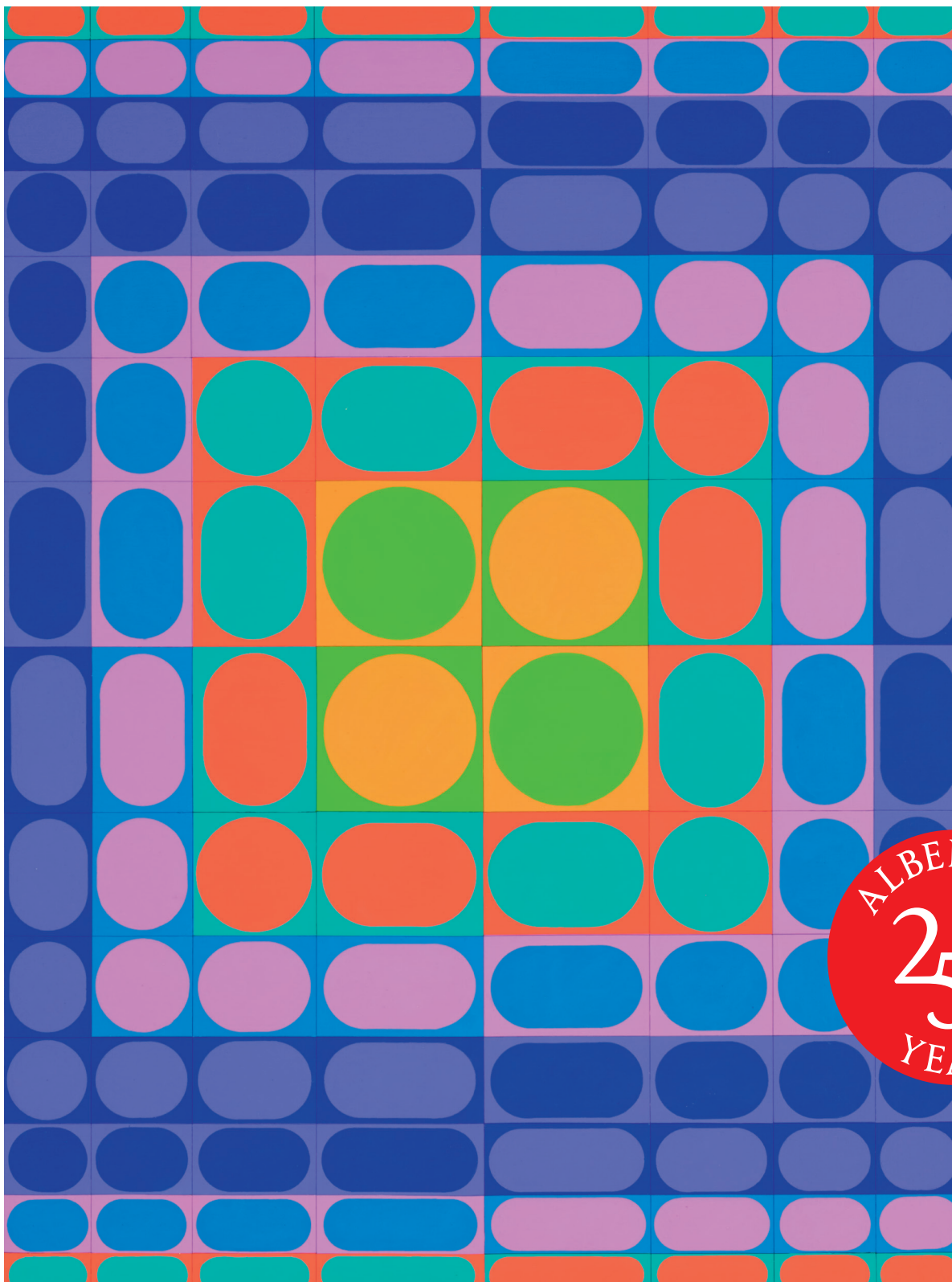


Vasarely & Adrian

26.6.2026 TO 8.11.2026

ALBERTINA modern



Exhibition Facts

Duration	26. June to 8. November 2026
Venue	ALBERTINA MODERN
Curator	Constanze Malissa
Exhibits	72
Contact	Albertinaplatz 1 1010 Vienna T +43 (0)1 534 83 0 presse@albertina.at www.albertina.at
Opening Hours	ALBERTINA MODERN Karlsplatz 5 1010 Vienna Daily 10 a.m. – 6 p.m.
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Vasarely & Adrian

Dynamic Grids

Op Art works are designed to set viewers' eyes in motion—it is an art style that seeks to challenge the sense of sight in a very special way, calling for no prior knowledge, and being spontaneously experienceable. It established itself in America and Europe in the mid-1960s. Fascinated by the physical laws of light and optics, an entire generation of artists devoted themselves to the study of optical phenomena and the fundamentals of perception. While Op Art has fallen somewhat into obscurity over the decades, it remains a revolutionary art born from a revolutionary era.

It was from the 1950s that Victor Vasarely and Marc Adrian put our vision to the test with optical effects. The bold colors of Vasarely's strictly geometric patterns, as well as the stark contrasts of his black-and-white paintings continue to inform the aesthetics of painting and design today. The depiction of movement in art is also the central subject matter of Marc Adrian, nearly a quarter-century younger than Vasarely. Throughout his life, he kept exploring the boundaries of the depictable, in respect of both content and the materiality of his works. Also, he made significant contributions to international avant-garde art movements such as the Düsseldorf-based ZERO group, the European and South American New Tendencies, and the early Italian computer art movement Arte programmata. Adrian's multiform body of work, which has yet to be fully appreciated and still holds much to discover, is nothing short of an expression of a new visuality. In 1965, he was the only Austrian to participate, alongside Vasarely and numerous other artists, in the trailblazing Op Art exhibition *The Responsive Eye* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, where he garnered international attention.

More than 60 years later, the ALBERTINA now dedicates an exhibition to these two grand masters of Op Art, presenting their works side by side and bringing them into direct dialogue with one another. What becomes clear is that either artist's multifarious oeuvre still is as impressive and relevant today as it ever was.

Exhibition Texts

Leaping Perspectives– Pictures as Gaze Traps

In the early 1950s, the concept of movement and its representation through optical phenomena was increasingly gaining ground in art. Marc Adrian's first exploration of this visual theme led him to his *Leaping Perspectives*, a series of about 15 abstract-geometric works created between 1951 and 1955 that focus on the effect of an ambivalent, "switching" spatial perspective.

In the early 1950s, Victor Vasarely worked on a series of works with optical phenomena in black and white. For Adrian's *Leaping Perspectives*, these early Op Art works certainly were inspiring; even more important, though, was his engagement with the work of former Bauhaus master Josef Albers, whose series *Homage to the Square* was created from 1950. In it, Albers explores the spatial effect of color tones in precisely measured-out constellations of nested squares with predefined relative sizes. Unlike Albers with his sensitive use of color and proportion and their interaction, the decisive factors in Adrian's *Leaping Perspectives* are the signal effect and the perspectival pull into the depth of space: What he wants is a revolutionary breakthrough that shatters settled perceptual habits.

In the context of Op Art at large, the *Leaping Perspectives* hold an independent position because of how Adrian uses intense and aggressive color contrasts to articulate the two-dimensional optical phenomenon as an ambivalent spatial structure.

Behind-Glass Montages I: Prismatic Breaking of Visual Habits

To develop a new visual idiom, Marc Adrian created assemblages that he named behind-glass montages. The principle consists in using ribbed or reeded industrial glass to produce optical shifting effects. A montaged or painted pictorial composition is mounted at a specific distance behind a glass pane. The light being refracted through the glass creates an impression of movement in the eyes of viewers as they walk past the picture. The idea of viewer activation thus is integral to the very conception of these works. By changing position, the various visual possibilities that lie hidden within the object can be "looked into" and experienced. What emerges is a "moving image"—as optical perception changes with the viewing angle. The term "moving image" of course originally comes from cinematography and is a direct reference to Adrian's parallel practice as an avant-garde filmmaker: the sequential transformation of the image seen in walking past in front of it corresponds to the sequence of individual frames that make up a film strip.

In his strictly geometrical *Q* series, created in the 1960s, Adrian radicalizes this phasing of the visual experience in a particularly striking way by arranging only precisely gridded squares in blue, red, and black behind the glass to create maximum visual oscillation.

Behind-Glass Montages II: From Grid to Visage

Starting in the 1950s, Marc Adrian mostly worked with simple geometric shapes that can classify as concrete art. Ten years later, he started incorporating letters and words into his pictorial objects—enter visual poetry. Text is not information here but visual material. In the 1970s, he created portraits that render, with utmost reduction, the subjects' physiognomic characteristics. As with his *Leaping Perspectives*, he explored in watercolor portrait series just how much visual information is actually needed to identify a face as such. Bright watercolor and gouache hues inform pop-style-inspired works in which hair, eyes, and mouths are broken down into almost stencil-like contrasting geometries. Following stays in America and influenced by Pop Art, this garish coloration replaced the previously cool subdued color scheme of his behind-glass montages. This also was the time when Adrian moved away from object montages and started mounting more and more paintings on canvas behind industrial glass.

As of the late 1950s, Vasarely also tried his hand at early forms of behind-glass montages: however, he only put screen prints behind the glass—which makes his works from this group decidedly inferior to Adrian's.

Pictures in Movement

In principle, Victor Vasarely and Marc Adrian pursued the same idea: using grid structures and basic geometric shapes as artistic means to irritate perception. Both artists viewed the human eye and brain as their actual “canvas.” Their works are not static but reveal their appeal only through the act of seeing. The difference lies in the material and dimensionality.

In the 1970s, Vasarely perfected his Vega series: *Novega* and *Tri-Vega* simulate the curvature of space within two dimensionality. The squares of the composition's strict grid are inscribed with shaded colored circles. Compressing and inflating the shapes, Vasarely creates the impression of spherical bodies that sculpturally stand out from the surface or sink back into it.

Marc Adrian took it one step further: he mounted gridded painted surfaces behind reeded glass. This enables ever new light refraction effects, depending on the viewing angle. *Aufbruch ins Innere* (Setting Out for the Inside) demonstrates masterly decentering: Behind patterned glass, there is a blur of colorful geometric shapes. If you move just a few centimeters, the shimmering colors dynamically rearrange. The image changes in real time. In the triptych *Hoffnung der Welt* (Hope of the World), Adrian combined coincidence and seriality. The compositions appear luminous and pulsating through the patterned glass.

While Vasarely simulated three-dimensionality with painterly illusionism, Adrian created it in reality through the physical interplay of light, glass, and movement.

Biografies

Victor Vasarely (1906–1997)

Victor Vasarely was born on April 9, 1906, in Pécs, Hungary.

After a brief stint at medical school, he enrolled in 1929 at the Műhely (“workshop”) art school in Budapest, which followed the Bauhaus tradition. He focused on graphic design, typography, and constructive design. In 1930, he moved to Paris, working for advertising agencies as a graphic designer. In the 1940s, Vasarely developed abstract compositions based on geometric forms and contrasts. He explored the principles of optical illusion and worked with grids and spatial effects.

In 1955, on the occasion of the exhibition *Le Mouvement* in Paris, he published his programmatic *Yellow Manifesto*, in which he laid down the foundations of Op Art and kinetic art. He combined squares, circles, and color contrasts into mathematically constructed visual systems. From that time on, his works have had formative influence on art, design, and architecture.

International fame came to Vasarely in the 1960s. The Museum of Modern Art in New York showcased his works in the exhibition *The Responsive Eye* in 1965. Picture series like *Vega* create an illusion of movement and spatial depth.

As of the 1970s, he went on to realize large-scale projects for facades, buildings, and public spaces. For the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich, the artist designed an official poster with clear-cut color shapes and optical effects. In the same year, he modernized the logo of carmaker Renault with its distinctive diamond shape. The sign became a well-known example of art connecting with industrial design. In 1976, the Fondation Vasarely was opened in Aix-en-Provence, France, bringing together under its roof art, architecture, and urban planning. Vasarely championed the integration of geometric art into everyday life.

On March 15, 1997, Vasarely died in Paris.

Marc Adrian (1930–2008)

Marc Adrian was born in Vienna on December 4, 1930.

From 1950 to 1954, he studied sculpture at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts under Fritz Wotruba, who sparked Adrian's interest in the artistic exploration of movement. Extensive study trips took him to Italy and France, particularly to Paris, where he met, for example, Ossip Zadkine.

In 1954, Adrian joined the Wiener Gruppe (Vienna Group). He set out to explore perception, movement, and geometric pictorial structures. This led him to create *Leaping Perspectives*—compositions of geometric forms which, depending on viewing angle, seem to protrude from the picture or recede into the background. Shortly thereafter, Adrian developed his behind-glass montages—assemblages behind patterned glass which produced optical effects when viewed from changing perspectives.

He was the only Austrian artist to participate in the 1965 exhibition *The Responsive Eye* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. In this groundbreaking show, his works were on view alongside those of international luminaries of the then-emerging Op Art, such as Victor Vasarely, Josef Albers, and Bridget Riley.

In the 1970s, Adrian worked with concrete poetry, computer-generated texts, and experimental film, combining perception research with cybernetics and media art.

From 1970 to 1973, he also taught painting and aesthetic theory at the University of Visual Fine Arts in Hamburg, Germany.

The depiction of movement in visual art was his central subject of exploration which he discovered for himself early on and which stayed with him throughout his lifetime. Besides further developing his *Leaping Perspectives*, behind-glass montages, computer imagery, and mobiles, he also created over 30 films. Peter Weibel has, not incorrectly, called him the “father of Austrian media art.”

On February 5, 2008, Marc Adrian died in Vienna.