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Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

Vasarely and Adrian - Dynamic Grids

Albertina Modern, 27.06.2026 [ENA]

The ALBERTINA MODERN's exhibition Vasarely & Adrian. Dynamic Grids is a rigorously curated and visually exhilarating encounter between two major pioneers of Op Art and media art, Victor Vasarely and Marc Adrian, whose works here reveal an enduring, almost prophetic relevance for our contemporary visual culture. Far from being a mere historical pairing, the show stages a genuine dialogue of both artists.

It focuses on artists' explorations of perception, motion and structure illuminate one another—inviting visitors to reflect on how images move, flicker and destabilize our ways of seeing. The exhibition's central premise is deceptively simple: to place Vasarely and Adrian side by side and track the ways their "dynamic grids" and optical systems push perception to its limits. In practice, this generates a complex historical and conceptual narrative. Vasarely's multilayered geometric fields, with their vibrating contrasts and illusionistic depths, are presented as precursors to the algorithmic aesthetics of today's digital interfaces, video games and data visualizations.

Adrian's work, meanwhile, extends Op Art into the terrain of media art, exploring movement not only as an implied optical effect but as a phenomenological experience anchored in the viewer's bodily presence. What emerges is an exhibition that refuses to isolate the artists as parallel monoliths. Instead, it invites us to see correspondences, divergences and reciprocal intensifications. Patterns ripple and colors snap across the galleries, while the artists' shared commitment to "activating" the spectator becomes the decisive thread that ties the show together. The visitor is not a passive observer, but a participant whose motion and attention complete the works.

One of the most compelling aspects of the exhibition is its careful reconstruction of Marc Adrian's artistic trajectory. Curator Constanze Malissa assembles around seventy works that chart his development from the "Sprungbilder" of the 1950s—images that already play with flicker, interruption and visual instability—through to his later hinter glass malerei and Hinterglassmontagen, where the dialogue between painting and material intervention reaches a sophisticated climax.

In these behind-glass paintings Adrian places industrially produced ribbed glass in front of his painted constructions, creating works in which perception is permanently unsettled: what we see shifts as we move, and the image becomes inseparable from the viewer's trajectory through space. Here, Adrian demonstrates an acute awareness of the fact that no image exists in isolation; it is always mediated by surfaces, by

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technologies, and by the viewer's own embodied position. That he was long regarded—by figures such as Peter Weibel—as a “father of media art” feels entirely justified in this context.

Vasarely's presence in the exhibition is anchored by key works drawn from the Essl and Batliner collections, each underscoring the breadth of his formal imagination. Faces composed of geometric shapes, expanses of pulsating grids, and fields of chromatic tension testify to an artist who understood abstraction not as withdrawal from reality, but as an intensified engagement with the mechanics of visual experience.

Seen against Adrian's experiments, Vasarely's works acquire renewed sharpness. Their strict geometry and powerful color schemes, which once appeared as quintessential hallmarks of 1960s Op Art, now read as anticipations of contemporary screen-based aesthetics. Pixelation, modularity, and systemic variation—features now embedded in digital culture—are here rendered through analogue means, reminding us that the logic of the grid and the seduction of optical illusion long predate the computer.

Malissa's curatorial design is chronologically structured yet conceptually elastic, allowing visitors to grasp the historical development of Adrian's oeuvre while also following thematic threads across both artists' work. The galleries are arranged so that correspondences in form—such as flickering linear patterns, modular color blocks, or spatially ambiguous figures—can be experienced as visual conversations rather than mere juxtapositions.

Importantly, the exhibition does not shy away from being “visually demanding”. The intensity of pattern, the constant invitation to move and re-focus, and the subtle strain placed on the eye constitute part of its intellectual proposition: to make us aware of the labor of looking, and of the ways our perception can be manipulated, delighted, or destabilized by art. Yet this challenge is offset by an undeniable sensory pleasure. The show is chromatically refreshing, at times almost festive, and its dense rhythm of images refuses any simple binary between rigor and enjoyment.

In historical terms, Vasarely & Adrian. Dynamic Grids succeeds in situating both artists as key figures in the story of Op Art while simultaneously opening that story onto the broader field of media and digital aesthetics. Adrian's role as the only Austrian participant in MoMA's 1965 The Responsive Eye exhibition gains new resonance when his later hinter glass malerei is seen as an early articulation of questions that would eventually dominate media art: how images move, how surfaces mediate, and how viewers are implicated.

Contemporaneously, the exhibition feels startlingly current. In an age saturated with screens, filters and algorithmically generated visuals, Vasarely and Adrian remind us that visual irritation can be more than spectacle; it can be a way of making the conditions of perception visible to us again. The ALBERTINA

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MODERN thus offers not only a celebration of two “grand masters” of optical illusion, but also a timely reflection on how art can help us navigate the increasingly complex visual systems that structure our daily lives.

This makes Vasarely & Adrian. Dynamic Grids a vital destination for anyone interested in the intersection of art history, technology and visual culture.

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