



COMPUTER ART TODAY AND TOMORROW

Catherine Mason, from the Computer Arts Society (CAS) and author of *A Computer in the Art Room: the origins of British computer arts 1950-80*, looks back on a year of digital art, commemorates the work of Alan Sutcliffe and looks ahead to a new year of computer art.

The diverse and eclectic world of computer and digital arts had an exciting year and the BCS special interest group, the Computer Arts Society (CAS), is pleased to see continued developments, especially within museums and galleries that contribute to raising the profile of the genre and in particular that of British artists throughout this country and internationally.

We were treated to several museum-quality exhibitions this past year including the major show *Digital Futures* at the Barbican Art Gallery (July to September) www.barbican.org.uk/digital-revolution. Focusing on 'things that are creatively ambitious for their time', from the 1970s to present day, and with many special

commissions, this successful show proved the Barbican is increasing its speciality in digital art. It is expected to tour at home and internationally at least for the next five years.

CAS member Ernest Edmonds organised *Automatic Art: human and machine processes that make art* in July at the GV Art gallery, London, <http://interactlabs.co.uk/files/5980/gv-art-de-montfort-university-automatic-art-press-release.pdf>.

A survey of 50 years of British artists who create work by using personal rules or by writing computer programs to generate abstract visual forms, it demonstrated that the systems

artists' approach of the 1970s and computer artists overlap and have many connections.

Gustav Metzger's show at Kettles Yard Gallery, University of Cambridge, in August focused on his lesser-known auto-creative art. Gustav became famous for inventing auto-destructive art in the early 1960s and was one of the first artists in Britain to write of the potential for computer use in art. CAS lent exhibition materials, including copies of *PAGE*, our periodical first published in 1969 with Gustav as the founding editor.

The name *PAGE* was chosen by Gustav as initially there was only one page available for printing (due to costs) and it

was a pun on the concept of paging (the use of disk memory as a virtual store, which had been introduced on the Ferranti Atlas Computer).

The questions Metzger posed about technological responsibility in the 1960s seem as pertinent, perhaps even more so, today. Although we still may not have any satisfactory answers, art can remind us to keep asking and challenging the status quo.

An important collection of early plotter drawings by German artist Frieder Nake were acquired by the Victoria & Albert Museum with funding assistance from the Art Fund. The acquisition of a full set of such early algorithmically-generated works will enable study of the progression of the artist's process.

To use digital computing for artistic aims, at a time when digital computing itself was in its infancy, required a great leap of faith by pioneers. This adds to the impressive computer art collections of the V&A and its continuing profile as the National Centre for Computer Arts.

In a first for a UK museum, the V&A appointed a Games Designer in Residence late in 2014. Sophia George, inspired by the museum's collections, especially that of William Morris, worked with the public and schools to develop a game based on

Documentation was held at the ICA, London, to explore the impact and continued relevance, nearly 50 years on, of the pioneering Cybernetic Serendipity exhibition held there in 1968. This ground-breaking show was the first international exhibition in the UK devoted to the relationship between the arts and new technology and featured collaborations between artists and scientists.

In addition to an assortment of monthly talks and presentations, the CAS programme this year included the annual EVA Conference held at the London HQ of BCS. (www.eva-london.org) This is always a good opportunity to apprise oneself of the latest international research in visualisation, design, animation and digital archive documentation. Michael Takeo Macgruder, who has been developing interactive digital art since the late 1990s, exhibited his new dome-based work Data Sea as part of an art exhibit curated by our chairman, Dr Nicholas Lambert.

In line with CAS's mission to support and propagate computer art, we support the Lumen Art Prize, a major international competition with 800 submissions from 45 countries <http://lumenprize.com>.

An exhibition of all the prize-winners was launched at Llandaff Cathedral and

Also in 2015 we will be looking forward to an exhibition in Rio de Janeiro featuring the work of CAS members Harold Cohen, Frieder Nake, Ernest Edmonds and Paul Brown. 'Códigos Primordiais' (Primary Codes) will occupy all three floors of Oi! Futuro exhibition space in Rio:

www.oifuturo.org.br/en

In February we mourned the loss of one of our founder members and first chairman, Alan Sutcliffe. It was his idea to gather together a group of like-minded people who were interested in the creative use of computing, for exchange of information, discussion and exhibition opportunities. Together with George Mallen and R John Lansdown he founded the CAS in 1969, the first practitioner-led organisation of its kind in Britain. Alan was also a stalwart of BCS; in the late 1970s he was elected Vice President for the specialist groups.

His deep knowledge of and enthusiasm for the subject together with the welcoming, inclusive nature of his personality will be greatly missed. Look out for a special issue of PAGE dedicated to him later in 2015.

If you are not yet signed up to our (free) emailing list, then please visit www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A0=CAS

See also our website:

<http://computer-arts-society.com> and Facebook www.facebook.com/pages/Computer-Arts-Society/303023289760986 All are welcome.

About the author

Catherine Mason, is a committee member of CAS, the author of *A Computer in the Art Room: the origins of British computer arts 1950-80*, and writes a regular column on contemporary computer art for the BCS website and *ITNOW* magazine. www.catherinemason.co.uk

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Morris's well-known Strawberry Thief pattern. It was released in October for iPad and iPhone. BAFTA-award winning Sophia aims to change perceptions of game design, not least that young women can be involved in games as well.

www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/g/game-designer-resident-sophia-george

In October an exhibition and associated conference Cybernetic Serendipity: A

will be shown in Athens, New York, Hong Kong and London with a joint show at Ravensbourne and Birkbeck in March 2015. Digital artists in all areas are encouraged to submit to this prize in 2015, as it will also enable them to connect with a broader public. The vast array of different styles and approaches that this prize attracts demonstrates the vibrancy of contemporary technological art.