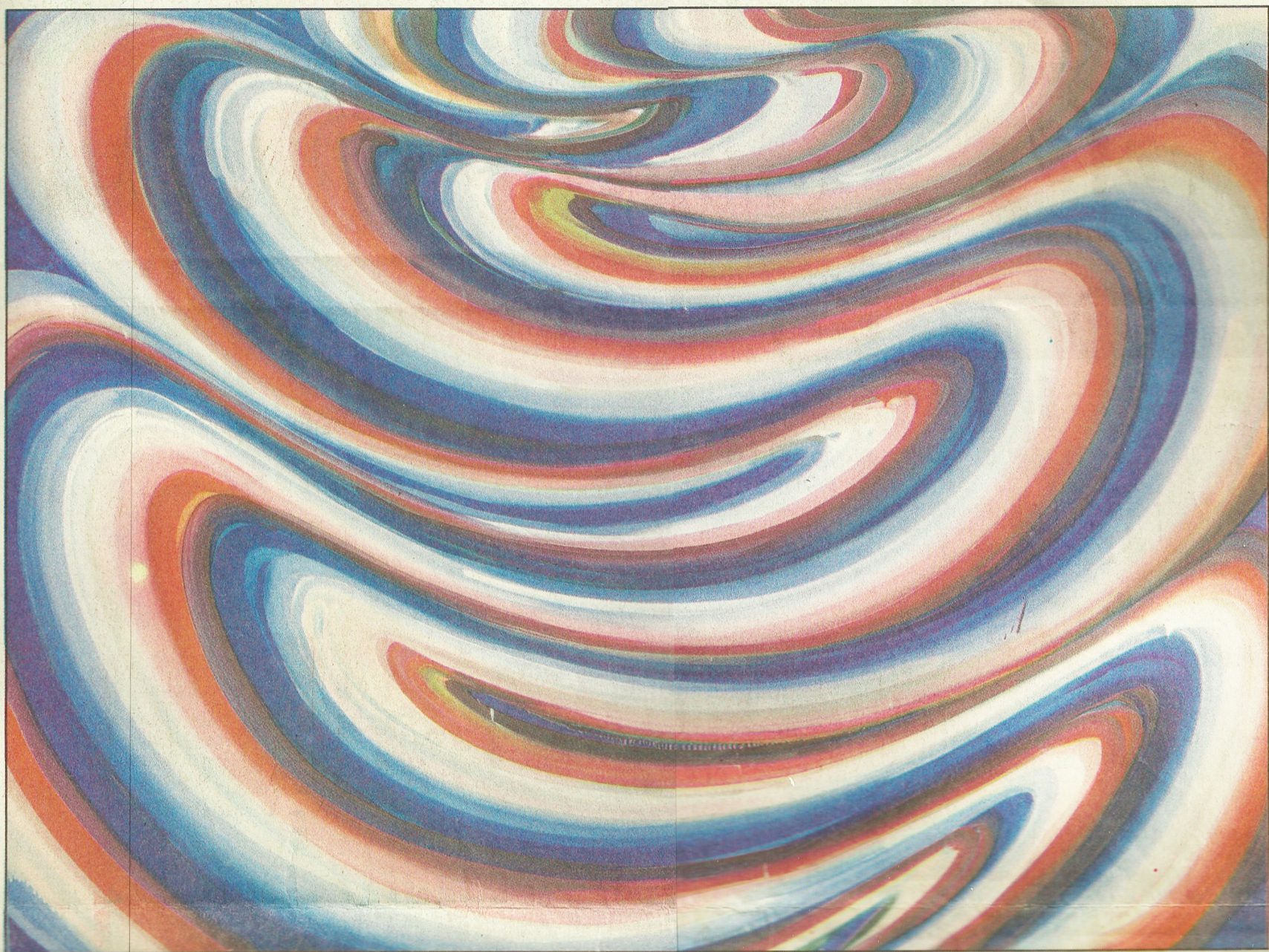


Right: "Red Cell" by Peter Halley, 1988

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Another look at OP ART



"Wanted" by Karin Davie, 1998

By DAN CRAFT
Pantagraph entertainment editor

In comic book parlance, the net results of hard physical action are often conveyed through the time-honored devices of the boldly lettered, brazenly inserted "Bam!"-"Pow!"-"Thunk!"-"Whack!"-"Smack!"

So primal and immediate are the effects of these graphic insertions that we don't really need any accompanying illustration or text to discern that something combative is going on, most likely between two or more opponents. (Friends don't "Bam!" friends.)

The same might be said, more or less, about what is presently going on, straight between the eyes, in all three of the Illinois State University Galleries, via its newly opened exhibit, "post-hypnotic," set to keep visitors in a thrall through Feb. 21.

AT A GLANCE

■ **EXHIBIT:** "post-hypnotic," featuring 50 pieces examining the resurgence of pronounced optical effects in the work of 28 painters, curated by Barry Blinderman

■ **ARTIST LIST:** Ross Bleckner, Steve Di Benedetto, Judy Ledgerwood, Stratton Cherouny, Mark Dagley, Philip Taaffe, Sarah Morris, Karin Davie, Michelle Grabner, Peter Halley, Jim Isermann, Yayoi Kusama, Tom Martinelli, Tom Moody, Aaron Parazette, Bruce Pearson, Peter Schuyff, Walter Robinson, Michael Scott, Jason Martin, James Siena, John Armleder, Susie Rosmarin, Tad Griffin, Fred Tomaselli, David Szafranski, Yek, David Clarkson

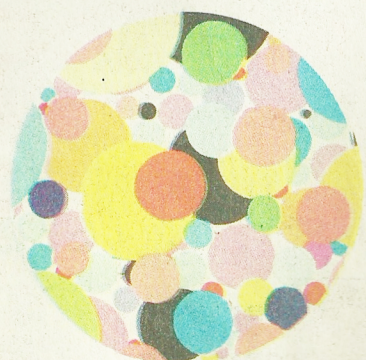
■ **GALLERY:** ISU University Galleries I, II and III, located in Center for the Visual Arts 110.

■ **TIMES AND DATES:** Noon to 4 p.m. Saturday through Monday, 9:30 a.m. to 9 p.m. Tuesday, and 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Wednesday through Friday, through Feb. 21.

■ **SPECIAL EVENT:** Lecture by guest critic Dave Hickey, author of "Air Guitar" and "Invisible Dragon," 8 p.m. Feb. 15, Center for the Visual Arts 147.

■ **ADMISSION:** Free.

■ **INFORMATION NUMBER:** (309) 438-5487.



"Untitled" by Stratton Cherouny, 1998

It begins simply enough:
You enter the gallery portals.

You descend the steps.
And, then: "Whack! Pow! Smack!"

Your optical nerves are promptly assaulted by a riot of primary colors, geometric shapes, pulsating configurations, undulating contours, Day-Glo swirls and confounding perspectives with (troubling?) intimations of the infinite.

This initial optical assault — like the graphically engineered audio track for a comic book melee — doesn't need to be critically analyzed or studied at length to gauge that first deep impact: something visually "combative" is going on, most likely between what the artist has created and what our retinas are reading.

Can illusions of some kind be far away?

If nothing else, "post-hypnotic" offers a gallery experience of the most viscerally optic, nerve-bending order, almost guaranteed to leave the viewer seeing things he or she may have trouble believing, based on the deceptively simple evidence.

Colored spots dot the field of visions after a glance at David Clarkson's "Iris Seventh Avenue Style," sporting circles within circles in yellow, green and two shades of blue, with the additional intrusions of three red light bulbs.

Mark Dagley's "Concentric Sequence No. 1," an acrylic-and-pencil-on-canvas piece, literally pulsates off the canvas, tricking the eye into intimations of color and — who knows? — maybe a nest of orb-plucking ghosts-in-the-canvas.

David Szafranski's "Bra Sale," uses ink jet print on paper to alter sensory states via the digitally goosed sleight-of-eye devices of popular "Magic Eye" calendars (talk about ghosts in the canvas — wait until the gazer ferrets out the definitely postmodern hidden message within; gotcha!)

Of course, beyond all of this initial visual "Bam!," there is a lot more to be discerned in "post-hypnotic's" epic outlay of 50 pieces (the first show in University Galleries history that has taken over all three exhibition spaces) by 28 nationally and internationally known artists.

And therein lies its true reason for being.

But the old-is-new idea of art as optical effect — or Op art — is the motivating force behind the show, curated by University Galleries director Barry Blinderman and set to hit the road following its ISU stay, traveling cross-country through Chicago and other cities.

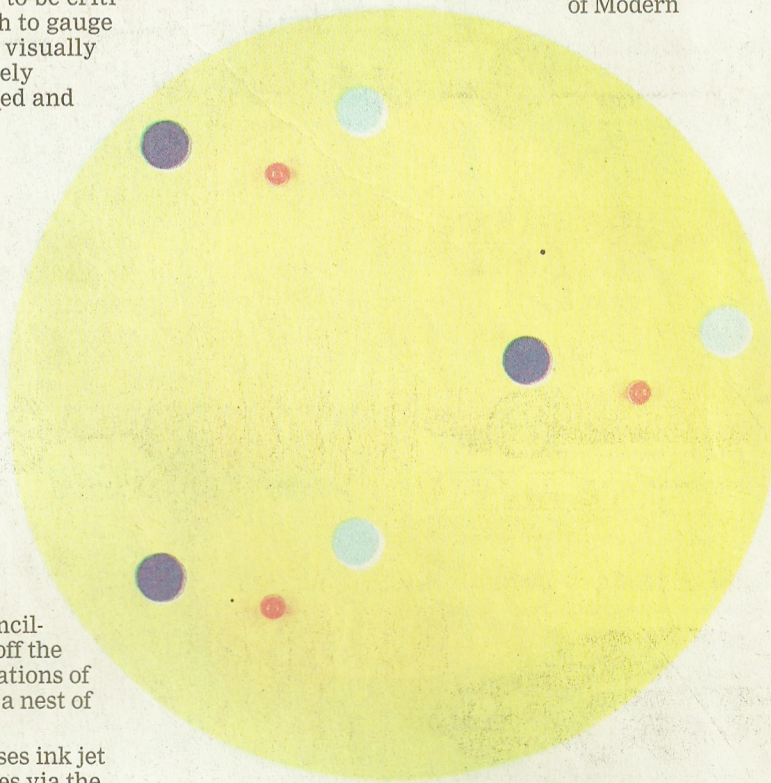
Blinderman's eclectic amassing of the post-modern generation's take on Op art shouldn't be ideologically confused with what first emerged as a movement 34 years ago, however.

That movement peaked in the mid-1960s at what he calls "the height of World's Fair optimism," when artists began investigating optical effects in their work as a kind of visual correlative to the era's scientific advances ... the

"we'll-get-to-the-moon-first" mindset of the country.

Says Blinderman, Op art "was a recognition of the power of science" through the geometric designs, repeating motifs, bold primary colors and other schematic approaches whose aftermath just so happened to be the generation of optical illusions: movement with the pattern, hidden images, halos, pulsations, color games played on the retina, etc.

The movement's defining moment, he says, was the Museum of Modern



"Iris Seventh Avenue Style" by David Clarkson, 1998.

Art's 1965 exhibition, "The Responsive Eye," which gathered together 100 pieces that "were mostly concerned with the phenomenon (of Op art) itself; they were trying to erase subject matter from their work," with their key cultural references being comic books, newspapers and TV.

Blinderman's show takes the Op art movement several generations forward, locating it squarely in the age of "computer screen savers, video games and high-ballistic graphics on TV."

The idea first arose around seven years ago, Blinderman says, when he conceived a show to be called "hypnotic," dealing with how artists from the 1960s were using patterns involving pronounced optical effects "to induce a certain experience in the viewer."

In 1992, however, only a handful of artists were doing it, he says.

But the idea remained lodged in his head and re-emerged around a year ago when, on a trip to New York, Blinderman began noticing the

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