

About the Artwork

**When We Were Young: Rethinking Abstraction
from the University at Albany Art Collections
(1967-present)**

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FIRST FLOOR



Chryssa [Vardea Chryssa Mavromichali] (1933–2013, American, b. Greece)
Gates to Times Square (Light Blue and Gray), 1978

Color screenprint on paper
Gift of Mrs. Ivan Radin

Deviating from the color of the artist's initial source material—a fragmented letter form appropriated from a neon sign in Times Square—the light-blue color of the central icon here suggests sky, and the gray color of the background, paired with the deckle-edged, coarsely textured paper, suggests stone. These allusions to natural elements were common in Chryssa's early days with the Coentities Slip artist group in Lower Manhattan. Looking out at the East River from their painting and sculpture studios, Chryssa and fellow Slip artists like Agnes Martin often sought to capture both the tranquility and sublimity of nature, in contrast to their contemporary Abstract Expressionist counterparts. However, this screenprint is not completely divorced from its Gotham roots; the light-gray field sparkles like the Times Square sidewalks, which glittered with glass particles (today replaced with silicon carbide) embedded in the cement.



Chryssa [Vardea Chryssa Mavromichali] (1933–2013, American, b. Greece)
Gates to Times Square (Blue and Beige), 1978

Color screenprint on paper
Gift of Mrs. Ivan Radin

In this work Chryssa capitalizes on the phenomenon of simultaneous contrast, in which the viewer's perception of a color is altered by the colors placed next to it. What is in fact a uniform beige ground appears lighter in the left half of the composition, where it is overlapped by a dark-blue figure, than it does in the right half of the composition, overlapped by a lighter blue figure. The work reinforces Josef Albers's claim that we do not see any true colors; rather, our perception of any color is influenced by the colors that surround it. The blue lines work in concert to form a central symmetrical figure, which appears to be a totem or primitive sculpture and recalls the Cycladic figures (c. 2500 BCE) from Chryssa's native Greece that influenced some of her earlier work, while simultaneously echoing the forms and icons of neon signs in Times Square.



Chryssa [Vardea Chryssa Mavromichali] (1933–2013, American, b. Greece)
Gates to Times Square (Shades of Blue), 1978

Color screenprint on paper
Gift of Mrs. Ivan Radin

Chryssa used the same screens to print this work as she did for *Gates to Times Square (Red, Fuchsia, Blue)*, thus maintaining the same shapes and compositional structure and only changing the colors. That is, all but one color: the dark-blue lines on the right are printed in the exact shade of blue as their counterparts in *Red, Fuchsia, Blue*. Repeating the identical form and maintaining one color offers something like the control of a scientific experiment and allows the artist to experiment with variable color interactions. In this case, the value of the field behind the blue lines is much darker, making them appear lighter than in *Red, Fuchsia, Blue*. At the same time, these two shades of blue are much closer in value than the relatively higher contrasting blues on the left. Thus the separation between figure and ground on the left becomes easier to read, apprehended in a moment.

Chryssa [Vardea Chryssa Mavromichali] (1933–2013, American, b. Greece)
Gates to Times Square (Red, Fuchsia, Blue), 1978
Color screenprint on paper
Gift of Mrs. Ivan Radin

One is initially struck by the stark contrast between the highly saturated red and blue hues in this work. While each color is assigned to the left and right sides of the composition, respectively, there are moments along their border when the colors penetrate and surround each other. Closer inspection reveals more subtle color relationships in each half. The tangle of red lines—based on layered fragments of Times Square signs—takes on an orange tint compared to the fuchsia ground behind them. But both colors appear red, losing their respective orange and magenta hues when they are directly juxtaposed to the adjacent blue territory. Viewers can compare the intense color effects in this work to *Gates to Times Square (Shades of Blue)*, in which Chryssa repeated the exact shapes and compositional structure but switched to a subtle monochromatic blue color scheme.



Cameron Martin (b. 1970, American)
Untitled, 2017
Permanent marker on paper
Gift of the artist

In this untitled drawing from his “Reticulations” series, Cameron Martin uses tight linear patterns (sometimes twenty-five or so lines per inch for each layer of color) to create surfaces that appear to vibrate and shift over time. When conflicting sets of patterns interface, seams or scars form and rupture the stability of the surface. In all works from this series Martin uses a single motif—the serial repetition of straight lines drawn either vertically or slightly diagonally with a straight edge and a fine point marker. With a focus on perceptual movement, Martin’s drawings force an inevitable comparison to Op Art, but their scale, luminosity, and hyper-intense color reflect the contemporary world of portable screens, tablets, and smart phones. At a distance, this drawing takes on a green tint as the pure yellow and blue lines blend as the viewer experiences them, a phenomenon called “optical mixture.”



Marietta Hoferer (b. 1962, German, New York-based)
S6, 2012
Graphite and tape on paper
Gift of the artist

Since the 1990s, Marietta Hoferer has been incorporating a mundane, non-art material in her drawings: packing tape. While the material is unassuming, the results are stunningly exquisite. Over a delicately drawn graphite grid that recalls the work of Agnes Martin, Hoferer applies quarter-inch square bits of strapping tape into a geometric pattern, carefully aligning the tape’s filaments with the vertical lines of the grid. The work is symmetrical both vertically and horizontally as Hoferer repeats the same diamond-shaped pattern eight times. Airy and spacious, yet systematic and rigorous, the composition invites far-ranging associations, from the open quality of lace to the geometry of needlepoint or 8-bit video games. The surface scintillates as the viewer walks up to the work: the plastic tape pieces reflect different aspects of the environment—and even the viewer’s body—becoming lighter or darker than the paper at different moments.





Donald Judd (1928–1994, American)

Untitled, 1978

Sixteen etchings on paper

Gift of Martin Shafiroff

Donald Judd was one of the leaders of Minimalism, a style that emerged in New York in the 1960s characterized by serial repetition of primary geometric forms, industrial materials, and an attunement to sculpture's interaction with the gallery space. In contrast to the subjective mark-making of the Abstract Expressionist artists of the previous two decades, Minimalists removed any traces of the artist's hand and often had their works fabricated in factories.

Judd's sixteen untitled etchings read as schematic drawings for his sculptures. In fact, the one-hundred mill aluminum boxes installed at the artist's foundation in Marfa, Texas share a similar design with the boxes in these prints. The repetition of the same primary box structure with changing interior planes calls for viewers to slow down and become sensitive to the specific relationships that emerge in each iteration.

Drawn in isometric perspective, receding parallel lines remain parallel in these etchings, rather than converge, as in one-point perspective. While other artists in this exhibition (notably Josef Albers, Luis Molinari-Flores, and Shozo Nagano) employ this perspectival system to create optical illusions, Judd does so to distance his work from a fine art tradition and ally his art instead with architectural and engineering plans, in which isometric drawings are commonly used.



Eduardo Paolozzi (1924–2005, British)

Selected pages from the portfolio *General Dynamic F.U.N.*, 1965–1970

Portfolio of thirty-four photolithographs and sixteen screenprints

Gift of Nicolo Pignatelli



Similar remarks apply to Uranium 235, photolithograph

Notes on the organisation of Paradise, screenprint

Notes on the organisation of Paradise, screenprint on plastic

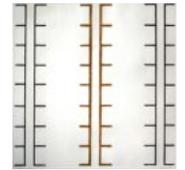
Becoming Is Meaning Like Nothing Is Going, photolithograph



Eduardo Paolozzi's prints defiantly merge popular culture and modern abstraction. Paolozzi, whose work was a forerunner to Pop Art and who was a participant in the 1956 exhibit *This Is Tomorrow* (Whitechapel Art Gallery, London), often credited as the first Pop Art exhibition, drew from popular sources verboten in the realms of fine art and high modern abstraction of his day. His colorful portfolio *General Dynamic F.U.N.*, from which these abstract prints were selected, also includes an eclectic mix of imagery appropriated from advertisements, as well as pictures of famous actresses and bodybuilders. In these four pieces, Paolozzi investigates the geometry of a machine aesthetic and modern urban architecture. Some of the titles parody the utopian idealism of pre-World War II modern architects and artists. Similar to Andy Warhol's screenprints, the purposeful messiness and slight misregistration of some of Paolozzi's prints evoke the aesthetic of cheap commercial printing typically used for mass production of pop culture.



Kim Lim (1937–1997, British, b. China)
Ladder Series I, 1972
Etching on paper
Gift of Steven and Bernice Sohacki



In her carved and rhythmic wooden sculptures of the 1960–1970s, Kim Lim evoked both Eastern spirituality and the forms of Constantin Brancusi, ideas she further explored in her *Ladder Series* of etchings. In this work, three ladders have been cut in half vertically and their outer rails flipped to the inside. The rhythmic pattering of the rungs is firmly balanced through mathematical ratios: each rung measures half the height of the space to the next rung; thus if each ladder were re-united, its negative spaces would form perfect squares. As the eye moves back and forth between the ladder sets, the empty space between them begins to exude a powerful presence, similar to voids in Daoist and Chan (Zen) ink painting. The regularity, geometric precision, and seriality of her forms recall the Minimalist sculptures of Donald Judd, in particular his famous “stacks”, but Lim’s organic mark-making and earthy ink tones—ochre and warm blacks—hearken back to Brancusi’s wood carvings.

Gene Davis (1920–1985, American)
Albatross, 1973
Lithograph on paper
Purchase of the Selection Committee, 1974



Along with his fellow Washington Color Painters in the U.S. capital in the late 1950s through the 1960s, Gene Davis was committed to hard-edge geometric form, pattern, and what critic Clement Greenberg called a “post-painterly” absence of mark-making. Throughout his oeuvre, Davis explored the possibilities of the repeated vertical stripe. In this lithograph, Davis’s calculated use of color harmonies—analogous colors close to one another on the color wheel (e.g., blue and green), opposite or complementary colors, and even monochrome passages of blue or yellow—recalls Albers’s experimentation in his *Homage to the Square* series. Each section of *Albatross* has its own meter or rhyme to it. Densely packed lines suggest quick movement, whereas open spaces create musical rests or beats. The sections can be read as stanzas, as in Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s poem *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798), to which Davis’s title seems to allude.

Max Bill (1908–1994, Swiss)
Four Equal Colors, 1975
Lithograph on paper
Gift of Thomas Scala



Designer and artist Max Bill’s interest in the “pure expression of harmonious measure and law” is seen in this square tessellation, in which each of the four colors is given an egalitarian allotment of space and each of the three triangles is repeated four times. Bill was a leading figure in Concrete art. As opposed to forms of abstract art that distort, exaggerate, or simplify from forms in the natural world, the forms of Concrete art originate solely in the mind of the artist. The pulsating color relationships exhibited among the interlocking triangles in *Four Equal Colors* recall the ideas of one of Bill’s early teachers at Bauhaus, Johannes Itten, who maintained that “form and color are one” and championed geometric shapes and spectrum colors for their simplicity and precision. The principles of Concrete art also played an important role in the development of Op Art, seen elsewhere in this exhibition.



Garo Antreasian (b. 1922, American)
Untitled, 1979
Lithograph and embossment on paper
Gift of Thom O'Connor

Since first observing several lithographs by Picasso in 1950, artist Garo Antreasian has largely devoted himself to lithography, determined not only to give the medium more prominence in the world of printmaking but also to make it rival the high status of painting. In this hard-edge work, Antreasian employs the grid, a device traditionally used by modern artists to emphasize the two-dimensional surface of painting. Ironically, however, this grid embossed into the paper possesses real depth as it rises off the surface. In contrast, the flat colored dots at intersecting points in the grid create an illusion of depth through shifts in scale: smaller dots appear distant. In addition to these innovative responses to Modernist forms, the work suggests cosmic imagery—the colored dots float like celestial bodies in the vast blackness of space. The rational structure and systematic distribution of primary colors suggest the precise clockwork of a Newtonian universe.



Luis Molinari-Flores (1929–1994, Ecuadorian)
Untitled II, 1971
Screenprint on paper
Gift of Thomas Scala

A member of the Ecuadorian artists group Vanguardia Artística Nacional (VAN), Luis Molinari-Flores rebelled with his peers against the dominant trend of *indigenismo*, which consisted of often-stereotypical depictions of idealized indigenous life or Native suffering. Instead, Grupo VAN forged a new national style informed by international abstraction and indigenous textile traditions. Engaging with Op Art in particular, Molinari-Flores here employs the optical illusion of an ambiguous Thiery figure, in which forms oscillate between appearing to project outward—like the corner of a cube entering the viewer's space—and appearing to recede behind the picture plane, as if the viewer is looking into a corner of a room. There is a discrepancy between what we see—three-dimensional forms that keep shifting their position in space—and what is actually there: a series of flat parallelograms. The shifts in value enhance the illusion by suggesting a light source in various passages, as do the corners of the composition drawn to 45-degree angles.

SECOND FLOOR

Peter Taylor (1932–2007, American)

Iberian Paths No. 3, 1975

Acrylic on canvas

Purchase of University at Albany Alumni Association from *Artists of the Mohawk Hudson Region*



In Peter Taylor's painting, a rectangular grid blazing with the color of warm hues is punctuated by blues, greens, and purples. The dazzling layout of colorful rectangles evokes a mosaic composed of innumerable tesserae. Limiting his compositional structure to a grid, Taylor's piece resonates with the geometry of other work in the exhibition, but his expressive mark-making provides a compelling foil. The artist allowed evidence of his process to show in the final work, thus enlivening the otherwise inhuman character of the grid. The viewer sees the texture of the paint, and certain passages even become palimpsests that reveal where the artist has reworked the surface. Often inspired by his travels to Cuba and Europe, the title, like many of his other pieces, recalls his journeys through Spain: Andalusia, Catalonia, Arno, and even Pamplona, where the artist had run with the bulls.

Andrew Brischler (b. 1987, American)

Fake Fuck with No Fangs, 2013

Oil, colored pencil, and pencil on linen

Gift of David Hoberman



From a distance, the vertical stripes of unmodulated color and single gradient make Andrew Brischler's painting seem right at home with the 1960s and 1970s' factureless geometric abstraction of Josef Albers and Gene Davis in this exhibition. But upon closer inspection, Brischler has intentionally sabotaged the sense of precision found in those artists' works. In the manner of a bored schoolboy scrawling graffiti on a desk, he doodles graphite lines over the painting, as well as three letter "F"s. These letters refer to the piece's enigmatic and alliterative title, which reads like a string of words generated through uncensored Freudian free association. Breaking with the clarity, rationality, and purity of earlier hard-edge abstraction, the artist has introduced unconscious, irrational, and spontaneous elements. A contemporary renegade, Brischler wittily challenges the lofty world of abstract art. In his work since this piece he has become even bolder about incorporating texts and words.

Josef Albers (1888–1976, German)

Formulation: Articulation, 1972

Folio II, folder 10 & 21

Color screenprints

Gift of Yves Istel



In these line works, Josef Albers creates spatial illusions as he revisits motifs from his 1940s *Graphic Constructions* series. As with his experiments with color, Albers was interested in the discrepancy between what actually exists on the paper and the viewer's perception; in this case, the viewer perceives a series of flat parallelograms and trapezoids as dimensional objects. Furthermore, the dimensionality of these structures constantly shifts so that at one moment it appears that a plane is thrusting toward the viewer, and the next moment it is receding. This spatial ambiguity is facilitated by Albers's use of isometric perspective, in which parallel lines, which we expect to optically converge as they recede into space, instead remain parallel. This perspectival device, common in architectural and engineering

designs, was later used by many of the artists in this exhibition, from Op Artists Shozo Nagano and Luis Molinari-Flores to Minimalist Donald Judd.



Josef Albers (1888–1976, German)
Formulation: Articulation, 1972
Folio I, folder 32
Color screenprints
Gift of Yves Istel

In this work, Albers revisits a motif he first explored in the 1940s in his series *To Monté Alban*. In 1933, when the Nazis shut down the Modernist art school The Bauhaus where he taught, Albers came to teach in the United States. From here he made several visits to Mexico in the 1930s and early 1940s, where he photographed the rectangular stepped pyramids and sacred ball courts at the Mesoamerican ceremonial site Monte Albán. The rectilinear designs of the structures resonated with Bauhaus architecture and design—pure geometric cubes and boxes, also seen in the International Style of architecture—as well as Albers’s painterly interest in geometric abstraction. Albers renders an aerial view of the pyramids and thereby generates spatial illusions common in Op Art. At times the flat surfaces appear to be platforms on the top of a stepped pyramid, but at other times seem to sink down below.



Josef Albers (1888–1976, German)
Formulation: Articulation, 1972
Folio I, Folders 23
Folio II, Folders 14, 19
Color screenprints
Gift of Yves Istel

Josef Albers held a sustained interest in pure geometric shapes and color relationships, and he maintained the utmost precision in his application of paint even when working in the United States at the time of Abstract Expressionism’s expressive mark-making. In his most famous series, *Homage to the Square*, begun in 1950 and continuing until his death in 1976, he restricted the compositions of the paintings to four semi-concentric squares in order to focus on our changing perceptions of color. The color of a middle square, for example, may appear warmer or cooler, or advance or recede spatially, depending upon the hue of its neighboring inner and outer squares. For Albers, art arises out of this “discrepancy between physical fact and psychic effect.” This particular color effect, known as simultaneous contrast, plays a key role in nearly every color work in this exhibition, especially in Chryssa’s *Gates to Times Square*.

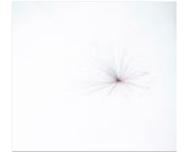


Jack Bosson (1937–2012, American)
Untitled, ca. 1966
Acrylic on canvas
Purchase of State University Student Affairs, 1972

Characteristic of hard-edge abstraction, Jack Bosson treats the surface of the painting as a single unit: fields of unmodulated color coexist on the same plane, and there are no traces of brushwork save for some underdrawing visible beneath the yellow areas. Like a Gestalt vase/face illusion, Bosson’s interlocking shapes constantly switch between figure and ground. One moment the blue field may read as a positive form, like a cliff in front of a magenta sky—and in the next moment the blue field is read as background partially

occluded by an encroaching magenta field. The composition maintains a dynamic sense of asymmetrical balance. The bulging magenta form below provides a counter to the visual weight of the dominant blue shape, and the peaking yellow shapes at the top draw the eye upward. The undulating vertical interface between blue and magenta is echoed in miniature in the contours between magenta and yellow that run horizontally across the canvas.

Richard Garrison (b. 1971, American)
Lot Walking (July 17, 2005–January 17, 2006), 2005–06
Graphite on archival color inkjet print
Purchase of University at Albany, State University of New York



Richard Garrison examines mundane aesthetics of suburban American life and consumer culture. While parked in the lots of various stores, public buildings, offices, and schools over a period of six months, he tracked the distance and direction of the walk from his car to the entrance of his destination using a hand-held GPS device. All that information is represented graphically in this work: the length of each line is determined by the distance walked, and the direction is indicated by the line's positioning around the circle, which corresponds to a north/south/east/west compass. The dominant color of each destination's sign determines the color of its line. Viewers might recognize, for example, the bright Home Depot orange of the line labeled "home improvement store" or the USPS® Blue of the one labeled "post office." Garrison's methodological approach both parodies and pays homage to the systematic abstraction elsewhere in this exhibition.

Ellsworth Kelly (1923–2015, American)
Untitled from Portfolio 9, 1967
Lithograph on paper
Purchase of the Art Council, University at Albany, State University of New York, 1970



Exploring structure and mass unencumbered by the gestures of action painting, Ellsworth Kelly's abstract paintings and prints are the paragon of hard-edged abstraction. Similarly to Minimalists like Donald Judd, Kelly removed all anthropomorphic traces from his artwork. This lithograph relates to his "figure/ground" series of paintings from the late 1950s to the mid-1960s, a time during which he worked in Manhattan's Coenties Slip alongside artists including Chryssa and Agnes Martin. Dissolving the distinction between figure and ground, Kelly resolved the problem of illusionistic space that had hitherto plagued even the most abstract works of two-dimensional art. This lithograph can be read as a black shape on a white ground and simultaneously as an opening in a white surface revealing a black background. Ultimately these contradictory readings cancel each other out and establish the surface to be a single unit consisting of two shapes interlocking like puzzle pieces.

Jenny Kemp (b. 1979, American)
Mellow Yellow, 2013
Gouache on paper
Purchase of the University at Albany Alumni Association from *Artists of the Mohawk-Hudson Region*



Contemporary painter Jenny Kemp employs the traditions of the previous century's abstraction while simultaneously breaking with them. She utilizes the temperature and value shifts central to Josef Albers's work, and like Gene Davis she limits herself to a singular motif—the stripe. However, breaking with the tenets of Concrete art and non-representational abstraction, she does not restrict herself to pure geometric forms or flat space. In the center

of the composition, a blue and green cocoon envelops inner layers of warm reds and oranges teeming with life. The overall sense of geometry in the work—the central structure reads as a diamond shape with alternating pointed and rounded corners—belies the fact that there are no perfectly straight lines in this composition. The yellow horizontal bands in the lower third of the composition even begin to suggest that this biological form is sitting in a naturalistic space.



Kenneth Martin (1905–1984, British)
Frankfurt II (Rotation Series), 1977
Screenprint on paper
Gift of Thomas Scala

Kenneth Martin led a revival in England of pre-war Constructivism, which endeavored to convey dynamic movement through pure geometric form. Martin first achieved notoriety in the 1950s by building mobiles informed by Russian Constructivist Aleksandr Rodchenko and American sculptor Alexander Calder. The geometry and kinetics of mobiles continue to play a role in this screenprint (as well as in his other paintings and prints from the 1960s onward). A series of orange, magenta, blue, and green bars seem to rotate around a loosely defined axis. While there are no tonal shifts to suggest volumetric forms, the use of overlapping and changes in color temperature evoke a sense of depth, as if the bars are rotating in three dimensions around a central point. At the bottom of the work, a pink bar establishes a firm ground line and stabilizes the otherwise wildly gyrating composition.



Henry Pearson (1914–2006, American)
Fall from Portfolio 9, 1967
Lithograph on paper
Purchase of the Art Council, University at Albany, State University of New York, 1970

As a member of the U.S. Army Air Corps during World War II, Henry Pearson's job was to make topographical maps of Japan. He brought this mapmaking experience with him when he subsequently moved to New York to study art and later became a leading figure in the Op Art movement. The topographical map, a two-dimensional representation of three-dimensional space, parallels the inherent tension in art between the two-dimensional surface of a print or painting and the illusion of depth generated through line and color. The undulating purple stripes in this work draw the eye not only up and down as they trace pathways from the top of the paper to the bottom, but also left and right as the lines sway laterally. Spacious areas with few lines appear to swell and enter the viewer's space; conversely, the dense areas of line form tight pockets that burrow themselves below the picture's surface.



Michael Kidner (1917–2003, British)
The Elastic Membrane portfolio, 1979
Illustrated book with mixed media multiple, photogravures, photolithographs, and spiral notebooks
Gift of John A. Olsen

In both this three-dimensional construction and the accompanying prints, Michael Kidner has pulled and distorted an elastic membrane to create unpredictable effects. The work recalls Bauhaus and Constructivist experiments from the 1920s: dynamic geometric constructions of wood and industrial materials. But as an Op Artist (who was included in William Seitz's seminal 1965 Op Art exhibition *The Responsive Eye* at the Museum of Modern Art in

New York), Kidner also had a sustained interest in creating optical movement through waves and moiré patterns, in this case by often superimposing grids over each other.

In many of these pieces, curves and circles are foils to straight diagonal lines, and both contrast with the stability of a recurring underlying grid. In one untitled lithograph, by stretching the membrane over an inverted clothes hanger he warps the square and circle embroidered on its surface. A similar dynamism is evident in the repeated curved and straight edges in the wood—and in the very wood grain itself—in the lithograph *Relief Continuous*. The shallow space and direct lighting in these photographs work to create a trompe l’oeil effect in which the objects appear dimensional at times.

Shozo Nagano (1928–2009, Japanese)

Rebirth, 1970

Oil on canvas

Gift of Donald Mochon



In this three-dimensional canvas, three L-shaped sides meet to form the corner of a cube. The canvas moves in and out of real space, physically widening and tapering. These real changes in depth are exaggerated by the painted white, gray, and black planes of the L-shapes, whose arrangement suggests a light source coming from above and left. But where one would expect the edges of the cube to protrude into the viewer’s space, they suddenly slope inward, an effect reinforced by the calculated shifts in value in the blue bands running parallel to the edges. Shozo Nagano’s shaped canvases recall Frank Stella’s Minimalist paintings, but Nagano incorporates the spatial illusions of Op Art—in particular the use of isometric perspective, a system of representing three-dimensional space in which, unlike one-point Renaissance perspective, parallel lines do not converge as they recede. Isometric drawings lend themselves well to spatial ambiguity, as famously in seen in the ambiguous figure type of optical illusion known as Schroeder’s staircase.



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