British Stripe Painter Harry MC Reflects on Bridget Riley's 'Learning to See' at Turner Contemporary

Monday 24 November, 2025

British abstract painter Harry MC, known for his large-scale stripe paintings, travelled to Margate this weekend for the opening of Bridget Riley's major new exhibition, "Learning to See," at Turner Contemporary. The show brings together six decades of optical experimentation, placing Riley's iconic bands and curves against the vast light of the North Kent coast.

For Harry, whose work maps rhythm, structure and colour through the discipline of stripes, the visit formed part of his ongoing World of Stripes project, which documents stripe paintings, artists who paint stripes, and architectural or optical experiences connected to linear abstraction.

"Standing in front of Riley's paintings, one is reminded that perception is active," observes Harry. "Your eyes don't receive the stripes; they negotiate them. The geometry is fixed, but everything you feel keeps shifting."

Turner Contemporary, itself named after the artist J.M.W. Turner, celebrates its connection to British light during Turner's 250th anniversary year. Outside the gallery, Antony Gormley's cast-iron figure "Another Time" stood half-submerged on Fulsam Rock during low tide—a quiet, uncanny counterpoint to Riley's controlled visual intensity. Tracey Emin's studio complex, only a short walk from the gallery, adds to the concentration of contemporary art energy that encompasses Margate.

Inside, the exhibition presents Riley's vertical bands, diagonals, waves and curves in a sequence that rewards slow looking. Harry photographed the galleries for reference, capturing how visitors of all ages respond physically to the rhythm of the works—leaning in, stepping back, tilting their heads to feel the pull of the compositions.

"For stripe painters, Riley's legacy is not just optical," Harry notes. "It's about discipline. She proves that a strict visual grammar doesn't close things down, it opens them up. There is endless variation within limits."

Harry's recent fieldwork has included the reopened rooms of Van Gogh's hospital at Saint-Rémy-de-Provence and the work of Sean Scully at the Estorick Collection in London. These trips formed part of the research for his World of Stripes project, where he investigates how colour behaves across different geographies and contexts, turning travel into structured studio work.

Harry MC's large-scale stripe paintings are currently attracting international collectors through his expanding World of Stripes platform. His Bath studio, situated steps from Jane Austen's former home and close to Thomas Gainsborough's historic studio continues the city's long tradition of artists working with British light, now refracted through a contemporary geometric lens.

"Learning to See" runs at Turner Contemporary, Margate, until 4 May 2026.

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