

Optical Impact

OPTICAL ART, OR OP ART, developed as a segment of geometric abstraction in the mid-20th century. Focusing primarily on perception and visual phenomena, Op Art images were intended to startle the viewer and provoke visual confusion. Paintings generally employ hard-edge line, chromatic relationships, tonal contrast, and figure/ground ambiguity to create optical illusions of movement and shifting spatial depth. Patterns, shapes, and forms appear to simultaneously come forward or recede, and are not easily reconciled by the eye. The viewer becomes an interactive participant, acutely aware of the act of seeing through noticeable visual sensations such as pulsating, vibrating, or difficulty focusing. Op Art compositions became popular with graphic and fashion designers in the 1960s and 1970s, and led to further experimentation with optical illusions in media such as television and video. Paintings by Richard Anuszkiewicz, Karl Benjamin, Peter Sedgley, and Victor Vasarely were included in the New York Museum of Modern Art's seminal 1965 exhibition *The Responsive Eye*, which was instrumental in bringing the work of Op Art to the attention of the broader public.