

In 1965, the Museum of Modern Art mounted William Seitz's exhibition "The Responsive Eye," which broke attendance records and established Op art as an unofficial movement and a cultural force. It was also highly controversial. On the one hand, the strength of the public's interest in Seitz's show quickly, if briefly, saw Op art supplant Pop Art as the reigning aesthetic of the burgeoning counterculture. However, perhaps as a result of its air of populism, the show and the movement were nearly universally dismissed by critics as mere gimmickry—packing a perceptual punch but lacking a depth of meaning.

In the wake of "The Responsive Eye," no one came to embody Op art more than **Bridget Riley**, whose wavering, psychedelic paintings have become nearly synonymous with the movement. Like many of the works in Seitz's show, Riley's paintings made use of techniques that exploited the eye's ability to be tricked—perceptual effects that were seemingly the result of investigations into the optical functions of the eye. Riley, for her part, disavowed any scientific grounding for her paintings while also repudiated the interpretation that her work was merely intent on the production of optical tricks. Instead, she preferred to focus on their emotional and phenomenological impact, asserting that her paintings resulted from an attempt, first and foremost, to create "tension." In this regard, she related her works to the riotous, participatory "happenings" associated with her American contemporary Allan Kaprow, in whose work Riley considered "The disturbance precipitated...latent in the sociological and psychological situation."

However, the highly seductive, graphic qualities of Riley's work led to it falling victim to the flood of pop cultural interest that followed Seitz's blockbuster exhibition. Almost as soon as the exhibition opened, the dynamic, graphic imagery featured in Riley's paintings began to crop up in fashion, interior décor, and film. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Riley was disquieted by this "vulgarized" reception of her work, which treated it as a mere design flourish, resorting, in one instance, to legal action.

After graduating from Stanford University in 1949, where he had originally studied engineering before switching to art, **Robert Breer** moved to Paris and developed a hard-edged abstract painting style influenced by artists associated with Neoplasticism, such as Piet Mondrian. After a few years, however, Breer became frustrated with Neoplasticism's rigid structures and sought to introduce a sense of movement and flux in his works. This impulse, coupled with access to the Bolex camera owned by his father, a high-level engineer at the Chrysler Corporation and an amateur filmmaker, led him to create abstract films. Through this medium he was able to extend the logic of painting into the dimension of time. These radically non-narrative films initially consisted of transforming and overlapping shapes and colors, but they evolved to include lightning-fast barrages of representational imagery—his film *REcreation* (1956) contains sections in which twenty-four completely unrelated images (one image per film frame) were squeezed into a single second. Some of these films appeared in a screening program that accompanied the seminal kinetic art exhibition “Le Mouvement” (1955), which Breer helped to organize alongside curator Pontus Hultén and artist Jean Tinguely in Paris.

In 1959, Breer relocated to New York where he extended his interest in the production of mutable compositions beyond the realm of filmmaking with the creation of kinetic geometric sculptures that he dubbed *Floats*. These otherworldly forms, which drift randomly at a nearly imperceptible pace, were a significant part of the Pepsi-Cola Pavilion at the 1970 International Exposition in Osaka, Japan. Designed as a totalizing, immersive environment, the Pavilion was conceived by a diverse collection of artists and engineers associated with Bell Labs, operating under the moniker E.A.T. (Experiments in Art and Technology). It featured happenings, laser light shows, and an inflatable, ninety-foot-tall mirrored Mylar bubble, all housed within a larger geodesic dome structure that was constantly shrouded in a sculptural halo of fog. Outside of the dome, Breer's *Floats* hovered like mute auguries of an uncertain, if guardedly optimistic, future.

Initially recognized for his pioneering experimental animation work, **Stan VanDerBeek** developed a fascination with technology later in his life. As one of the first artists to work intensely with computers, he produced a series of animated films in collaboration with Ken Knowlton at AT&T's Bell Labs in the 1960s. This interest in technology, coupled with VanDerBeek's affinity for the work of Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan, led to the conception of his most ambitious unrealized project, the *Movie-Drome* (1963–66). VanDerBeek's idea was to erect large domed structures, or movie-dromes, on various sites around the world, which would serve as hubs for the distribution of knowledge via the universal language of the information age—images. Programs at the various movie-dromes would be tailored to the needs and desires of local populations, and would draw on a limitless image library, parts of which would be stored electronically in each movie-drome. These programs would, in turn, be connected up to other movie-drome programs through a network of satellites, televisions, and telephones.

Had VanDerBeek fully realized his idea, he would have created a kind of rough prototype of the World Wide Web, but the expense and attendant technological roadblocks meant that the project would remain a dream. However, VanDerBeek did succeed in building a single thirty-foot movie-drome that he fashioned out of a commercially produced grain silo top in Stony Point, New York. Here, he staged a handful of all-encompassing multimedia events, where film and slide projectors covered the interior of the movie-drome with a rotating collage of images. In the end, only a handful of visitors experienced the movie-drome and it was eventually repurposed into a storage site once VanDerBeek moved from Stony Point. In its prescient anticipation of contemporary image culture, the movie-drome has become an iconic work within the field of expanded cinema and for younger artists dealing with a networked digital realm. This installation, produced with the help of VanDerBeek's family, is the first reconstruction of the *Movie-Drome* ever undertaken. The selection of films, videos, and slides presented in this reconstruction was compiled with the advice of art historian Gloria Sutton and is based on the programs from several of VanDerBeek's multiscreen presentations of the 1960s and '70s.

In both his writings and his work, **Seth Price** has engaged closely with our relationship to images. Price has particularly focused his efforts on dealing with issues surrounding image reception and distribution, especially as they have been affected by the increasing prevalence of digital media. Price deals with digital imagery's lack of any traditional, stable relation to a support (as, for example, a painting would have to the canvas on which it is painted), which renders the digital image into an endlessly changeable and circulatable specter that is both absent and present all at once.

To create *Film/Right* (2006), Price purchased a six-second digital video loop from a company that licenses images for use as background material in corporate presentations and added his own color effects and distortions. The finished loop is transferred to 16mm film, giving what was initially a disposable commercial product the appearance of abstract experimental film. Moreover, the formerly anodyne image becomes charged with significance that it was never meant to have—an eerie embodiment of the churning ocean of digital dross that buoys up our increasingly dematerialized culture.

In 1931, while studying for his DSc in Electrical Engineering at MIT, **Harold Edgerton** developed and perfected the use of stroboscopic light in the process of inventing ultra high-speed photography. Initially using this technique to photograph the movements of synchronous motors, Edgerton soon realized that his innovation also had aesthetic potential. He began taking photographs of everyday phenomena that are imperceptible to the human eye—activating the camera as a truly sense-expanding mechanism. These images, for which Edgerton is best known outside of scientific circles, began to appear in publications and exhibitions around the world—including a 1937 show at the Museum of Modern Art in New York curated by Beaumont Newhall, which is distinguished as the first exhibition of photographs ever mounted at the museum.

In addition to the accolades Edgerton garnered for his work in high-speed photography, he was also widely recognized for his work developing various scientific and military applications for stroboscopic imaging. In 1947, along with long-time collaborators Kenneth J. Germeshausen and Herbert E. Grier, Edgerton invented a camera (dubbed the Rapatronic) designed to photograph the rapidly changing states of matter at the beginning of nuclear explosions for the Atomic Energy Commission. When the Rapatronic was completed, it was the fastest camera in the world, capable of recording an image with an exposure time of as little as ten billionths of a second. The resultant images, however, possess a potency that extends far beyond their technical proficiency—they are impossibly still, standing as chilling testaments to the technological leaps that allow us to both picture and produce our own potential demise.