other side of the camera would have given Modotti invaluable insight. At the same time Modotti was producing architectural studies, exploring Mexican themes, and starting to take portraits, she embarked on a series of photographs of plant forms. Indeed,



**Mom and daughter,**  
Messico, 1926,  
Tina Modotti

**Easter Lily and Bud,**  
Messico, 1925,  
Tina Modotti



photographic still life suited Modotti. Her use of a large-format camera imposed certain restrictions on her mobility. Modotti combined demanding formal considerations while seeking objects from her everyday world to use

as metaphors of abstract ideas. Modotti began each image with a careful selection of an object or two she wished to photograph; her pictures reveal a measured deliberation about how close in to bring her camera and what

1. *Tina che recita*  
California, 1920, E. Weston
2. *Calla Lilies*,  
Messico, 1925, Tina Modotti
3. *Donna con vaso*,  
Messico, 1926, Tina Modotti

**"CI VUOLE  
CUORE, OCCHIO  
E CERVELLO,  
AL DI FUORI DI  
QUESTO LA  
FOTOGRAFIA NON  
MI INTERESSA"**

Henri Cartier  
Bresson



degree of intimacy or distance she wanted to convey. Modotti chose objects with a wealth of interpretations and connotations, in contrast to Weston who professed his images had no meaning beyond their formal issues. Moreover, her images bear out the notion that the camera is a tool and that the photograph does not simply issue from a machine but from the active intervention of a creative artist. Modotti worked at a distance from the industrial centers associated with the emergence of new vision photography, but she drew on tendencies evident on both sides of the Atlantic. To modernist subject matter (crowd scenes, industrial sites) and techniques (extreme angles and points of view), Modotti added a uniquely "Mexican" point of view.

In this effort, she is allied with two strains of Mexican modernism, the mural movement, sometime called the Mexican Renaissance, and the Movimiento Estridentista. The portraits Modotti produced over her seven-year career range from formal, elegant likenesses to more casual pictures, to some that demonstrate her interest new vision photography. In a letter to Weston two years after her earliest dated photograph Modotti declares her commitment to photography and articulates her ambition: to transform the tangible into the intangible, to transmute matter into ideology. While some of her earlier photographs show evidence of these aspirations, her work after this turning point in her emotional and artistic life attest to her achieving her goal.



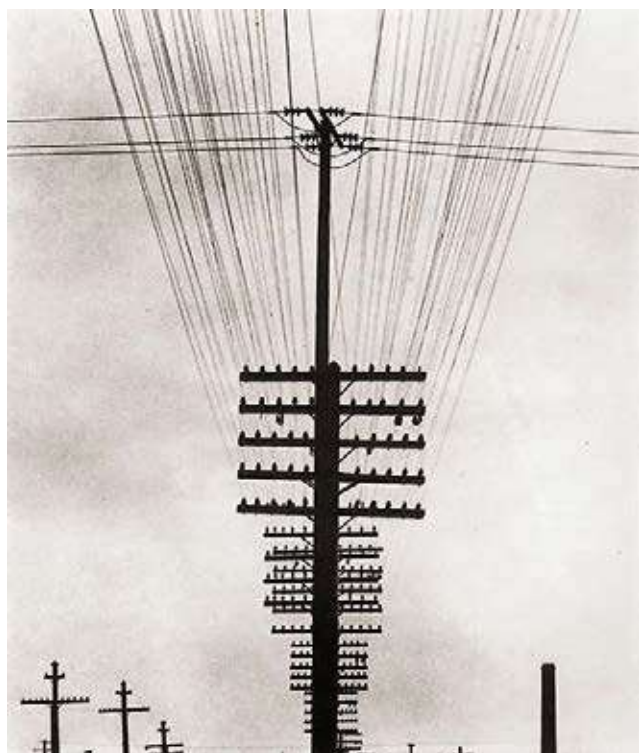
## IL VELO DELL'APPARENZA

by Pino Bertelli

La poetica della rivolta e la visione dell'utopia sono al fondo della scrittura fotografica di Tina Modotti. A leggere con attenzione e grazia le sue immagini di presa del reale, non è difficile scorgere la radicalità del suo sguardo e la grande forza estetica ed etica che emergono da ogni singola fotografia. La Modotti strappa il velo del dominio dell'apparenza e non partecipa alla codificazione dei valori dominanti. In questo senso, la fotografia sociale della Modotti lavora per cambiare la vita ed attuare l'utopia. Il suo credo era — «Ciò che non mi uccide, mi rafforza» (F. Nietzsche) — e non l'ha mai tradito. La fotoscrittura della Modotti non riesce a catturare solo la bellezza dell'esistere, anche quando alza la fotocamera nelle periferie invisibili delle città, la forza poetica delle sue icone della povertà restituisce al reale la passione, il sentimento, l'amore verso gli umili e gli offesi. C'è fantasia, desiderio, speranza. Lei ha fo-

tografato la vita secondo i principi forti di Henri Cartier-Bresson: "Ci vuole cuore, occhio e cervello, al di fuori di questo la fotografia non mi interessa". Ogni fotografia della Modotti, infatti, culmina nel canto di lode

dell'umana povertà e desantifica l'atto confusivo e menzognero del linguaggio dominante. Il linguaggio fotografico della Modotti non è il tema, ma il tessuto. La trama del suo fare fotografia esprime una poetica della verità, o una filosofia dell'amore che è propria alla filosofia antica, dove l'anima del mondo e il pensiero del cuore testimoniano l'immaginazione creativa dell'utopia. La finezza dell'immaginale del-



**Telephone Wires,**  
Messico, 1925  
Tina Modotti



**Worker's hand,**  
Messico, 1925  
Tina Modotti

**Accept the Witness**  
Richard Drew and  
"The Falling Man"





“LA RIVOLUZIONE È L'ARMONIA  
DELLA FORMA E DEL  
COLORE E TUTTO ESISTE,  
E SI MUOVE, SOTTO UNA  
SOLA LEGGE: LA VITA.”

*Frida Kahlo*

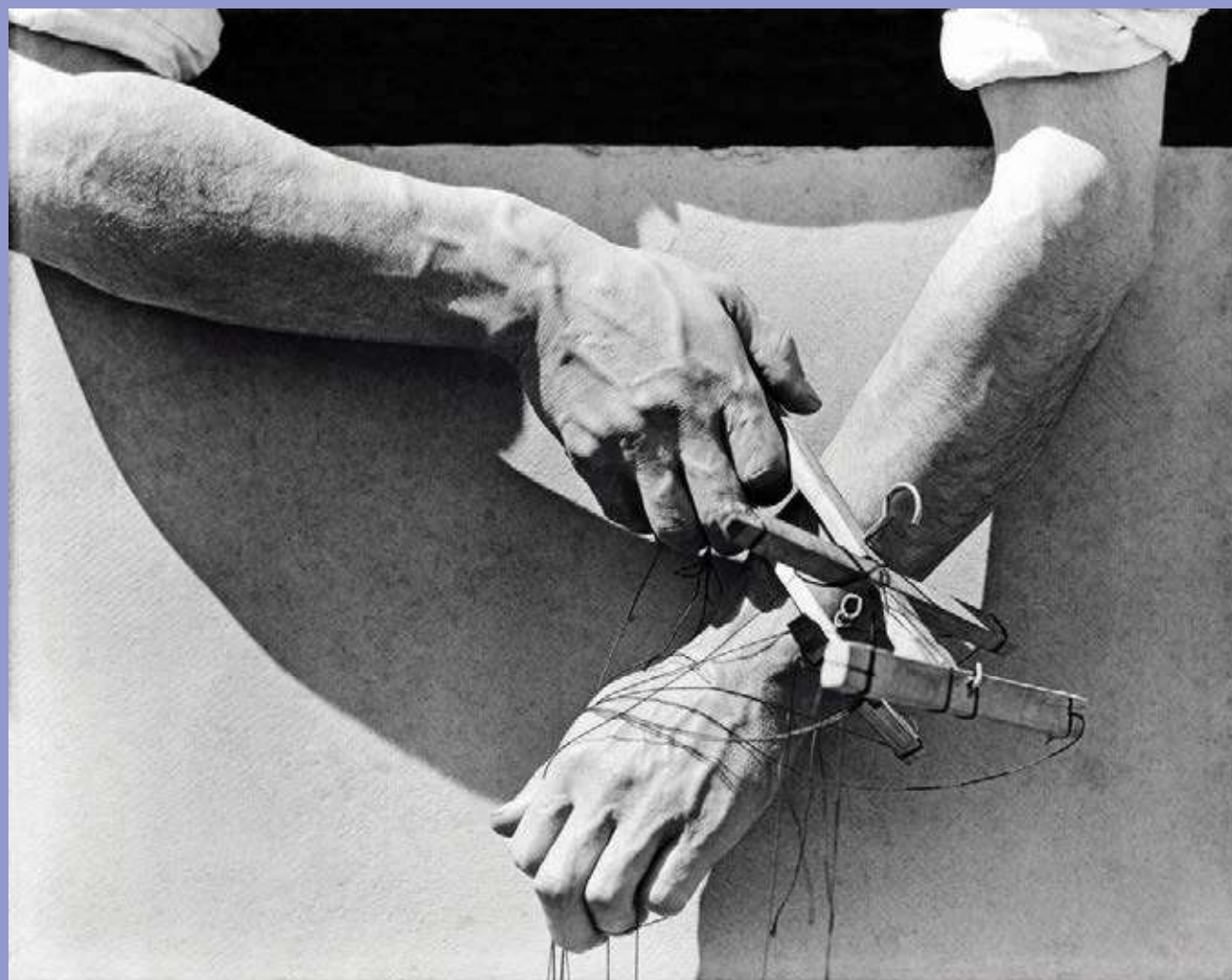
la Modotti si riversa nelle sue fotografie e, — come nessuno mai —, i corpi che scippa alla storia quotidiana, nelle loro evidenti imperfezioni formali, contengono e allargano la visione della rivolta, messaggera d'altre primavere di bellezza. L'estetica della verità passionale che la Modotti affabula nel suo fare-fotografia, esprime un senso del reale che si trascolora in testimonianza della disumanità degli uomini. Le sue immagini più importanti non tengono conto dell'illuminazione ricercata, della composizione “perfetta”, della messa a fuoco precisa e anche la qualità delle stampe non erano poi così importanti, quanto raccontare la storia e l'ingiustizia degli umiliati e degli offesi. Il linguaggio radicale della fotografia, come quello del sogno,

non sta nell'estetizzante ma al di sotto di ogni formalismo del segno (cioè dell'iconografia). Insieme ad altri fotografi di strada, la Modotti aveva compreso che la svalorizzazione del mondo passa dalla devalorizzazione dell'uomo. L'immaginario fotografico della Modotti ci permette di vedere le cose sotto il loro vero aspetto. Ci fa comprendere ciò che è doloroso accettare. Distinguere il reale dalla presenza del vero possibile. L'oggettività dall'autentico. La fotografia della Modotti è una provocazione. Uno studio singolare sul dolore. Il disvelamento della realtà artificiale buttato contro le griglie del superficiale d'autore. Un viaggio espressivo senza ritorno attraverso i territori immaginari della quotidianità trasgredita.

*Tina durante la lavorazione,  
Messico, 1920, Tina Modotti*



# HANDS OF THE PUPPETEER



*Hands of the Puppeteer,*  
Città del Messico, 1929  
Tina Modotti

## Composizione

Il **soggetto** della fotografia sono le braccia di un marionettista appoggiate a un muretto che sorreggono i fili della marionetta.

Il **peso visivo** della composizione è tra le dita della mano destra del soggetto e l'oggetto tenuto nella stessa mano (il quale oltre ad essere a forma di croce ne forma un'altra con il braccio sinistro), ma gli elementi che l'occhio insegue in questo scatto sono diversi.

La **texture** è un elemento importante in questa composizione. È messa in risalto dalle vene sulle mani forti del protagonista e dai fili della marionetta. Una texture più leggera si nota anche sul muretto che funge da sfondo.

## Scelte tecniche



La dura **luce** naturale scelta crea un forte contrasto tra zone esposte e in ombra fortificando la texture già presente.



Come **sfondo** viene utilizzato un muretto che si interpone tra il soggetto e le sue mani (e lo spettatore).



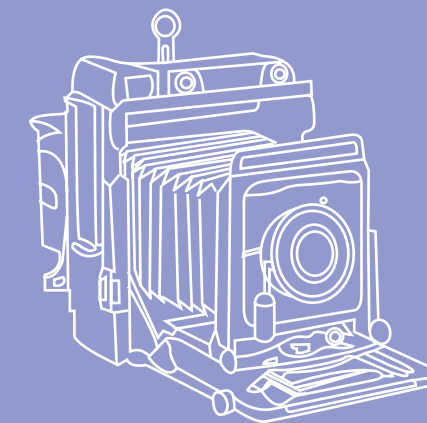
L'**inquadratura** è statica, frontale e taglia il soggetto che esce dal frame e alleggerisce parzialmente il peso visivo delle mani.

## Colore



Pur essendo in bianco e nero è evidente la presenza di **colori** caldi dovuti alla luce solare diretta.

## Strumento



*Graflex 3 1/4 x 4 1/4*

La **macchina fotografica** scelta dà la possibilità di utilizzare un tre piedi a seconda delle necessità.



# MASSIMO VIGNELLI

# 2



Spotify playlist:  
**Focus on the  
simplicity**



*rubrica a cura di Giacomo Villanese*

## THE MAN WHO STREAMLINED DESIGN

by Ellen Lupton

From the moment Massimo Vignelli started his career in Italy in the mid-1950s, he forged a rigorous philosophy that transformed the international language of design for print, products, and environments. Over the decades, debates about design's cultural function bubbled and boiled around him. Confronting the upheavals of Pop, post-modernism, deconstruction, and the digital age, Massimo didn't change his methodology so much as polish it into an ever sharper, more refined instrument. His ability to stay modern in a post-modern world sealed his reputation as one of the great designers of our time. As his career advanced, Massimo's work and ideas became more relevant, not less. He remains a towering and untarnished design hero, not only to his peers and to the generation who started their own careers in his offices in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, but to designers just entering the field now, who view the elegant

man in the modernist menswear with almost mystical reverence. Massimo Vignelli's career is inseparable from that of his equally gifted wife, Lella Vignelli. The couple married in 1957 and opened their first firm together in Milan in 1960. While both were trained as architects, Lella continued to focus on three-dimensional design, while Massimo focused on graphics. Together, they could move across disciplines very quickly and with astonishing grace. In 1964 the Vignellis left Italy for New York City, where Massimo co-founded Unimark International. Specializing in corporate identity—a field encompassing print, signage, interiors, and wayfinding—Unimark quickly expanded to become one of the world's largest design firms. In its early years, Unimark required employees to wear white lab coats—an idea hatched by Massimo, who had a keen interest in enhancing the dignity of design professionals. In 1992, Massimo and Lella would launch their own functional clothing line (Design Vignelli), which offered a universal solution to the problem of men's and women's fashion, with its extra parts and ever-changing silhouettes. Although the Vignellis' priest-like garbs didn't find a broad market, they became part of the cou-

ples' signature personal style. Massimo left Unimark in 1971 to co-found Vignelli Associates with Lella. The Vignellis' work shaped New York City in profound ways. Massimo designed numerous posters, journals, and books for architects and architectural associations—indeed, a certain era of New York architecture speaks the language of Vignelli, using forthright Helvetica, upright Bodoni, warm, approachable Century Expanded, and gridded layouts articulated with horizontal bars.

Young Vignelli  
Venice, Italy, 1956



## “UN DESIGNER HA RAGGIUNTO LA PERFEZIONE NON QUANDO NON C'È PIÙ NULLA DA AGGIUNGERE, MA QUANDO NON C'È PIÙ NIENTE DA TOGLIERE”

Antoine de Saint-Exupérie







Massimo's modernist innovations sometimes provoked controversy. His 1972 subway diagram for New York City took inspiration from the abstracted transit guides that had been used for decades in London and Tokyo. Emphasizing relationships among subway lines, Massimo's diagram eliminates extrinsic information and distorts the city's built geography in favor of revealing connections. Vignelli's new urban order infuriated some outspoken New Yorkers, and the MTA replaced the

iconic map with clunkier, more conventional graphics in 1979. The wayfinding system he created for the New York subway (with Bob Noorda at Unimark) remains in use today. The simple sans serif numbers and letters enclosed in colored circles helped unify New York's once competing train lines into a single network. The signs are seen and used by millions of people, generating an unforgettable signifier of the New York experience. Throughout his career, Massimo raged against typographic excess. In his view, a graphic designer should be able to solve nearly any communication problem with no more than five typefaces. (Later, he loosened his list to a dozen). The indu-

strial revolution had unleashed an unholy cacaphony of fonts, made worse by the information overflow of the twentieth century. This typographic deluge yielded what Massimo called the "biggest visual pollution of all times" (Vignelli Canon). If everyone in the early 90s who called themselves a "desktop publisher" were a doctor, he complained, we would all be dead by now. (This might be true, if you think about it.) Massimo's appearances in Gary Hustwit's film *Helvetica* (2007) are among the movie's most memorable moments. Chastising those who think that every thought or feeling warrants its own unique typeface, Massimo intoned that you don't need letters that look or sound like a dog to represent the word "dog." He liked to compare a great typeface to a musical instrument, which can be used to play any song in the hands of a skilled designer; Helvetica is "just like a piano, the more you play it, the more you learn how to play it and the better player you become."



*NYC from above*  
NYC, United States, 2015





*What is killing  
Helvetica?*  
Envato, 2018



*Atlas for Vignelli's tribute*  
Donostia, Spain, 2015

## A MONASTIC MODERNISM

by Justin Reynolds

Vignelli outlined his design methodology in many interviews and articles, but it is summarised with particular clarity in *The Vignelli Canon*, a short book he wrote towards the end of his career. The first half of the Canon, setting out Vignelli's fundamental design principles in no more than 40 pages, is one of the clearest guides to the modernist design aesthetic available anywhere.

The designer's first objective when beginning a new project is to attain a clear understanding of what he called the 'semantics' of the task: the nature of the client and their audience, and how the subject of the design will relate to sender and receiver in such a way as to make sense to both. Once these are understood it is possible to develop the design's 'syntax', the visual grammar most suitable for the task at hand. As Vignelli puts it: "The consistency of a design is provided by the appropriate

relationship of the various syntactical elements of the project: how type relates to grids and images from page to page throughout the whole project. Or, how type sizes relate to each other. Or, how pictures relate to each other and how the parts relate to the whole. There are ways to achieve all this that are correct, as there are others that are incorrect, and should be avoided."

The project's semantics and syntax establish the bounds within which the designer's imagination should be exercised. For the professional designer creativity only comes into play within the grid of possibilities established through completion of the first two stages in the design process. These principles – semantics, syntax and appropriateness – should be applied to all projects across every field of 'Design' (a word Vignelli often capitalised) whether the subject be the layout of a business card or the structure of a skyscraper:

"The discipline of Design is one and can be applied to many different subjects, regardless of style. Design discipline is above and beyond any style. All style requires discipline in order to be expressed. Very often people think that Design is a particu-

lar style. Nothing could be more wrong! Design is a discipline, a creative process with its own rules, controlling the consistency of its output toward its objective in the most direct and expressive way."



## A DECEPTIVE SIMPLICITY

by Justin Reynolds

Vignelli's graphic design work has a deceptive simplicity. Simple grids. Simple use of whitespace. Simple photography. Simple typography. Any designer might think: 'I could do that.' And they would be right. Vignelli's work is eminently accessible. There is nothing mysterious about it. Everything is transparent, out in the open. His designs were created in the full light of well established design principles that anyone can learn and implement. That is the whole point of the modernist design process: to move design from the cloudy subjective realm of inspiration to the well-lit objective world of documented repeatable process. But the peculiar intensity of Vignelli's life and work indicates that knowledge of sound design principles is not enough. Design is not merely an intellectual process, it is a moral discipline. The obsessive, exalted terms in which Vignelli refers to 'Design' demonstrates his acute understanding of the self-sacrifice that good work

requires. The designer committed to intellectual elegance must overcome the perennial temptation to adopt design as a channel for self-expression, to follow fashion, to try out new techniques unsuitable for the task at hand. For Vignelli, all of that is 'vulgarity': We are definitively against any fashion of design and any design fashion. We despise the culture of obsolescence, the culture of waste, the cult of the ephemeral. We detest the demand of temporary solutions, the waste of energies and capital for the sake of novelty. Good design has a moral dimension. Its function is to meet the common interest of all parties: the client, their audience, and wider society. The designer should find satisfaction in the conscientious realisation of the project's objectives, not the expression of a personal vision. For Vignelli this austere discipline was an absorbing life-long pursuit: even the most humdrum project is fulfilling if it follows the correct process: I strongly believe that design should never be boring, but I don't think it should be a form of entertainment. Good design is never boring, only bad design is. Some designers, like Vignelli, will find design an all-consuming passion. Like him, they will



**Heller Dinnerware**  
Massimo Vignelli, 1972

**City Gate of Chisinau**  
Chisinau, Moldova, 1980

**Divano Saratoga**  
Massimo Vignelli, 1964





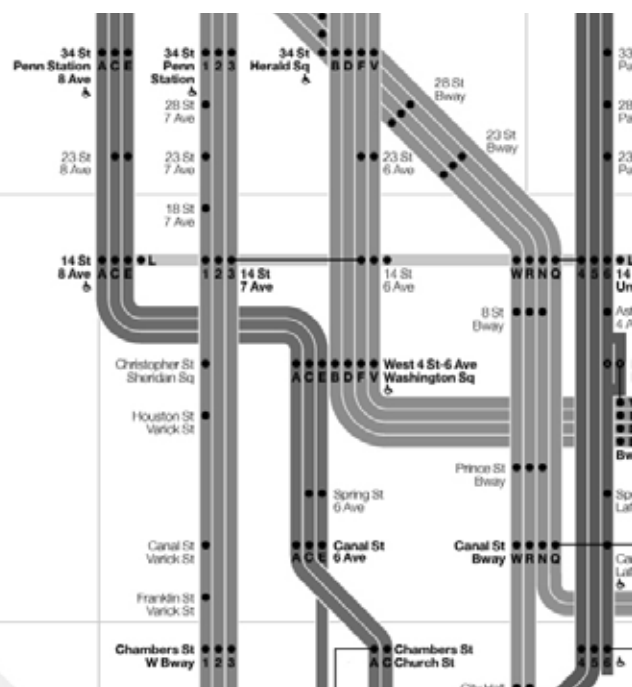
be entranced precisely because of the discipline it demands, the purity of intention it requires. But others will find that design, as conceived by Vignelli, is not a sufficiently broad channel for all that they might want to express. And there is nothing wrong with that. Designers are often frustrated by the limitations that professional design for clients imposes on their scope for free expression. But Vignelli's understanding of the nature of design is surely right: it is a pragmatic, technical pursuit, not an artistic one. The very nature of design means it cannot serve as a vehicle for subjective expression. That would be to misunderstand the kind of discipline it is. Designers for whom design, so to speak, is not enough, need not give it up, but make sure they have other creative outlets, such as art, illustration, painting, music, or writing. It is unfortunate that design is so often represented as a 'creative' field without qualification of what the word 'creative' means in this context. Understood correctly, the creativity that designers exercise is constrained, channelled within the parameters set by the task at hand. The designer, unlike the artist, does not begin with a blank canvas. Vignelli was a great designer because he understood the ascetic

nature of design, and loved it for that very reason. In that sense, perhaps, he was rather unusual. For many of us design will provide professional satisfaction, but no more – and no less – than that. Vignelli's example teaches us what we should expect from design, and what we should not, and the satisfaction and sacrifice involved in doing it well.



## How to simplify your life

**Details of NYC subway map and guide**  
Massimo Vignelli, 1972



**“ANY INTELLIGENT FOOL CAN MAKE THINGS BIGGER, MORE COMPLEX, AND MORE VIOLENT. IT TAKES A TOUCH OF GENIUS AND A LOT OF COURAGE TO MOVE IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION.”**

*E.F. Schumacher*







**Parthenon**  
Athens, Greece, 432 B.C.

## INTELLECTUAL ELEGANCE

by Justin Reynolds

For Vignelli design should exhibit ‘intellectual elegance’, a painstaking clarity of thought his Canon describes in the most exalted tones: “We often talk about Intellectual Elegance, not to be confused with the elegance of manners and mores. For me, intellectual elegance is the sublime level of intelligence which has produced all the masterpieces in the history of mankind. It is the elegance we find in Greek statues, in Renaissance paintings, in the sublime writings of Goethe, and many great creative minds. It elevates the most humble artefact to a noble stand. Intellectual elegance is also our civic consciousness, our social responsibility, our sense of decency, our way of conceiving Design, our moral imperative. Again, it is not a design style, but the deepest meaning and the essence of Design.”

An Intellectual elegance gives a design an eternal quality: “We are for a Design that lasts, that responds to people’s needs

and to people’s wants. We are for a Design that is committed to a society that demands long lasting values. A society that earns the benefit of commodities and deserves respect and integrity.”

Vignelli’s exhortations, particularly in the appropriately named Canon, have a religious intensity. Design is his ineffable, austere deity, intellectual elegance a sacrament. Like many designers of his generation he dressed simply, often in black, an austere uniform somewhat evocative of the monk’s habit. For 20th century modernists in every field – design, literature, art, music and architecture – the collapse of traditional religious belief left a vacuum that human culture had to fill. The pursuit of excellence took the place of the worship of God. Certainly, Vignelli’s best work has a profound simplicity, evoking something of the ambience of religious symbolism: think Orthodox icons, severe Reformed church architecture and the austere spaces of Gothic cathedrals. His graphic design, with its rigorous application of modernist typographic principles, is of particular interest for digital designers. All of his designs make disciplined use of the grid, organising content into the modules crea



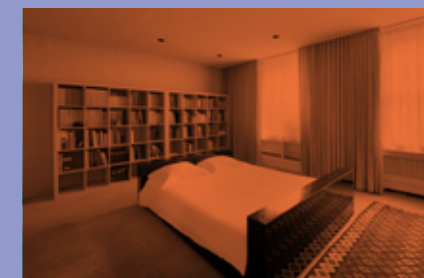
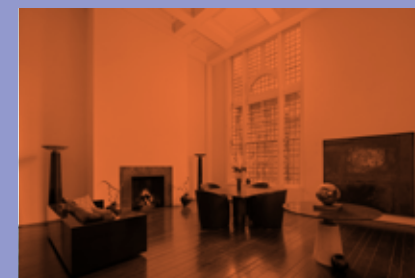
ted by the interplay of rows and columns, his use of asymmetry and whitespace investing his layouts with tension and dynamism. The use of horizontal rules to underline the visual hierarchy of content was a particular characteristic of his work. For Vignelli whitespace evokes the great open spaces of the American landscape, and gridlines are redolent of musical notation: It is just like in music, where five lines and seven notes allow one to make infinite compositions. That is the magic of the grid. He liked strong imagery and bold colour schemes, often restricting himself to the use of the primary colours, blue, red and yellow to give his designs clarity and directness: Visual strength is an expression of intellectual elegance and should never be confused with just visual impact – which, most of the time, is just an expression of visual vulgarity and obtrusiveness. He employed type sparingly, often using just one typeface for each design and even then avoiding italics and bold, relying instead on gradations of scale to establish typographic hierarchy. He used no more than half a dozen classic typefaces through his entire career – making repeated use of Garamond, Bodoni, Century Expanded and Helvetica – al-

lowing him a deep understanding of their particular characteristics. Vignelli welcomed the new design possibilities opened up by digital software but was wary of the endless options it made available: The advent of the computer generated the phenomena called desktop publishing. This enabled anyone who could type the freedom of using any available typeface and do any kind of distortion. It was a disaster of mega proportions. A cultural pollution of incomparable dimension. As I said, at the time, if all people doing desktop publishing were doctors we would all be dead! Typefaces experienced an incredible explosion. The computer allowed anybody to design new typefaces and that became one of the biggest visual pollution of all times.

Massimo and Lella's  
minimal house  
Upper east Side, NYC

**“SIMPLICITY IS THE MOST DIFFICULT THING TO SECURE IN THIS WORLD; IT IS THE LAST LIMIT OF EXPERIENCE AND THE LAST EFFORT OF GENIUS.”**

George Sand





## POSTER, KNOLL INTERNATIONAL



81.3 x 120.7 cm  
produced in 1967, New York (U.S.A.)  
offset lithograph on white wove paper



### Fonts

**Gil Sans Bold**  
OPQRSTUVWXYZÀ  
ÅÊÏÕøabcdefghijklmnop  
nopqrstuvwxyzàåéïõø  
ü&|234567890(\$£..!?)

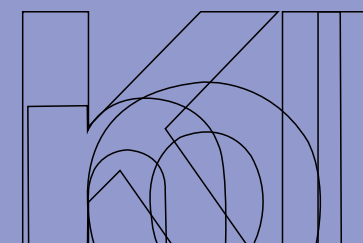
**Gil Sans Regular**  
OPQRSTUVWXYZ  
ÀÅÊÏÕabcdefghijklmnop  
nopqrstuvwxyzàåéïõ  
&|234567890(\$£..!?)

### Meaning

Knoll has been an important commission for Massimo Vignelli. Once he described the Knoll assignment as “the most exciting, rewarding” of his professional career. As recognizable and successful as the work of his predecessor, Herbert Matter, Vignelli’s Knoll advertisements, pricelists and branding efforts gave Knoll an international graphic identity that became the industry standard. Here’s a gift/tribute for some of the ones that worked for Knoll’s design.

### Composition

# Knoll



Logotype Knoll

# Knoll



# Colors

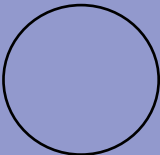
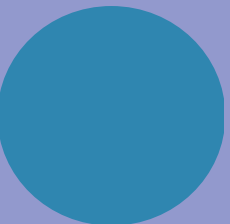
S 0550-G90Y



S 1050-R30B



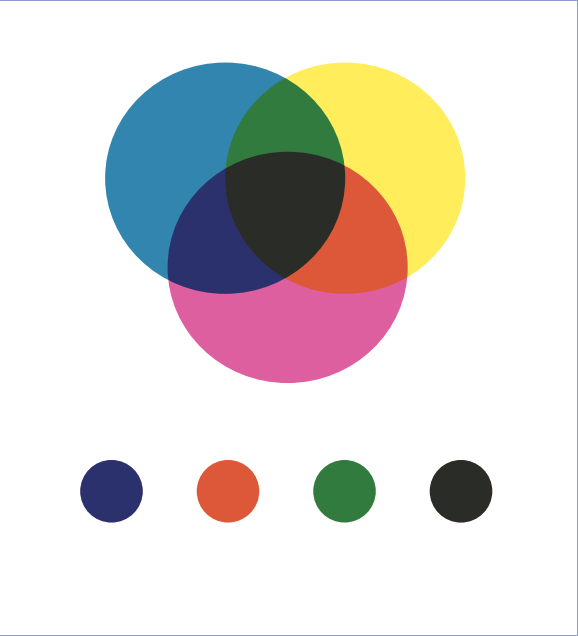
S 2050-R90B



S 0500-N



S 8500-N



Overlapping colors



# VICTOR VASARELY

# 3



Spotify playlist:  
**Optical illusions**



*rubrica a cura di Marta Cuccurullo*

## DOWN THE WRONG PATH

by Phillip Barcio

In 1906, when Victor Vasarely was born, artists and scientists were equally respected. In Budapest, where Vasarely went to university, it wouldn't have been unusual for members of both fields to interact with each other, especially in the bustling cafés along the banks of the Danube, which were centers of the European intellectual scene. When Vasarely first entered university, it was to study to become a doctor at the University of Budapest's School of Medicine. But two years in to the program he abruptly changed direction and decided to devote himself to studying art. But though his subject matter changed, his approach to learning did not. In 1927, at the age of 21,



**Vasarely's first exhibition**  
Denise René, Gallery Paris (1946)

“ON ONE HAND THERE IS A DIRECTION LEADING TO THE WORLD OF CELLS, MOLECULES AND ATOMS, **INVISIBLE TO THE EYE**, WHILE THE OTHER DIRECTION POINTS AT THE REMOTE, HUGE, STARRY **UNIVERSE**.”

Victor Vasarely

Vasarely enrolled in a private art school where he received formal training as a painter. He excelled as an art student, and while honing his aesthetic skills he also continued reading books by the leading scientists at the time. Through his dual study of art and science Vasarely began to formulate a theory that the two modes of thought intersected in a way that when perceived together could, as he said, “form an imaginary construct that is in accord

with our sensibility and contemporary knowledge.” In 1929, he enrolled at Budapest's Műhely Academy, which at the time was Hungary's equivalent of the Bauhaus. His studies there focused on the concept of a total art based on geometry. He experimented with geometric abstraction and began to understand how optical illusions could be created through the arrangement of geometric shapes and colors on a two-dimensional surface.



Vasarely and his son Yvaral



After leaving the Muhely Academy, Vasarely moved to Paris, got married and had two children. He supported his family as a graphic artist, pursuing his art at night. Whereas his day job required a clean, precise style, his art practice was open to his imagination. After 14 years working on dual careers in Paris, Vasarely finally received his first major exhibition. It was well enough received that he was convinced that he could commit full time to being an artist. It was around this time that he took a departure from the visual style he had been creating. While vacationing on an island in Brittany, he took notice of the way waves affected the landscape, especially how they altered the coastline and shaped the stones. This observation led him down a path toward a sort of biomorphic geometric abstraction as he attempted to connect with a visual manifestation of the natural geometry of the organic world. Although Vasarely later referred to this time in his life as “the wrong path,” it resulted in an important evolution in his work. It added more rounded elements to his paintings. When he returned to his previous geometric style it was with the inclusion of dyna-

mic rounded forms that seemed to bulge outward from the painting or collapse inward from the surface. The way these forms tricked the eye it seemed as though the image was moving. That

**“ PAINTING IS ONLY A MEDIUM, THE FINAL GOAL IS TO SEARCH, TO DEFINE, TO INTEGRATE THE PLASTIC PHENOMENON INTO THE EVERYDAY LIFE. ”**

*Victor Vasarely*

kinetic illusion, combined with the three-dimensionality of the images on Vasarely’s canvases, became the foundation for iconic aesthetic we now call Op-Art. In 1955, Vasarely exhibited some of his work in an exhibition of kinetic art called “Le Movement” in Paris. To accompany his work he published an essay called Notes for a Manifesto. Printed on yellow paper, the essay has since come to be known as The Yellow

Denise René e Victor Vasarely

Manifesto. In it Vasarely declared, “We are at the dawn of a great age.” He insisted that labels such as painting and sculpture were outdated since artists such as Arp, Kandinsky, Mondrian and Calder had destroyed the artificial separations between the plastic arts. He declared that since all aesthetic phenomena are manifestations of the same impulse, it was time to regard all artistic achievements as part of “a single plastic sensibility in

different spaces.” At the height of his popularity in the 1960s, Vasarely created what would represent the culmination of his life’s work. He described what he called the Plastic Alphabet, a symbolic visual language based on geometric forms and colors. There were 15 forms in the alphabet, all based on variations of the circle, the triangle and the square, and each of the forms existed in a range of 20 different hues. Each form was portrayed within a square frame, and the shape and its surrounding frame were presented in different hues. The Plastic Alphabet could be arranged into a seemingly infinite assortment of combinations and utilized to create an evidently endless array of images.





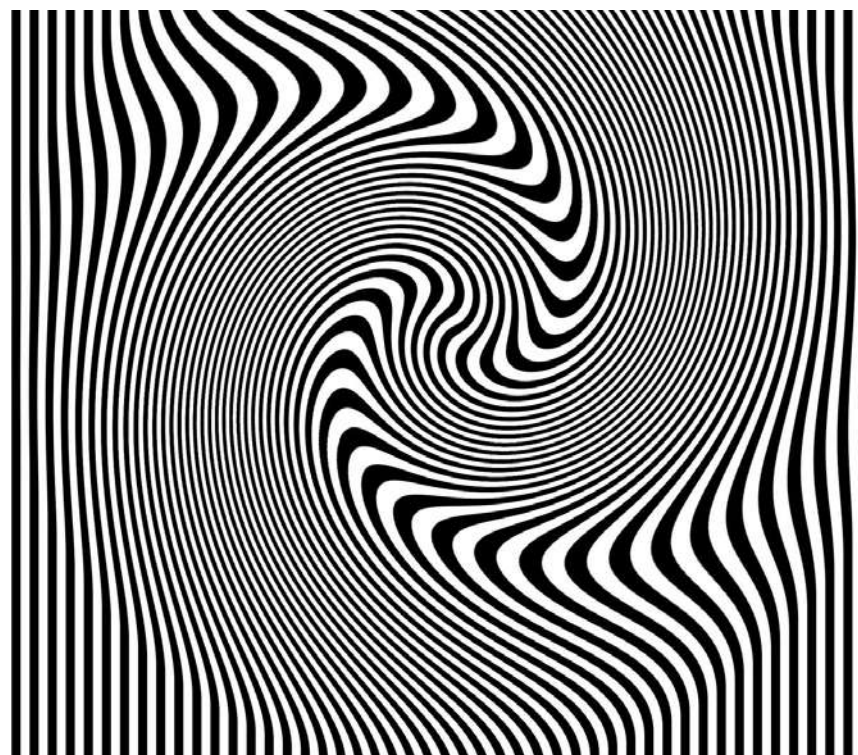
## THE SCIENTIST

by Sarah Gottesman

Artists, like neuroscientists, are masters of visual systems. Through experimentation and observation, artists have developed innovative methods for fooling the eye, enabling flat canvases to appear three-dimensional, for instance. Neuroscience — and more recently the subfield of neuroaesthetics — can help to explain the biology behind these visual tricks, many of which were first discovered by artists. During the 1960s, Op Art — short for “Optical art” — combined the two disciplines by challenging the role of illusion in art. While earlier painters had created the illusion of depth where there was none, Op artists developed visual effects that called attention to the distortions at play. Abstract and geometric, their works relied upon the mechanics of the spectator’s eye to warp their compositions into shimmering and shifting displays of line and color. The Museum of Modern Art announced this international artistic trend in 1965 in a seminal exhibition titled “The Responsive Eye.”

Since then, neuroscientists have continued to probe the mechanisms by which the human eye responds to these mind-bending works. The appearance of motion in Op Art continues to drive research in neuroscience today. Victor Vasarely applied centuries-old lessons of linear perspective to their abstract compositions in order to create an illusory effects.

*Spazio ad Attivazione Cinetica*  
commemorative exhibition  
“The Illusive Eye” (2015),  
MoMa, New York



**Fiber Optic**  
Victor Vasarely, (1960-62) Parigi

“ART HAS A DOUBLE FACE OF  
EXPRESSION AND ILLUSION, JUST  
LIKE SCIENCE HAS A DOUBLE  
FACE: THE REALITY OF ERROR  
AND THE PHANTOM OF TRUE.”





Vasarely used linear perspective, theorized by Brunelleschi during the Renaissance, to manipulate the colors and shapes of abstract forms, creating images that alterate space. While Op artists studied the science of perception, scientists have in turn looked to Op Art to ask questions about visual processes. Though their experimental techniques differ radically, their conclusions are often the same: The human visual system is not a mirror for the outside world. Rather, it is capable of seeing far beyond what is actually there. Victor Vasarely was both a scientist and an artist. The father of a Modernist abstract art movement known as Op-Art, he comfortably inhabited both worlds. Initially trained in medicine, Vasarely immediatly approached art from a systematic perspective.

He analyzed the formal qualities of what constituted an aesthetic object. He studied nature in search of the building blocks of the visual universe. And he analyzed the way viewers perceived the visual universe in search of how art could help reveal fundamental truths. From the 1920s when he conducted his earliest aesthetic experiments, through the 1960s when he revealed his ultimate creation, the "Alphabet Plastique," till the end of his life at age 90, Vasarely approached his art from a viewpoint that simultaneously included creativity and analyses. Along the way he altered how humans view two-dimensional space and created a body of work that even decades after his death continues to inspire artists, art lovers, designers and scientists alike.

**“ LA POSTA IN GIOCO NON È PIÙ IL CUORE, MA LA RETINA, E L'ANIMA BELLA ORMAI È DIVENUTA OGGETTO DI STUDIO DELLA PSICOLOGIA Sperimentale. I BRUSCHI CONTRASTI IN BIANCO E NERO, L'INSOSTENIBILE VIBRAZIONE DEI COLORI COMPLEMENTARI, IL BALUGINANTE INTRECCIO DI LINEE E LE STRUTTURE PERMUTATE [...] SONO TUTTI ELEMENTI DELLA MIA OPERA IL CUI COMPITO NON È PIÙ QUELLO DI IMMERGERE LO SPETTATORE [...] IN UNA DOLCE MELANCONIA, MA DI STIMOLARLO, E IL SUO OCCHIO CON LUI. ”**

Victor Vasarely



OpArt Video Installation  
Playtime fashion show, Paris, 2018

**“ILLUSION  
BEGETS AND  
SUSTAINS  
THE WORLD;  
WE DO NOT  
DESTROY  
ONE WITHOUT  
DESTROYING  
THE OTHER.”**

*Victor Vasarely*

**“DANZI IN UN PERFETTO  
EQUILIBRIO TRA LE  
MACERIE DI UNA STORIA  
DA NON MUTARE, SOLO  
CHI CONOSCE I DOLCI  
SEGRETI DELL'ANIMA  
SUSSURRATI ALL'INFINITO.”**

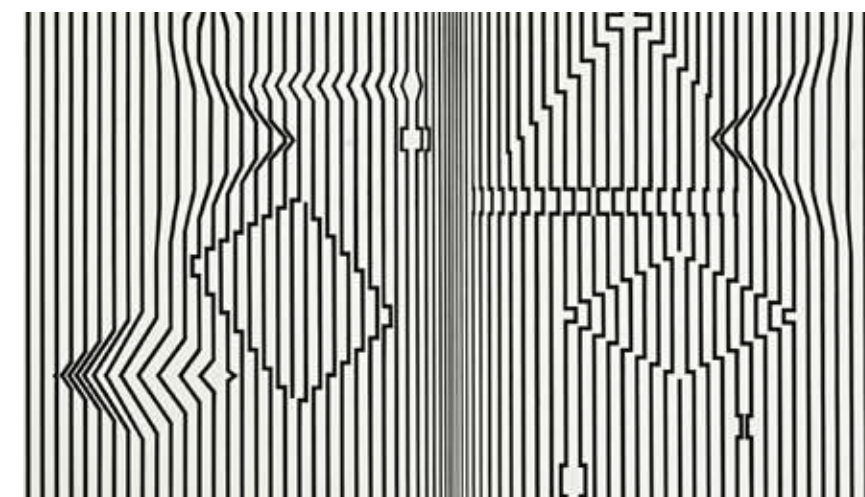
*Anonymous*

## ART FOR ALL

by Tiphaine Guillerrou

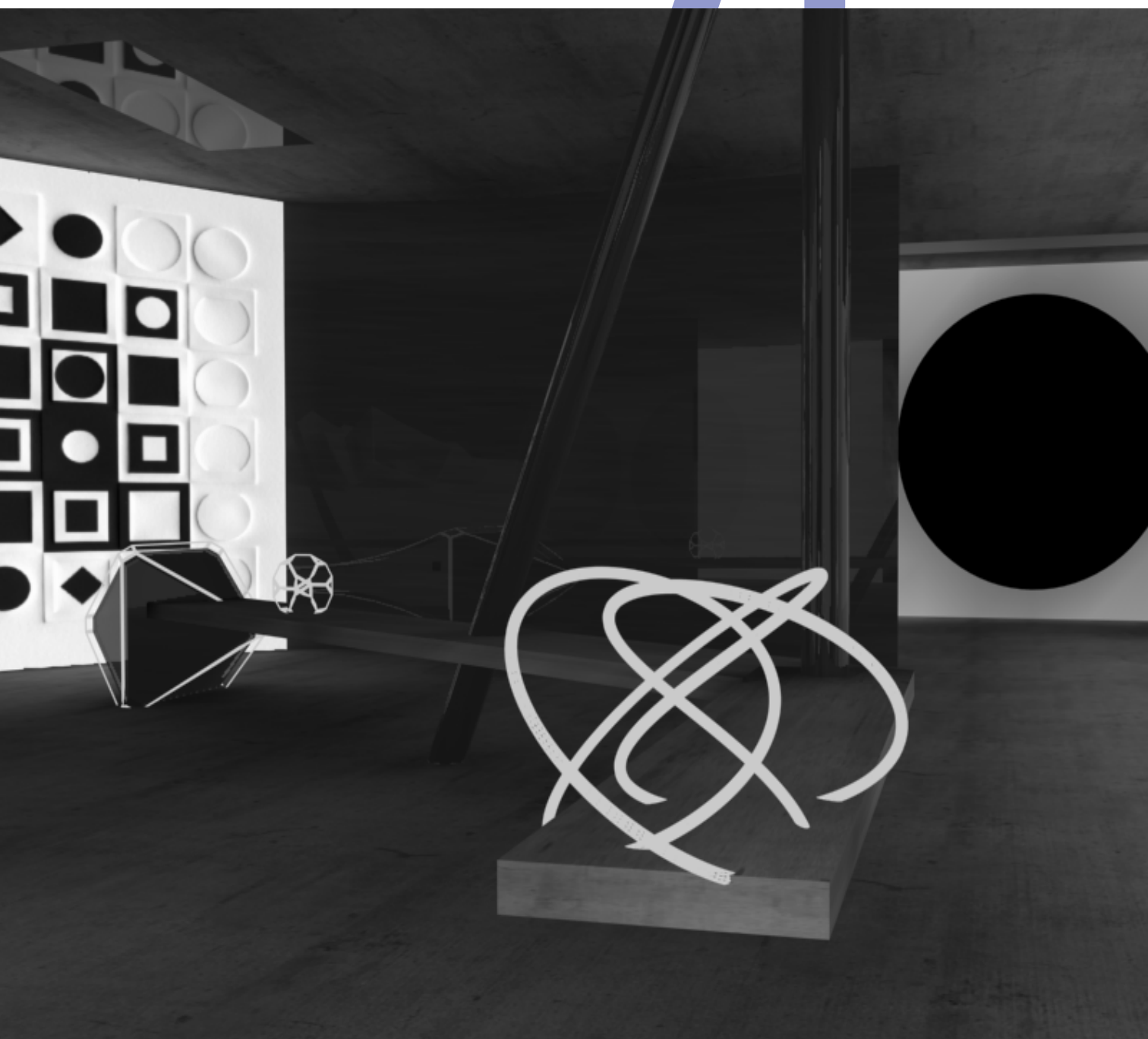
Like his predecessors in the Constructivist and Concrete Art movements, Victor Vasarely wanted to create an universal visual vocabulary for the modern art. By the 1960s, he had developed what he called an “Alphabet Plastique” of many endlessly interchangeable compositional elements. These small, square units each consisted of a simple combination of figure and ground, whose color and shape could be changed in any number of ways, to be organized in any conceivable pattern. This aspect of Vasarely’s work exemplifies a post-Second World War concern with using art to communicate across national and cultural boundaries, by stripping away any topical reference,

and using visual effects so simple that they would mean the same thing to any viewer. In this way, Vasarely sought to create what he called a “Planetary Folklore”. As a student of the Constructivism, Vasarely believed that art should also have a functional purpose within society, an aim he pursued partly by exploring the overlaps between both art and architecture. As well as designing murals and other visual features specifically for architectural spaces, Vasarely believed that his visual vocabulary of interchangeable compositional elements could be used in urban planning, as a way of combining qualities of regularity and of variety within domestic architecture, street design, and so on.



**Méandres-Naissances**  
Victor Vasarely, 1953, Parigi





While many of the artists from the 1910s onwards had considered how modern art and architecture might both influence each other, few pursued that specific vision with such a singular and consistent vision as Vasarely did. Into the gloomy and grey city suburbs, where buildings hide the sun, Victor Vasarely imagines a “polychrome city of happiness” where art would be everywhere in the city. Since 1955, Victor has been actively involved in the development of different panels for the University of Caracas. The aim of art therefore became for him to “combat the visual nuisances, beautify today artificial environment”, and be accessible to everybody. About this idea he affirmed that:

**“ THE CONTEMPORARY ARTIST CAN BE NO MORE INTERESTED IN PAINTING ONLY PRETTY AND LITTLE PICTURES. BUT HE MUST BEAUTIFY EVERY DETAIL OF THE MODERNIST AND GRADUOSE ENVIRONMENT, SINCE TODAY’S SOCIETY NEED PLASTIC FORMS AS IT NEEDS THE SUNLIGHT, OXYGEN OR VITAMINS. ”**

*Victor Vasarely*

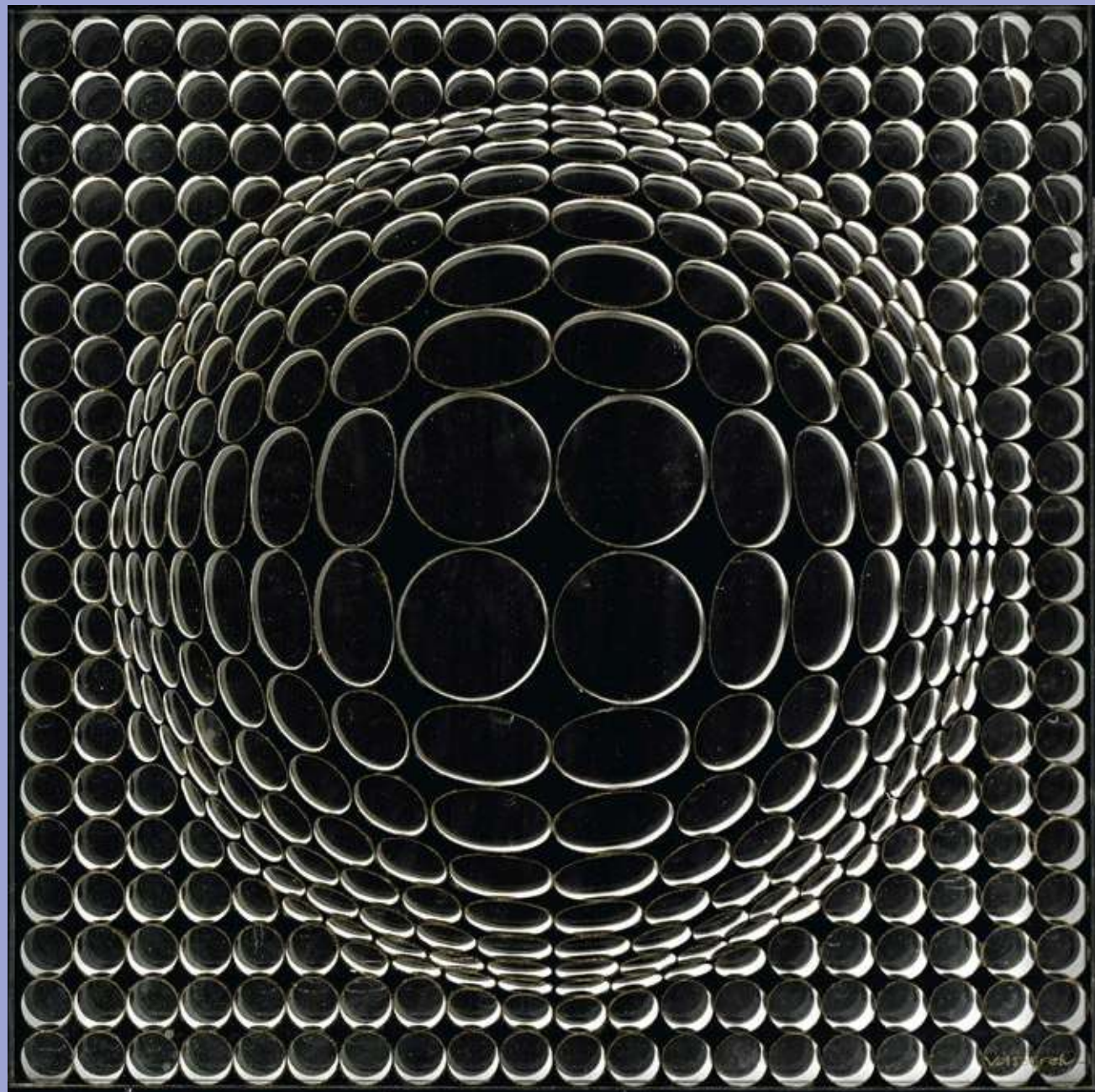
“Our dialectic - in the field of art - cannot be based on the study of history, nor on the exaltation of the masterpieces of the past. Are we in a desperate situation? Period. If we risk at every moment our title of ARTIST and the advantages that this entails, the task seems simple to me: START instead of CONTINUE. The Colour-Form or the Plastic Unit offers us the possibility to advance, always further, without having to turn around.”



**Mostra Vasarely**  
Centre Pompidour (Parigi)  
6 febbraio - 6 maggio 2019

**Fabbricare Fiducia Architettura**  
podcast a cura di Francesco Lipari  
Cityvision & Farm Cultural Park, 2020

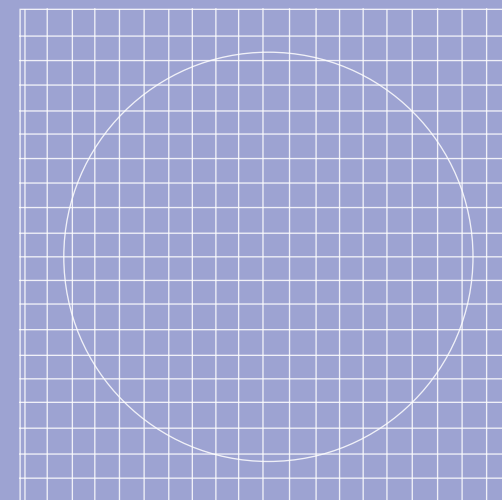
## VEGA MIR. (from Bach Album)



50 x 50 x 7 cm  
executed in 1973, Paris (France)  
silk-screen print on glass and mirror



### Grid



The grid, as a basic element for the visual planning, switches from being a synonym for stability to being an instrument for deformation and illusion in the hands of the artist. This rigid system of lines testifies the rigour and the attention that Vasarely put in his work, keeping in mind the lessons learned from the Gestalt and the avant-garde such as De Stijl or Constructivism.

### Colors



many white *reflections* caused by the light hitting the glass

the use of different materials shows the eclecticism of an artist such as Victor Vasarely, who explored reality in many different ways to deeply understand the laws behind it and the visual phenomena

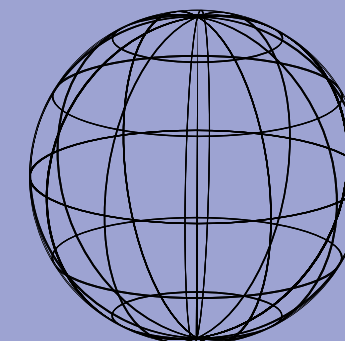
### Pattern



series of circles

The repetition of the same figure helps to give *movement* to the global composition and to suggest the presence of an illusory space

### 3D space



In the middle of the artwork the surface seems to swell up and project out into space, towards the observer. This effect is constructed geometrically through the perspective deformation of the circular modules and the orthogonal grid that contains them.

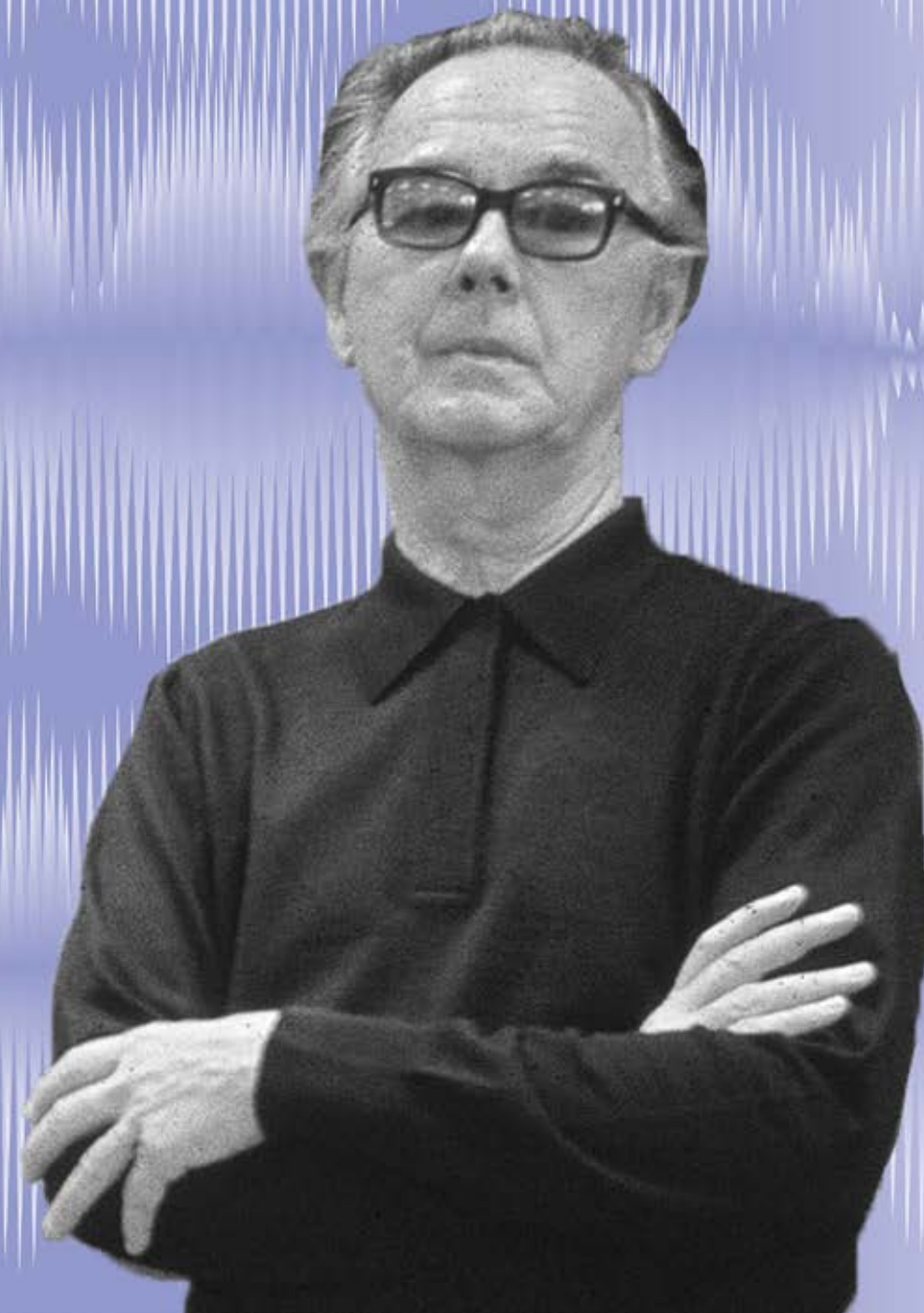


# VICTOR VASARELY

# 4



Spotify playlist:  
**Hypnotic waves**

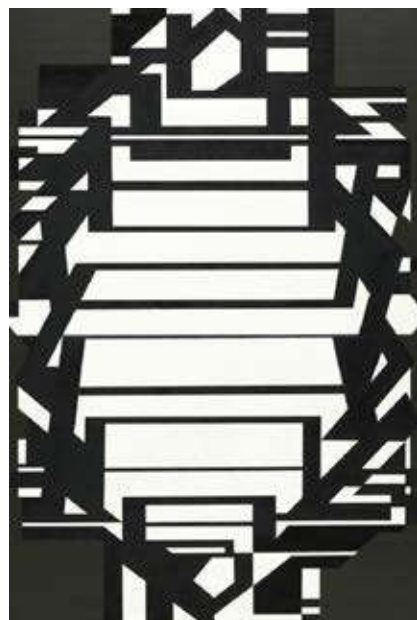


*rubrica a cura di Lorenzo Valentini*

## VASARELY SEEN THROUGH NEW EYES

By Andrew Ayers

*Mindoro II, 1954,  
Victor Vasarely*



As the show made clear, Vasarely is a one-man encapsulation of the art movements of the early to middle years of the 20th century. Too young for Cubism, he started out in a Bauhaus vein at art school in Budapest, absorbed Giorgio de Chirico and Surrealism and put them to good use in his advertising career in 1930s Paris; he then went through a Jean Arp-style biomorphic phase in the 40s, before his breakthrough into black-and-white geometric abstraction in the 50s (e.g. *Hommage à Malévitch*, 1954–58). Then, at the dawn of the 1960s, colors burst forth in Vasarely's work, with a resounding Pop!, and the psychedelic Op Art for which he is best known came triumphantly into existence. Soon his art was everywhere: on TV studio sets and book and album covers (Bowie's *Space Oddity*), in films and open-air sculptures, on cars and garages via his Renault-logo redesign, and also on buildings, both inside and out. It was only a matter of time before

of time before Vasarely turned his hand to architecture itself. In 1966 he began work on an eponymous foundation that would put his ideas into practice, a building he designed himself with help from architect Claude Pradel-Lebar (construction being realized by Jean Sonnier and Dominique Ronsseray). Inaugurated in 1976, the Fondation Vasarely sits on a grassy slope outside Aix-en-Provence, a site of symbolic import since it's close to a property once owned by the Cézanne family, and enjoys sweeping views over the Montagne Sainte-Victoire, which Paul Cézanne so often painted. While Vasarely has become enduringly identified with the pre-oil-crisis optimism that reigned in the technocratic France of the Citroën DS, Concorde, and Ariane, his work aimed for a universality and timelessness whose means of expression might, perhaps, chime once more in the otherworldly flatness of our post-Postmodern, digital age.

**“THIS INSPIRATION GAVE RISE TO POETRY AND LIFE, EVEN ETERNAL LIFE. IS THERE A REASON AS TO WHY THIS EXPANDED, GIGANTESQUE, PHYSICAL REALITY WITH ASSOCIATED RELATIVITY, ELECTRIC AND MAGNETIC FIELD, ITS LIGHT WAVES, PROBLEMS OF MATTER, SPACE AND TIME, WONDERS AND SECRETS, COULD NOT BECOME AN INEXHAUSTIBLE SOURCE OF NEW POETRY AND BEAUTY?”**

*Victor Vasarely*



# MUSICALITY OF VICTOR VASARELY PLASTIC WORK

by Frédéric Rossille

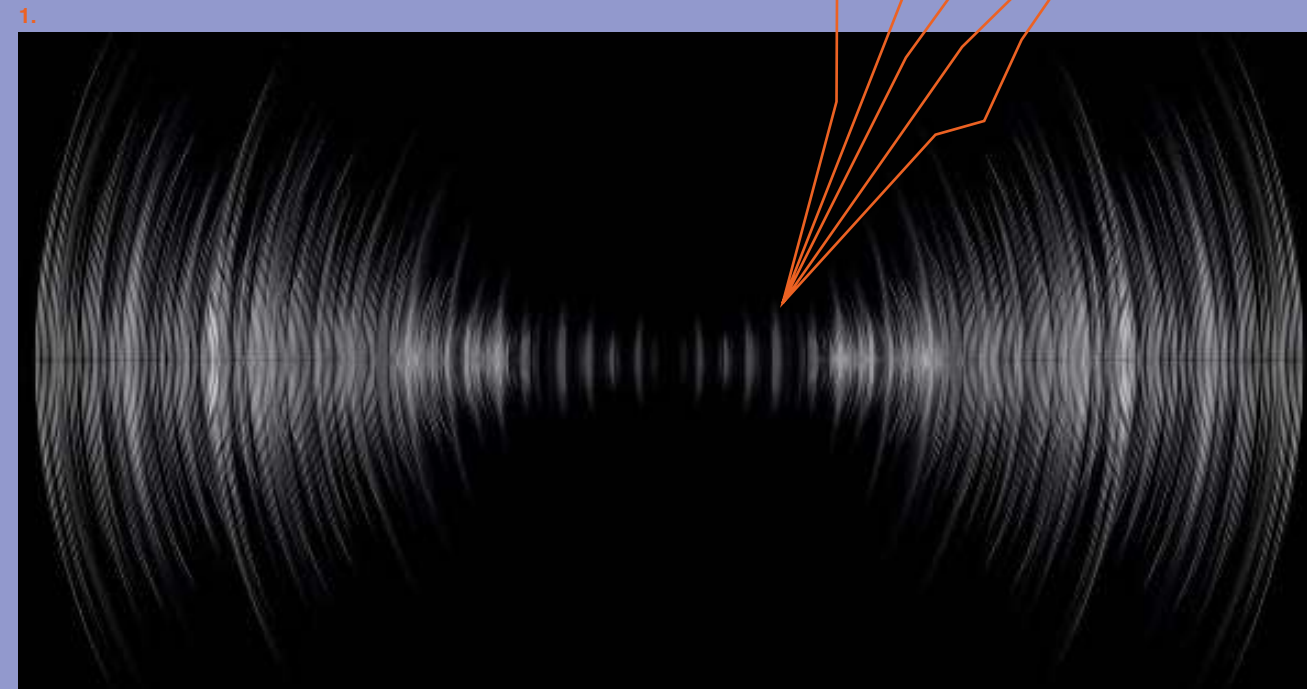
Vasarely calls “algorithms” his works founded on programmable permutations of colour shades. The repetition of form-colour units evokes the repetition of musical cells, of motifs, of phrases or even of entire sections. The process reaches its peak in music using an “ostinato” – as in the “passacaglia” – and in the minimalist current. Whether it is in music or in plastic art, the repetition process guarantees unity, permitting all the same the most complex elaborations. The notion of repetition is very close to the mathematical notion of symmetry. “Rhythm is to time as symmetry is to space”, writes Francis Warrain. In Vasarely’s paintings, symmetry is often expressed along different axes. It can also take the shape of symmetries peculiar to certain geometrical figures. In the musical field, canons, reversible counterpoint, imitation processes, retrogradable rhythms originate from the principle of symmetry. On the basis of these principles, Vasarely’s work is worth being compared to the musical constructions of Jean-Sebastian Bach and to those of the explorers of new writings: dodecaphony (Arnold Schonberg, Alban Berg, Anton Webern), Olivier Messiaen’s modes of value and intensity, serial music, Witold Lutoslawski’s original technique of the twelve sounds, Iannis Xenakis’ stochastic music, Gyorgy

Ligeti’s “micro-polyphony”, repetitive and avant-garde music. The characteristic of musical variation is presenting a theme by changing some of its aspects: ornamentation of the melody, change in harmony, transformation of accompaniment and other proceedings. In Vasarely, the spirit of variation appears in a work such as “Clide” (1984) which shows coloured variants of expansive structures on the motifs of circle, square, hexagon and octagon. The variation equally appears in the creation of series prolonged in duration, fulfilling the same plastic research or corresponding to the successive implementations of the same “prototypestart”. Think of the black and white works constructed on a chessboard pattern and of the expansive-regressive structures of the “Vega” period. In the “allegro” of the sonata form, the development - or “elaboration” - resumes some elements of the sequence to prolong the ideas thanks to repetitions, modulations and other proceedings. After a more or less complex tonal course, it ends by the preparation of the re-statement of the initial tone. In the final stage of a fugue, the polyphonic relation tightens the subject and its response overlap in close entrances. In Vasarely, the elaboration process characterises his works making a synthesis of different plastic research works.

## 1. Sound Waves oscillating

Thus, “Xexa-Domb” (1971-1973) matches Kepler’s cube to the expansive structure of the “Vega” period. Built on the basis of the octagon and the square, “Planetary” (1972) combines the concept of the rich polychromy of “Folklore planétaire” with the language of expansive-regressive structures. The realisation of the big form - the global structure of a work - implies the search for the balance of the parts among them and in their relation to the whole. Such balance will be mainly obtained by elaborating the contrasts necessary to the good development of the work and to keep interest in it alive. Thus, rapid movements will alternate with

slow movements; the tonal course will get far from the initial tone to return to it in the coda. Vasarely is respectful of principles of balance and unity very close to those we have just mentioned. So, in “Tauri-R” (1966-76), the black and white drawing is completely duplicated in the negative, as if the two parts had to cancel each other. In “Eridan” (1956-76), the four quadrants of the canvas reflect each other in positive-negative. In “Capella I” (1964), the top half of the painting seems to radiate light while the bottom half seems to receive it. In “V.P.112” (1970), an expansive structure responds to a regressive structure.





Vasarely studied the principles of Gestalt Theorie – or the theory of form – and applied them to his research. Let us mention the three great axes: the whole is different from the sum of the parts; perception consists in separating a figure from a background; mind structures the perception of forms according to certain natural laws. And let us remember that the background-form law of intervention is already implicitly formulated in the concept of Plastic Unit. The principles and laws of Gestalt Theorie apply to the perception of music. The natural laws of good form, good continuity and common destiny govern the art of melody. The laws of similarity show themselves in counterpoint imitation, the processes of repetition and symmetry, rhythm. According to the background-form law of intervention, musical analysis takes into account the notions of background, medium shot and close-up shot. Let us remember that many works of the Gestalt period represent figures which can be interpreted

in relief or engraved. Polyphonic The illusion of “Kanizsa’s motif” is used in “Binaire” (1956) where geometrical figures are only suggested by barely sketched contours. Some melodies suggest virtual notes that our mind return with reference to natural resonance and tonal system. Some repetitive music – such as “Music for 18 Musicians” by the composer Steve Reich – plays on the introduction of time lags between superimposed simple motifs. This proceeding is at the origin of endlessly changing sound configurations, creating a kaleidoscopic effect. One of Vasarely’s thoughts can surprisingly fit this phenomenon: “The ideal thing is attaining a total simplicity on the objective plan for a maximum complexity on the subjective plan” in “Vasarely plasticien”, éditions Robert Laffont, Paris, 1979, p. 169). music superimposes several melodic lines and consequently supplies different reading schemes. Our attention can focus on one or the other voice highlighted in comparison to the other parts. Every

1. *The singer David Bowie* visiting Vasarely's Fondation in 1977
2. *Victor Vasarely* and *David Bowie* together.
3. David Bowie admiring Vasarely's artworks. On the background an op art masterpiece: *Rena II A*
4. *David Bowie's signature*

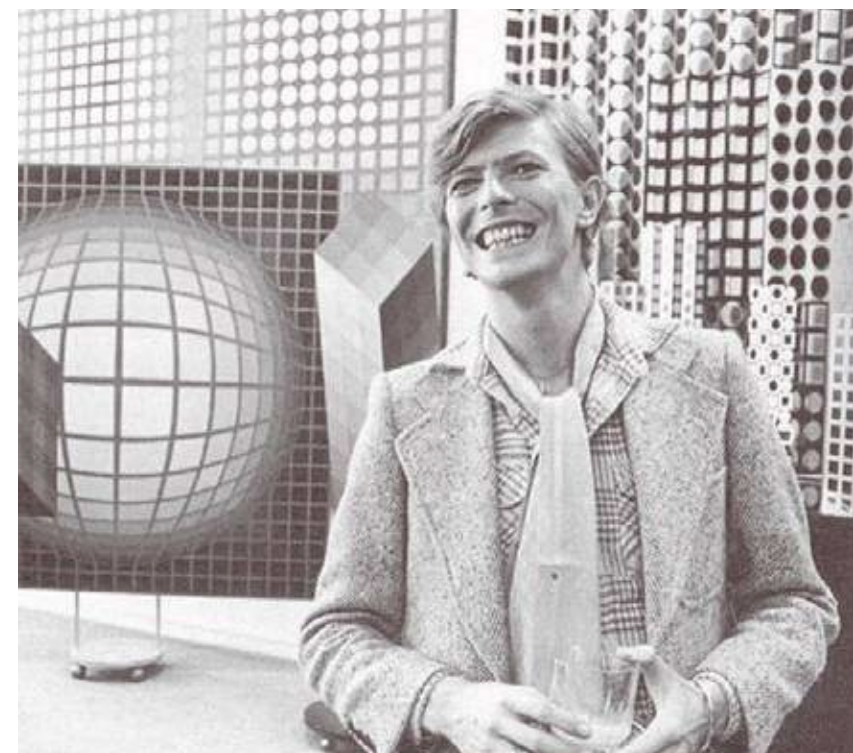
1.



2.



3.



4.

complex music accordingly reveals different schemes of interpretation. Think of polyrhythm and other rhythmic ambiguities. A two-time measure in 6/8 can thus be meant as a three-time measure in 3/4 whether our ears group the six quavers by three or by two. In the two fields arousing our interest, interpretation ambiguities are richness factors, creating free spaces which are actively invaded by our senses.

Vasarely took part in the creation of kineticism that he theorized in his “Yellow Manifesto” in 1955. Starting from his figurative period, he tried to give the illusion of movement. His linear black and white nets avail themselves of retinal persistence, as in “Linear study” and “Zebras” (1938). In his “photographisms”, the illusion is produced by the superposition of positive and negative images out of step. His “deep kinetic works” superimpose two nets separated by a space and animated by complex movements when the spectator changes his/her place. The illusion of “Hermann’s grid” clearly appears in works such as “Rena II A” (1968) where you can see little grey spots peeping out at the intersections of clear lines.



*Space Oddity, David Bowie 1969*  
The album's cover was made by Victor Vasarely



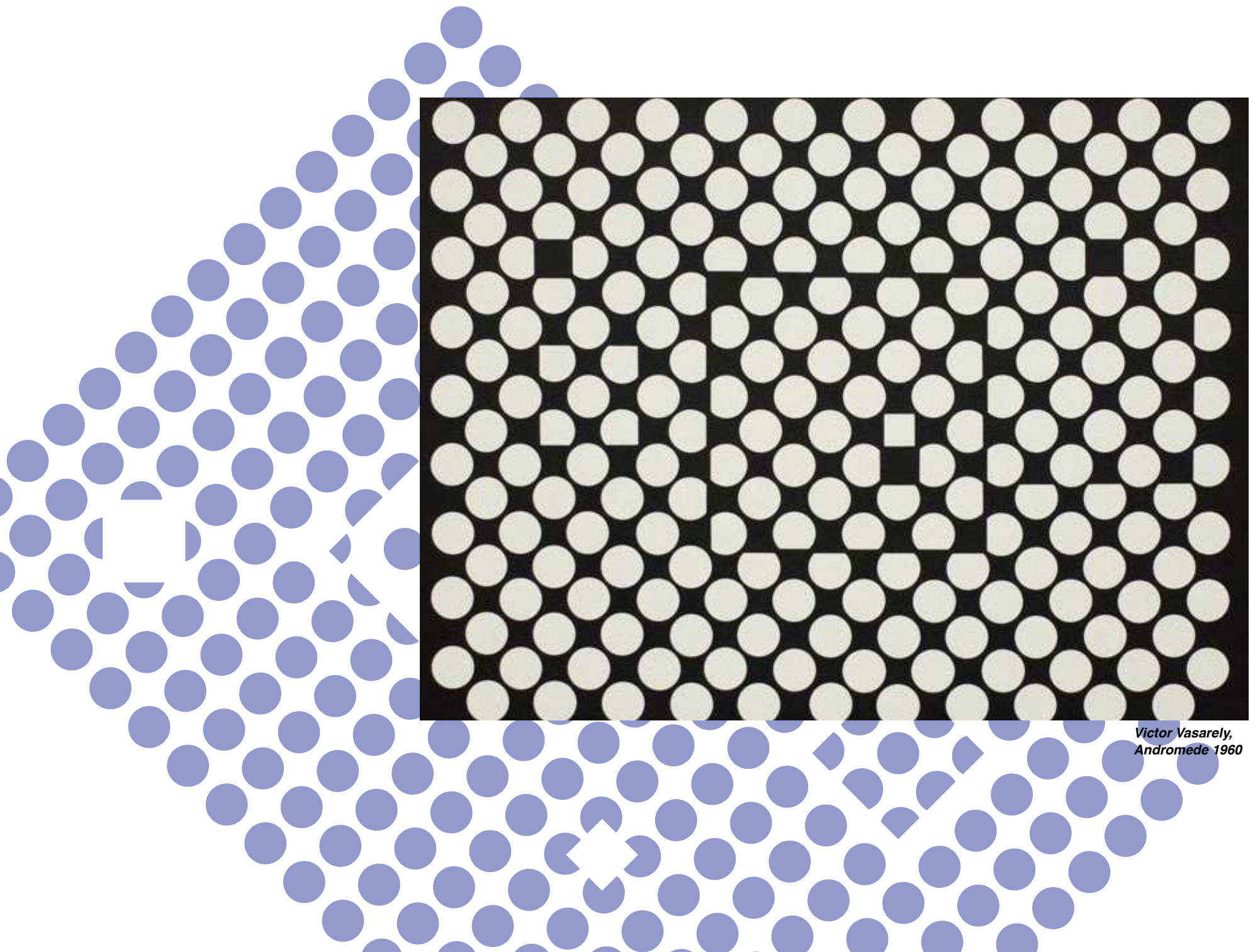
## VICTOR VASARELY: UN ARTISTE ENGAGÉ

Foundation Vasarely

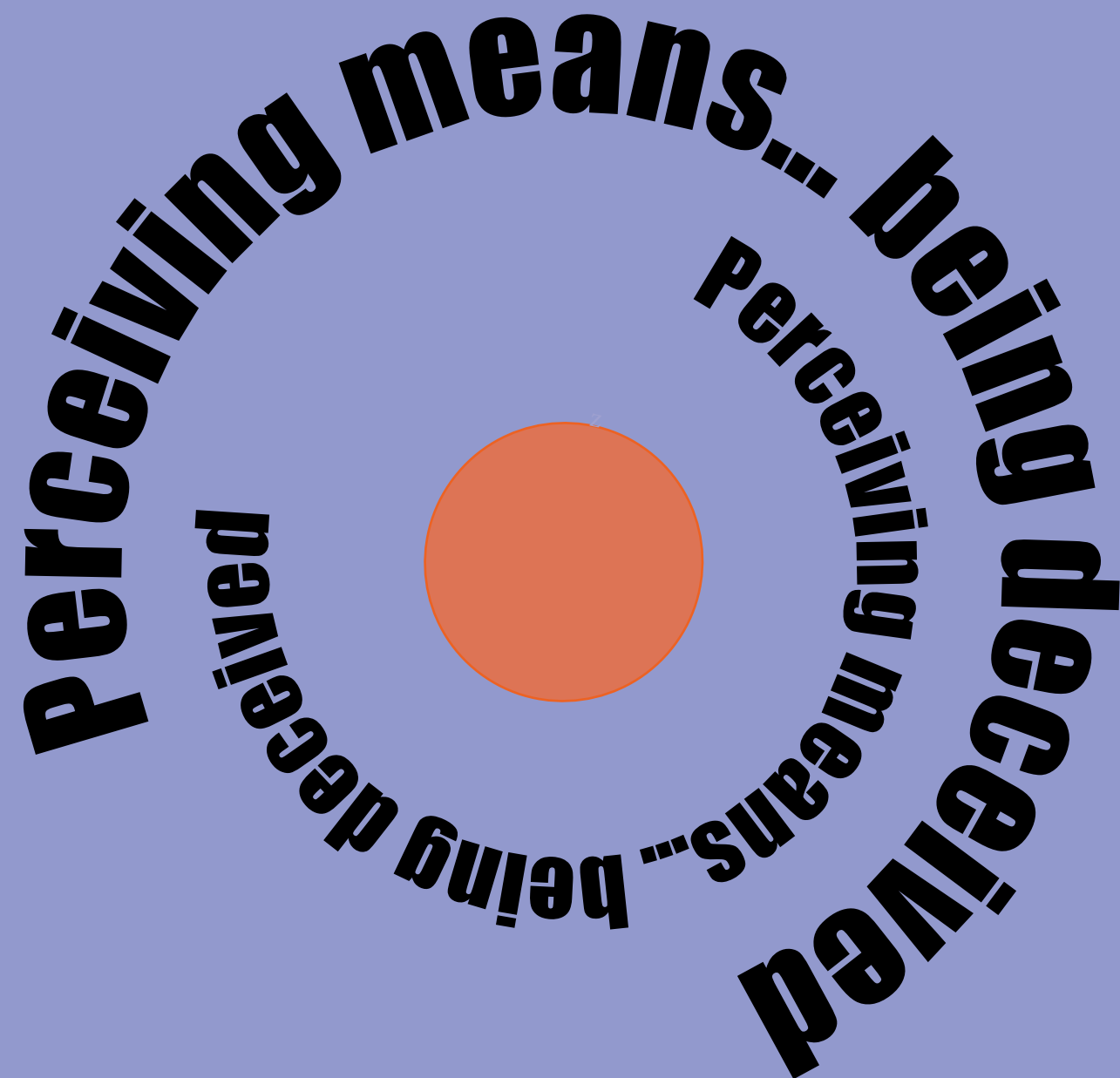
Victor Vasarely is a unique artist in the history of twentieth century art. Famous during his lifetime, he distinguished himself from contemporary art with the creation of a new movement: optical art. The evolution of his life of work is inherently coherent, progressing from graphic art to the artist's determination to promote a social art that is accessible to all.

Starting in 1960, color bursts out in the "Planetary Folklore" works. The plastic unit used "consists of two geometric elements that fit one into the other, that come together, that switch places". Using these bicolor units with solid or contrasting colors, the artist invents the Alphabet Plastique which breathes new life into an idea which dates back to the beginning of the century among abstract artists – the search for a method to create a universal language understandable by all. This Plastic Alphabet opens the door to the introduction of collective art. Through the matching and transforming of shapes and shades, the artist makes a number of different

use of combinations of this scale in plastic art provides a universal tool, without limiting the expression of personality such as that of ethnic identities." In this combinatory art, elements can be coded or programmed. Vasarely uses new techniques and technologies to diversify and compose new works ad infinitum. Elements can be prefabricated using industrial processes, and the works are monumental and integrated into architecture and our urban environment. "The future takes shape in this new geometric polychromatic and solar city. Here, plastic arts will be kinetic, multi-dimensional and collective... most definitely abstract and inseparable from science."



Victor Vasarely,  
*Andromede* 1960

***Reflexions de Victor Vasarely on Ina.fr***

An interview of Vasarely shared by Fondation Vasarely where he expresses his thought regarding society, art and progress.



# KEPLE GESTALT

Victor Vasarely, 1969

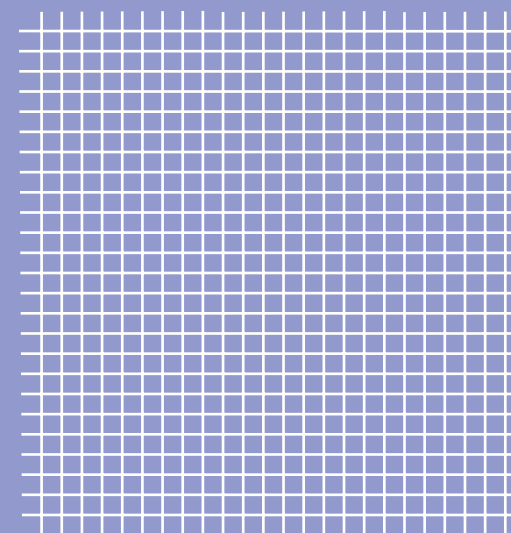


## Description

Keple Gestalt is a visual representation of the Gestalt's theories: the keynote of Vasarely's op art works. The shape, the shadows, the cubes organized in precise grid create an impressive 3D illusion.

## Grid

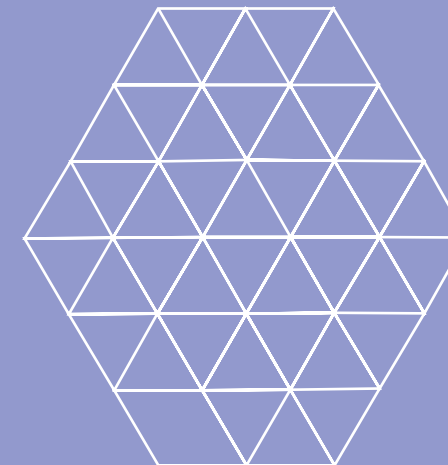
Like every Vasarely's artwork, Keple Gestalt was painted following a precise grid. The grid gives rigour and a perfect geometry to the shape but at the same time creates illusions and dynamicity.



## Colors

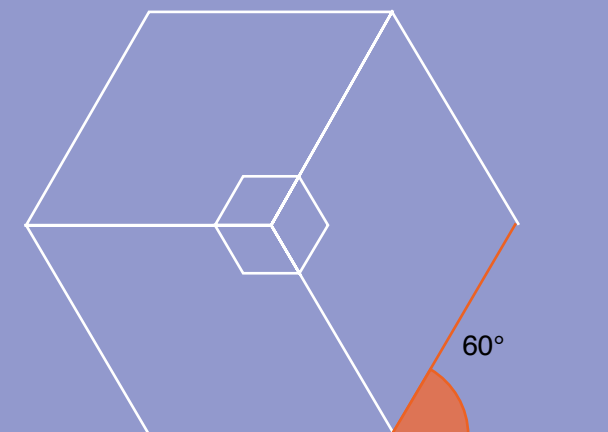
For this artwork Vasarely chose 3 cold colors supplemented by their gradients in order to create shadows.

## Shape

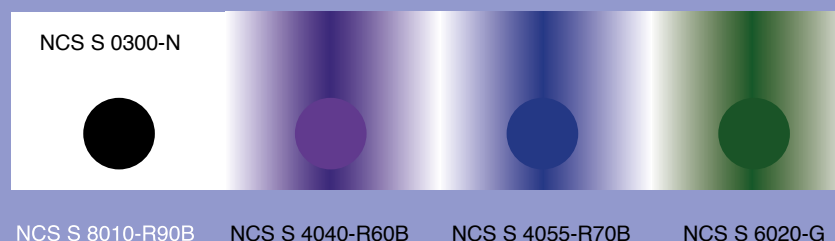


The shape is an irregular hexagon composed by 14 hexagons.

## Cubes



The Artwork is composed by many hexagons that in 3D could seem cubes tilted 60° on their side, because oblique lines create an illusion of depth.



# Fonti

## Articoli

- 1 Tina Modotti's vision: photographic modernism in Mexico (1996), thesis by Sarah Margaret Lowe, City University of New York (CUNY)  
Tina Modotti: dalla poetica della rivolta all'etica dell'utopia (2008), Pino Bertelli, editor NdA
- 2 <http://metropolis2520.com/2014/06/09/massimo-vignelli-design/>  
<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/remembering-massimo-vignelli-180951592/>  
<https://collection.cooperhewitt.org/objects/18734823/>  
The Vignelli Canon (2012) by Massimo Vignelli, editor Postmedia Books
- 3 <https://www.ideelart.com/magazine/victor-vasarely>  
<https://www.artsy.net/article/the-art-genome-project-the-neuroscience-of-op-art>
- 4 <https://pinupmagazine.org/articles/portfolio-resident-aliens-vasarely-museum-philippe-jarri-geon-fantasy-ufo>  
<https://www.fondationvasarely.org/centre-architectonique/victor-vasarely/?lang=en>  
[http://www.lecarrebleu.eu/allegati/2-2007/LCB%202-2007\\_INGLESE\\_WEB.pdf](http://www.lecarrebleu.eu/allegati/2-2007/LCB%202-2007_INGLESE_WEB.pdf)

## Immagini

<https://www.pexels.com/it-it/>  
Hooks M., (2002), Tina Modotti. Londra, editor Phaidon Press Limited  
<https://images.google.com>