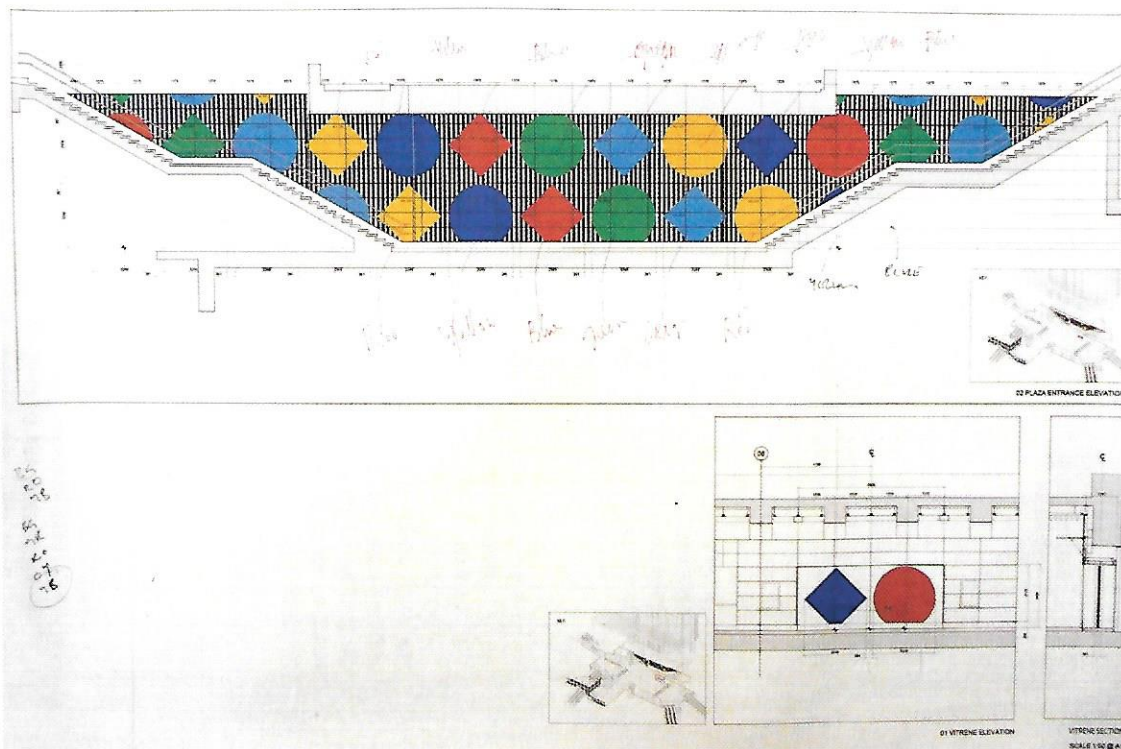


THE NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN PLAZA STATION ENTRANCES WILL FEATURE A WALL OF SOLID, COLOURED SHAPES SET AGAINST MONOCHROMATIC STRIPES



When Daniel Buren was a little-known conceptual artist back in 1970, he somehow managed to charm a woman working for Paris' transport system to let him hang his striped paper in the advertising frames of Métro stations for a short time between ad campaigns, an operation he called *affichage sauvage*, or clandestine billposting.

Today, the Frenchman – now one of the world's best-known living artists – is putting his signature stripes up in London's newly rebuilt Tottenham Court Road Tube station. Unlike the Paris installation nearly half a century ago, the current artwork is official and permanent, created in tandem with the station and part of the walls themselves.

The projects are different enough that the artist does not make a connection between them until asked. 'The only thing they have in common is the question: "What is the Underground?"' he responds, sitting in the offices of the Lisson Gallery, his London art dealer. 'It's all about movement. And then there's this thing you might stop to look at.' Aged 77 and as busy as ever, Buren is a compact man with an easy-going manner and dark eyebrows that contrast with his white hair, a colour scheme not unlike the stripes he's famous for.

'What I find interesting about the metro is the idea of motion and speed,' he says. 'The physical circulation of people who plunge underground, then emerge. The constant coming and going of hundreds of thousands of people in a precise chaos. And that's not even taking into account the trains arriving and disappearing.'

Tottenham Court Road is one of London's busiest stations, and one that will also serve the new Crossrail high-capacity railway starting in 2018. At that point, an estimated 200,000 people – office commuters, weekend shoppers, nightclubbers – will rush through this subterranean site every day, and at all hours.

When Buren's project is fully completed in 2016, his artwork will greet them loudly and cheerfully at two different entrances. At the Oxford Street entrance, open since January, the walls facing and adjacent to the escalators are covered in big, brilliant, black and white striped circles and diamonds. As you descend the escalator, the 2.4m-high shapes loom towards you. To one side, they take up the entire two-storey wall, disappearing into the floor and the ceiling.

Buren says the shapes are 'fundamentally banal' on their own. But oversized, they create what he calls an 'enormous, enveloping fresco'. The walls are glossy and reflective, made of clear laminated glass, screenprinted with the artwork. The alternating geometric forms unfurl across the surface, the diagonal line of the escalator slashing across it. At the bottom, people gliding off the moving staircase are framed from behind by a striped rhombus, a near-cinematic effect.

On the opposite side of the station, at the Northern and Southern Plaza entrances, another two-storey wall next to the stairs and escalator will be covered by the same shapes in bright, solid colours against vertical black and white stripes. Buren is also placing a transparent dividing screen inside the ticket hall, with the shapes engraved in glass. A display case exhibits two sculptures, a blue circle and yellow diamond, thick and shiny like enormous liquorice allsorts. The artist says with a chuckle, 'They are presented like a museum piece, but I would never do something like that in a museum. In the metro, it seemed amusing.'

Standing in just the right place, you will be able to glimpse all four compositions at once. And though it may not be obvious to the hurried commuter, the sculpted pieces in the glass case set the rhythm for the whole installation. 'If you pushed them straight back to the colourful wall, they'd generate the circles and >>