

**THE** THE MUSEUM THAT PLAYS  
WITH OUR PERCEPTION

**MUSEUM OF**

**ILLUSIONS**



#### IMITATING REALITY

- Villa of Mysteries wall paintings (Pompeii)
- Donato Bramante
- Jan Van Eyck
- Jean Valette-Penot
- Michelangelo
- Chuck Close
- Duane Hanson
- Jacques Poirier
- John Baeder
- Ernest Pignon-Ernest
- Julian Beever
- Kurt Wenner
- Ron Mueck
- Banksy

#### PLAYING WITH THE EYE

- Erhard Schön
- Hans Holbein the Younger
- William Scrots
- Mughal school
- Samuel van Hoogstraten
- Anonymous anamorphosis
- Georges Seurat
- Giacomo Balla
- Victor Vasarely
- Bridget Riley
- Neil Dawson
- Georges Rousse
- Bernard Pras
- Edgar Mueller
- Felice Varini

#### ALTERED BODIES

- Giuseppe Arcimboldo
- Vincenzo Campi
- Matthäus Merian
- Godfried Schalcke
- Edgar Degas
- Paul Gauguin
- Desiree Palmen
- Tony Cragg
- Evan Penny
- Emma Hack
- Alexa Maede
- Giuseppe Mastromatteo
- Liu Bolin
- E.-J. Cammack
- A.Maestre Gasteazi
- Tony Oursler

#### DOUBLE MEANING

- The Venus of Milandes
- Andrea Mantegna
- Jean-Honoré Fragonard
- Utagawa Kuniyoshi
- Charles Allen Gilbert
- W. E. Hill
- Salvador Dali
- Philippe Halsman
- Man Ray
- Jasper Johns
- Octavio Ocampo
- Shiego Fukuda
- Markus Raetz
- Raoul Marek
- T. Noble & Sue Webster
- James Hopkins

#### SHOWING THE IMPOSSIBLE

- Pericopes of Henri II
- Pieter Brueghel
- G. Piranesi
- William Hogarth
- Pere Borrell del Caso
- René Magritte
- M. C. Escher
- Joan Fontcuberta
- Eija-Liisa Ahtila
- Philippe Ramette
- Maurizio Cattelan
- Gilles Barbier
- Bruno Catalano
- Li Wei
- Peter Bristol...

KEEP YOUR EYES WIDE OPEN!

IN HIS PAINTING, DID EDGAR DEGAS WANT

TO REPRESENT A CRAGGY LANDSCAPE

OR THE LYING BODY OF A WOMAN?

HOW DID THE STREET ARTIST

EDGAR MUELLER MANAGE TO MAKE

A PAINTED CLIFF ON A SIDEWALK

SO REAL AND SO DIZZY?

BY PLAYING ON OUR PERCEPTION

AND OUR IMPRESSIONS,

ARTISTS SHOW, THROUGHOUT

THE AGES, THAT THEY HAVE

THE POWER TO DISTORT REALITY.

THE MUSEUM OF ILLUSIONS

PRESENTS 50 DISCONCERTING

AND AMAZING WORKS OF ART

THAT CHALLENGE APPEARANCES.

FIRST IMPRESSION IS NOT ALWAYS

THE BEST IMPRESSION...



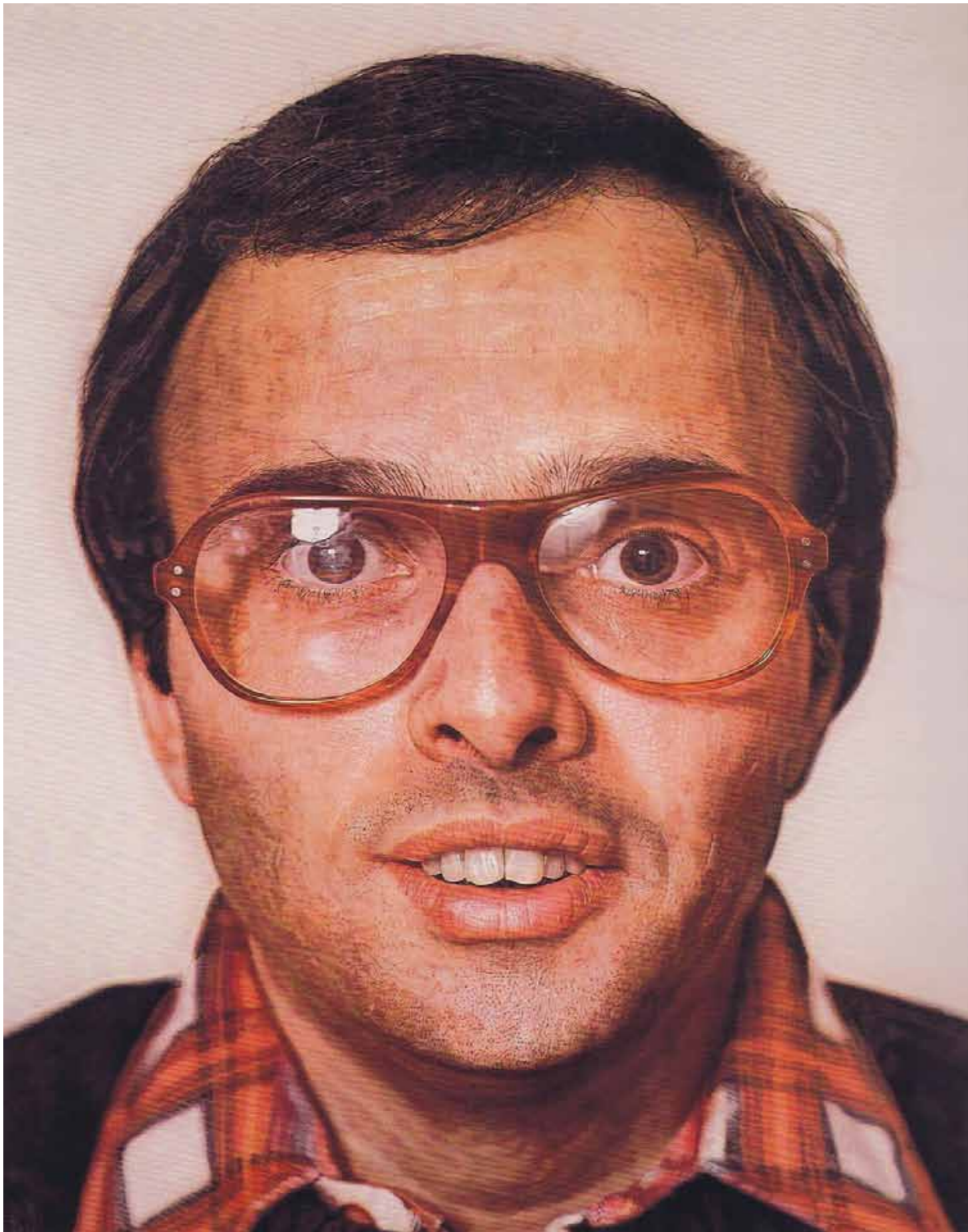
# UTAGAWA KUNIYOSHI

c. 1797 - 1861

**For many people today, the mention of Japanese prints evokes images of landscapes by Hiroshige or the famous Great Wave by Hokusai. But the playful nature brought to this art form by some of the masters like Utagawa Kuniyoshi remains less well known. Their ingenious works allowed these creators to demonstrate their brilliance in sometimes surprising ways.**

The practice of Japanese print-making began at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century in Edo (Tokyo) and aimed at depicting the everyday life of the prosperous middle class, including kabuki theater, sumo, feminine beauty and libertine pleasures. Using woodcut images, the prints were easily reproduced and distributed, at first serving as publicity posters for public entertainments and luxury products. At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the rise of landscape subjects helped establish the technique as an art form in its own right. The attempt to capture fleeting moments, the play of light and colors and the boldness of the graphic effects and compositions captivated western artists. Until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Japanese frequently used the prints as packing for china being shipped to Europe, which, at the time, was experiencing a craze for Japanese-style art. Western art lovers fell under the charm of these colored images that were exhibited at international fairs and later in shops selling fashionable “exotic” objects. The Impressionists found inspiration in these works: Van Gogh worked at copying them, and Monet built up his own collection. The result was that the thousands of prints circulating in Europe and the United States became considered real works of art. And yet, originally, these Japanese prints were simply designed as eye-catching images designed to attract one’s attention. They were often created especially for children, for rebus (picture-riddles), syllabaries, card games, shadow puppets, magic lanterns, kites or cut-out clothes for dolls. The prints also made use of optical illusions in the form of “double images,” like reversible grotesque heads, anamorphic art or hidden satiric images. Utagawa Kuniyoshi demonstrated an incredible graphic inventiveness in his composition of *A Young Woman Who Looks Like an Old Lady*, using a combination of human bodies and various objects cleverly intertwined to create the face, including sickles for eyebrows. The hands are made of a nude body whose legs become fingers.





# CHUCK CLOSE

1940 -

**For more than forty years, Chuck Close has only painted faces, photographed faces to be more precise. What he tirelessly explores is the gap between reality and its representation. Close's gigantic canvases demonstrate that an image is always something fabricated.**

In 1967, Chuck Close began his first series of portraits. In the beginning, he worked in black and white from ID photos. As an artist, he doesn't see himself in a pictorial tradition, in which a portrait is designed to reveal the soul of its model. His project is completely different: the image of these faces with neutral expressions is the object of a quasi-scientific experiment. The choice of working in black and white as well as the immense scale of the paintings work against any effect of illusion or truth. The details of his 1968 *Self-Portrait* are rendered with a disconcerting perfection. However, the blurriness of the contours of the face indicates that the artist has scrupulously respected the constraints of photography. His—as well as the viewer's—vision corresponds exactly to that of the camera, including its weaknesses. Technique is of primary importance, and what's new in his work is the treatment of the image. The painted portrait reveals that photographic realism is only an illusion.

Using the same subject, Close varies the technical parameters employed in his works. Like other Hyperrealists, he has experimented with the projection of slides onto the canvas and airbrush painting. But, in the end, he prefers mural painting and brushwork: first, he traces a grid on the photograph and then transfers the image onto the enlarged version on the canvas, square by square. In a sort of premonition of the future, the artist has, for years, been creating digital images made up of millions of pixels.

When, in 1971, Close introduced color into his works, there again, he carried out various experiments. He didn't create his colors in the traditional manner by mixing different pigments on a palette. Instead, he only used the three primary colors, which he applied one by one, as if he were superimposing three monochrome paintings on top of each other: one blue, one red and one yellow. He thus imitated the process of the printing of color photographs. He has also made portraits using stickers or the application of his own fingerprints. In his *Self-Portrait* of 2004, the squares of the grid are filled with geometric forms (like rings, dots or diamonds) which reinforce the abstract aspect of the work. That is, in fact, where the impact of his work comes from: the representation seems to collapse as soon as its fabrication is revealed. Seen from afar, the work genuinely looks like a hypnotically realistic face, but the closer the viewer comes, the more the subject seems to disappear. And right in front of the canvas, there doesn't seem to be anything left but an abstract mosaic of small brushstrokes, nothing, in fact, but paint.

**Chuck Close, *Mark*, 1979**

# BRIDGET RILEY

1931 -

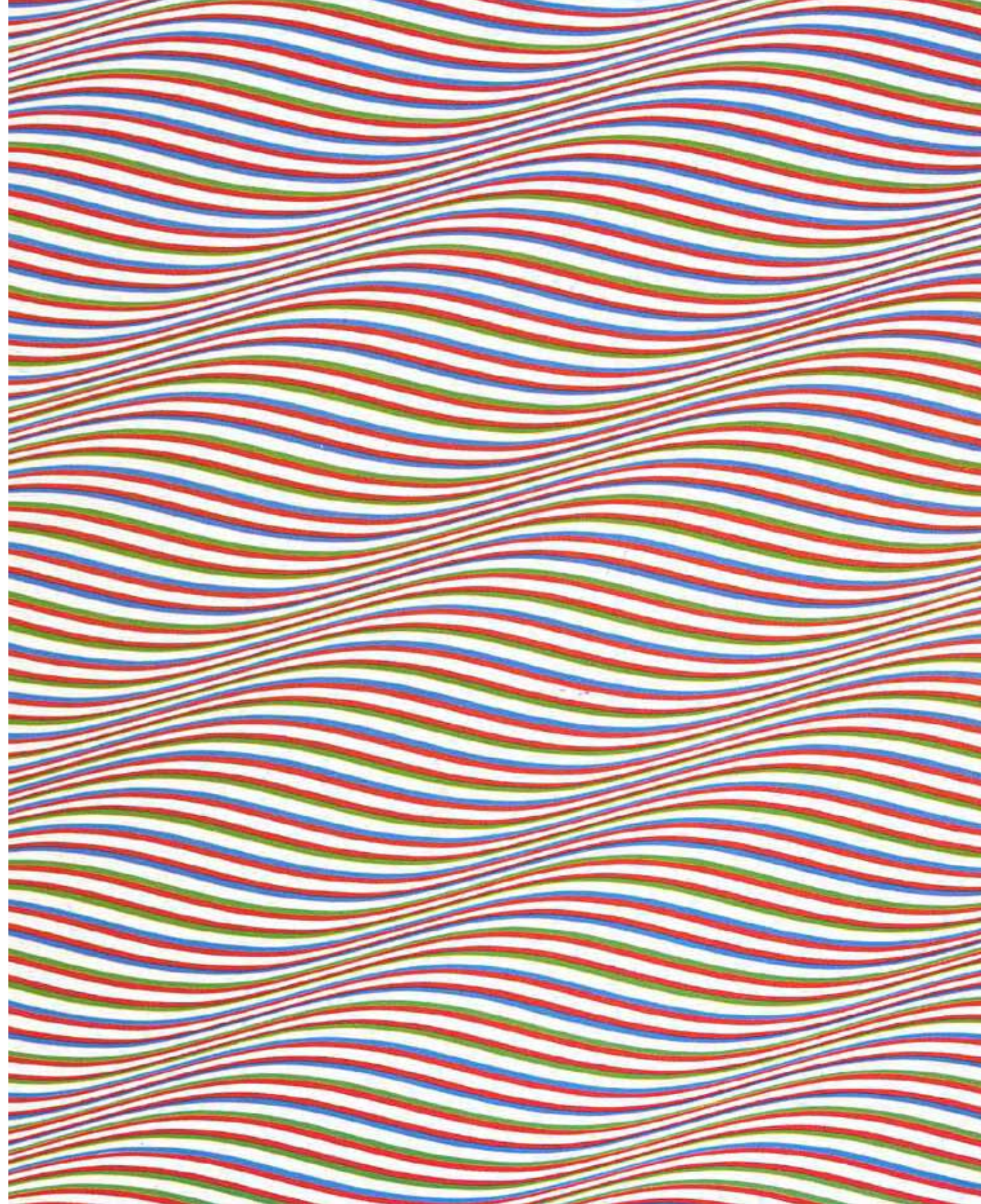
**Bridget Riley is often associated with the Op Art movement which was experiencing popular success when she entered the art scene in the 1960s. Her work, however, is much less motivated by the scientific aspects of visual perception than a passionate search for the potential that painting has to create various sensations.**

The illusion operating in the works of Bridget Riley obviously does not consist in creating a perfect resemblance of a subject, but rather in using the distinctive peculiarities of painting to create and communicate a sensation. For Riley, painting still contains many hidden possibilities that need to be explored.

Riley has been inspired by the experimentation of certain modern painters like Seurat, Monet, Matisse, Mondrian or Klee. Her first paintings were influenced by the Neo-Impressionist Georges Seurat, who based his work on the principle of the division of colors and the capacity of the human eye to synthesize adjacent colors to form the optical impression of seeing another color. Riley worked at trying to copy Seurat in order to understand his method.

Throughout her work, she has remained faithful to her personal experience with nature, being inspired by her sensitivity to phenomena like the waving of grasses in the wind, the reflections of sunlight on water or the metamorphosis of cloud formations in a changing sky. From that starting point, Riley works methodically with pure and simple painting techniques and progresses along with her sensory discoveries. Her many sketches on paper are fundamental steps, which allow her to integrate shapes and colors by means of repetitions and changes in the scale of the work. Riley began working in black and white before later introducing color into her paintings. She explores all the potential of each element before adding a new one. The simplicity of the methods employed is balanced by the complexity of the visual effects obtained: luminescent vibrations, feelings of depth or impressions of movement.

Since 1961, Riley has employed assistants whom she asks to paint in a neutral and precise manner. That way, she can concentrate on making an objective judgment of her works as their very first viewer. Her paintings, in fact, need to be contemplated by the viewer, whose vision becomes the final step in the creative process. After an initial hallucinatory effect, new images appear which only exist when the painting is looked at from a certain distance, during a fleeting moment of the attention: a certain effect of light, a peculiar shape or a looming movement, totally inexistent outside one's ephemeral relation with these unusual works.



# GIUSEPPE ARCIMBOLDO

1527- 1593

**Whether caricatures or allegories, the faces created by Arcimboldo are a cross between portraits and still lifes, which make constant demands on the viewer's eye. These paintings bring together the tastes and preoccupations that marked the end of the Renaissance.**

Giuseppe Arcimboldo started to become known when, in association with his father, he painted "cartoons" (or designs) for stained-glass windows in Italy. In 1562, called into the service of Ferdinand I of Habsburg, the young Milanese painter went to Vienna and later to Prague, where he became the official portrait artist of the royal family. There he attained fame and fortune. In 1563 and 1566 he presented the Habsburgs with innovative portraits: a series known as *The Four Seasons* and another known as *The Four Elements*. These paintings represent heads composed of juxtaposed fruits and vegetables as well as animals and other objects. Hidden behind the amusing parody is a political dimension: these richly decorated faces symbolize the diversity of the universe ruled over by the Habsburg dynasty. And the strangely personified portraits reflect the tastes of the era. Playful, entertaining and bizarre at the same time, they could easily find their place in the royal cabinet of curiosities.

Beyond their simply odd and humorous aspect, Arcimboldo's "puzzles" echo the preoccupations of their day. It was, in fact, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century that Copernicus turned the world upside down when he destroyed the geocentric view of the universe that had put man at the center of all things. The profoundly humanist vision of the Polish astronomer created great uncertainties and met with skepticism. Some artists, troubled by this revelation, expressed their doubts through a deformed or fantasy vision of the real that became known as Mannerism. One of its representatives, Arcimboldo used illusion in his art to help illustrate this new and still uncertain world. His use of artifice thus becomes a method of expressing the illusion of this new world that seemed capable of collapsing at any moment.

Famous in his own day, Arcimboldo fell into oblivion after his death. It was the Surrealists, like Salvador Dali, who finally rediscovered his work in the 1930s. They recognized, in this master of collage and illusion, a precursor of their own work.



**Giuseppe Arcimboldo, *Summer*, 1563; *The Four Seasons*, 1593; *Vertunno Rodolfo II*, 1590; *The Greengrocer*, 1590**



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