The major Festival exhibition at the National Galleries of Scotland (NGS) in summer 2019 will celebrate the work of one the greatest British painters of our time. Over the course of a remarkable career, which has spanned seven decades, Bridget Riley (b.1931) has developed a unique visual language, creating dazzling and compelling abstract Paintings which explore the fundamental nature of perception. Riley’s earliest abstract works were closely associated with Op Art, a tendency in visual arts which emerged in the mid-1960s. In the last 50 years she has forged a singular path, developing her practice in new and ground-breaking ways, and her work has been exhibited and collected across the world. She is
one of the most distinguished and internationally renowned artists working today.

*Bridget Riley* will be the first major survey of Riley’s work to be held in the UK for 16 years, and the first of its scale to be staged in Scotland. Organised by the NGS in close collaboration with the artist herself, and presented in partnership with Hayward Gallery, London, the exhibition will be shown first in Edinburgh, in the Royal Scottish Academy, from June to September 2019, before travelling to Hayward Gallery in London, where it will be shown from October 2019 until January 2020.

Through her observations of the natural world, her experience of looking at the work of other artists (in particular Georges Seurat, Piet Mondrian, Paul Cézanne and Henri Matisse), and through her own experimentation, Riley has made a deep, personal investigation into the act of painting, and of how we see. At its heart, her work explores the ways in which we learn through looking, using a purely abstract language of simple shapes, forms and colour to create sensations of light, space, volume, rhythm and movement.

This exhibition will place particular emphasis on the origins of Riley’s work, and will trace pivotal, decisive moments in her acclaimed career. It will feature early paintings and drawings, iconic black-and-white paintings of the 1960s, expansive canvases in colour, wall paintings and recent works, as well as studies that reveal Riley’s working methods.

Highlights will include early paintings inspired by the work of Georges Seurat, such as *Pink Landscape* (1960); Riley’s first abstract paintings, *Kiss* and *Movement in Squares* (both 1961); and other iconic works of the 1960s, including *Current* (1964), from the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York and *Paean* (1973) from Tokyo’s Museum of Modern Art. The exhibition will also include *Late Morning* (1967-8) and *Rise 1* (1968), key, large-scale colour paintings first shown at the 1968 Venice Biennale, where Riley became the first British contemporary...
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painter and the first woman artist to be awarded the International Prize for painting.

Exploring the relative nature of colour has been integral to Riley’s work, and the exhibition will trace the development of this concern from her early vertical and horizontal stripe paintings, through her lyrical curve and twist paintings of the 1970s such as Clepsydra (1976) and Aubade (1975); the second series of stripe paintings using her ‘Egyptian’ palette, from the early 1980s; through to the dynamic, reintroduction of the diagonal in the intensely coloured ‘rhomboid’ paintings and arc paintings of the 2000s. Recent developments in Riley’s practice will be presented, including her re-engagement with black and white and a recent series of disc paintings, entitled Measure for Measure.

A significant feature of the exhibition will be to bring together key series of works, which offer fascinating insights into how Riley has developed her work by what she refers to as the ‘spirit of enquiry’. Riley produces numerous preparatory studies and drawings en route to painting, relying upon her eye to judge the potential of a motif, and making numerous decisions about scale, format and palette, in order to balance the tempo and tensions within a given work. As well as the paths followed and developed, the exhibition will highlight certain areas of activity the artist chose not to follow, and will feature, for example, Continuum (1963/2005), which is her only 3 dimensional work. Riley has looked carefully at paintings from the past and has made a selection of examples from the National Galleries of Scotland own collection to accompany the show, which will be on view at the Scottish National Gallery and Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art.

The exhibition will bring together some 50 major paintings from public and private collections around the world, as well as a large number of works on paper, including a selection of works from Riley’s student years and childhood, many of which are being shown for the first time.

Speaking about the exhibition, Simon Groom, Director of Modern and Contemporary Art at the NGS, said: “We are absolutely thrilled
to be bringing together so many major paintings from across Riley’s long and distinguished career to show the radical development and constant creative evolution of work by an artist who has been at the forefront of the international avant-garde since the early 1960s. In pioneering such a distinctive body of work, Riley has expanded the possibilities for painting, as she has profoundly changed the way we think about – and look at – art.”

For further information and images please contact the National Galleries of Scotland’s press office on:

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6247/6314/6332
or
pressinfo@nationalgalleries.org
NOTES:

Exhibition dates:

Royal Scottish Academy
National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh
15 June to 22 September 2019

Hayward Gallery, London
23 October 2019 to 26 January 2020

For press information about the Hayward showing, please contact:
Clare Callaghan, Press Officer Visual Arts,
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Survey exhibitions devoted to Riley’s work have been held at:

Hayward Gallery, London (1971)

Musée d’art moderne de la Ville de Paris, France (2008)

Museum of Contemporary Art Australia (MCA), Sydney Australia (2004-5; with tour to City Gallery Wellington, New Zealand and Aargauer Kunsthaus, Aarau, Switzerland)


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