

The background of the image is a complex, abstract composition. It features several overlapping geometric shapes, primarily triangles and quadrilaterals, in a variety of colors including shades of green, yellow, orange, red, and purple. These shapes are rendered with a heavy, pixelated or dithered texture, giving them a digital, almost mosaic-like appearance. The overall effect is a vibrant, multi-colored field with a high level of visual detail and texture.

AESTHETICA

AESTHETICA

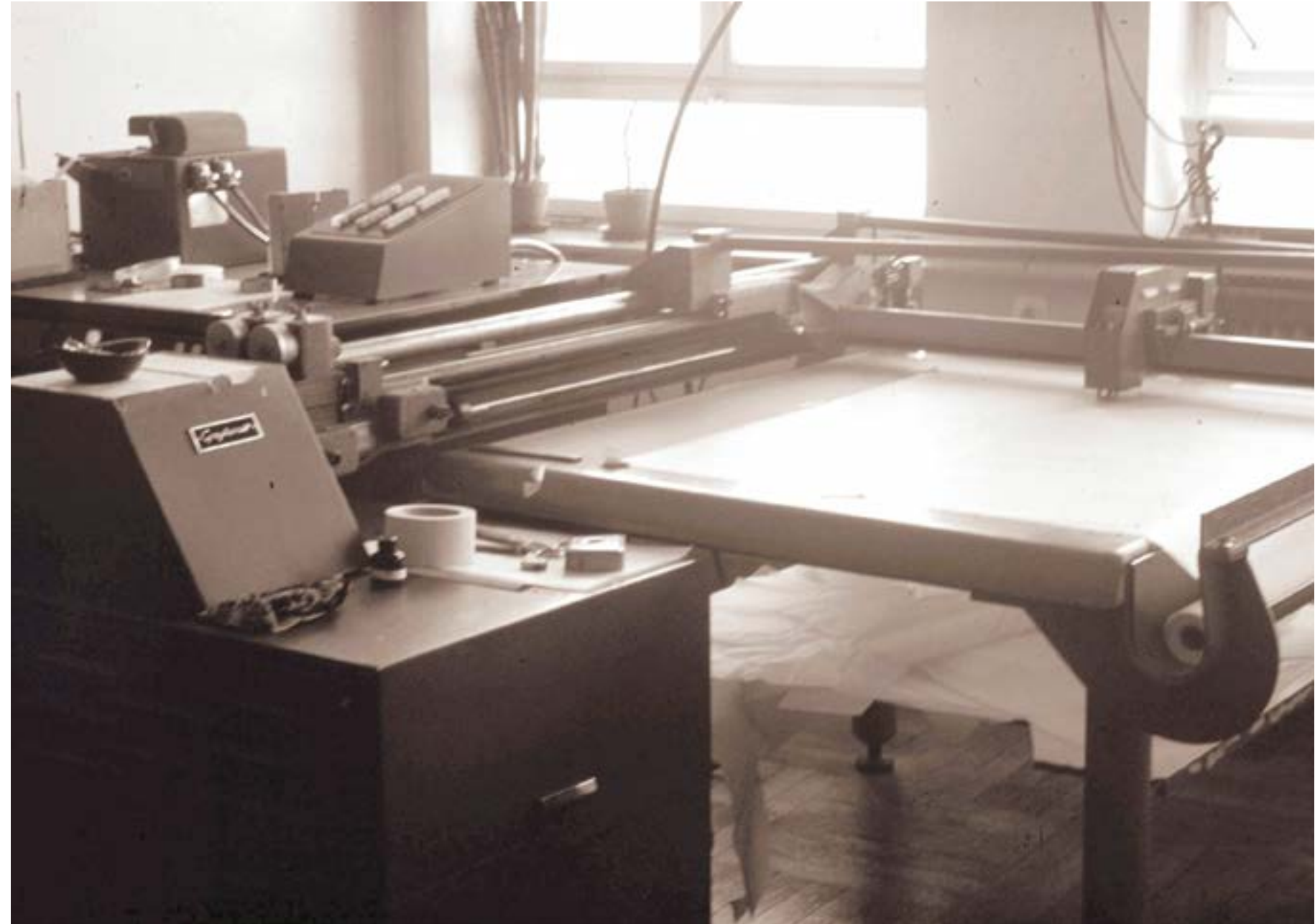
50 Years of Computer Generated Art



30 May - 1 August 2015

Zuse Graphomat Z64

Rechenzentrum Universität
(TH) Stuttgart. Fotografie von
Frieder Nake, 1965



Preface

The avant-garde is constantly developing and exploring new territory, so that sometimes the real avant-garde does not even know whether it has penetrated enemy territory or an unknown void. Some advances were foreign for everyone and everything was unknown — the boundaries and foundations as well as the inhabitants, respectively users.

So 50 years ago from now in 1965, three new individuals — whose names begin with “n” and are listed here alphabetically: Nake, Nees and Noll — tred on very shaky ground. Is it science, art, computer science — and what is it good for anyway?

And then the philosophical, watchful minds who accompanied the pioneers with their thoughts, led by Max Bense and a few others, alternating with the navigating and mediating Herbert W. Franke.

At the same time Zero and Fluxus celebrated their first international successes, and media art emerged with new technologies (synthesizers, audio and visual), video (use and alter TV images, the first cameras) or new devices (such as the Carousel projector, which allowed for permanent loops). In the US and Europe, the most important inspiration was John Cage, who since the 1940’s associated everything with everything giving rise to invention —and accepting no limitations!

And to many it is still unclear that the papers generated by machines fifty years ago are unique results of a particular species. They are neither pure art nor pure computer science formulas, and are rather poetry made by the machines made by people.

These computer graphics constitute diverse and increasingly variant steps between art and science, between human and machine, between order and chance — which may arise in film as in music, on paper or in three dimensions. Such wonderful works were created and the international list of this exhibition at DAM brings together a top team:

- Horst Bartnig** *DE* **Peter Beyls** *BE* **Vuk Cosic** *SL*
Hans Dehlinger *DE* **Manuel Felguerez** *MEX*
Patrick Lichty *USA* **Tony Longson** *GB* **Rafael Lozano-Hemmer** *MEX-CDN* **Manfred Mohr** *DE*
Vera Molnar *F* **Frieder Nake** *DE* **Georg Nees** *DE*

Casey Reas *USA* **Brian Reffin** **Smith** *GB* **Antoine**

Schmitt *F* **Sommerer & Mignonneau** *A-F* **Kerry Strand**

USA **Roman Verostko** *USA* **Roger Vilder** *F-CDN* **Mark**

Wilson *USA*.

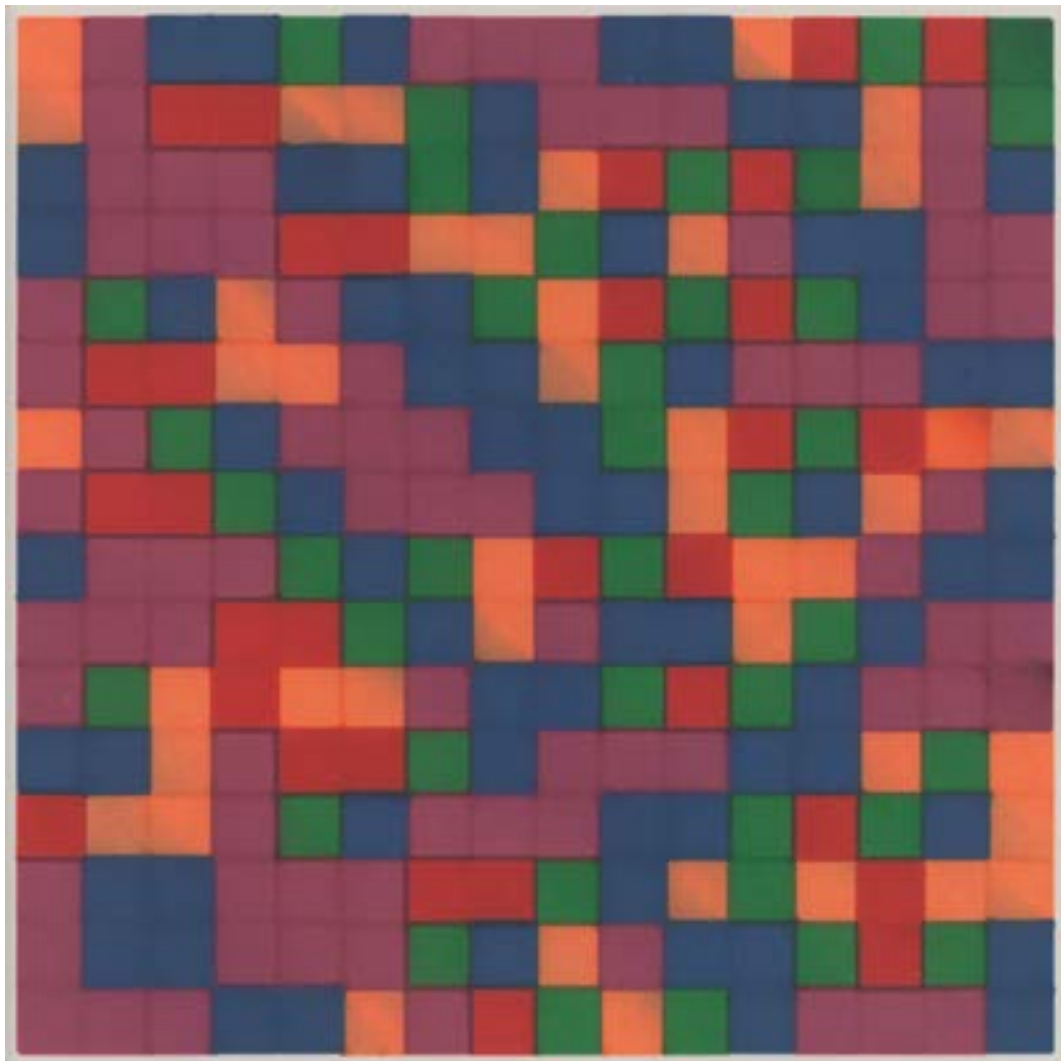
And very, very few in the art world have inserted themselves at the beginning and taken on a pioneering role with dedication and an enthusiastic idealism, so that others have be persuaded to look more carefully and to understand and enjoy such works representative of the 21st century. The works in the exhibition at DAM leave much of the living-room-sized expressive painting truly appear as rearguard!

Wolf Lieser was and is one of the first pioneers who gave the avant-garde protection and assistance with strength, a good eye and understanding. A variety of activities were thereby created: exhibitions, publications both small and extensive, art fair attendances, as well as inspiration and realization of the first significant prize for computer art. Here Wolf Lieser (together with the Kunsthalle Bremen) incorporated the intelligent yet different. That today DAM is such a center for a much broader art could not have been predicted when it was founded 15 years ago. Too many galleries have come and gone that could only temporarily leave their mark.

Ad multos annos—even 50 years after the first works of computer art heroes, the field remains a remarkably white, blank space—but ZERO also had to wait a long time!

Wulf
Herzogenrath

Berlin & Cologne 2015



Peter Beyls

GR 21

11 x 11 cm, 1979

Hewlett-Packard plotter

HP Fiber Tip Pens

Patrick Lichty

Enso (Circle)

2015

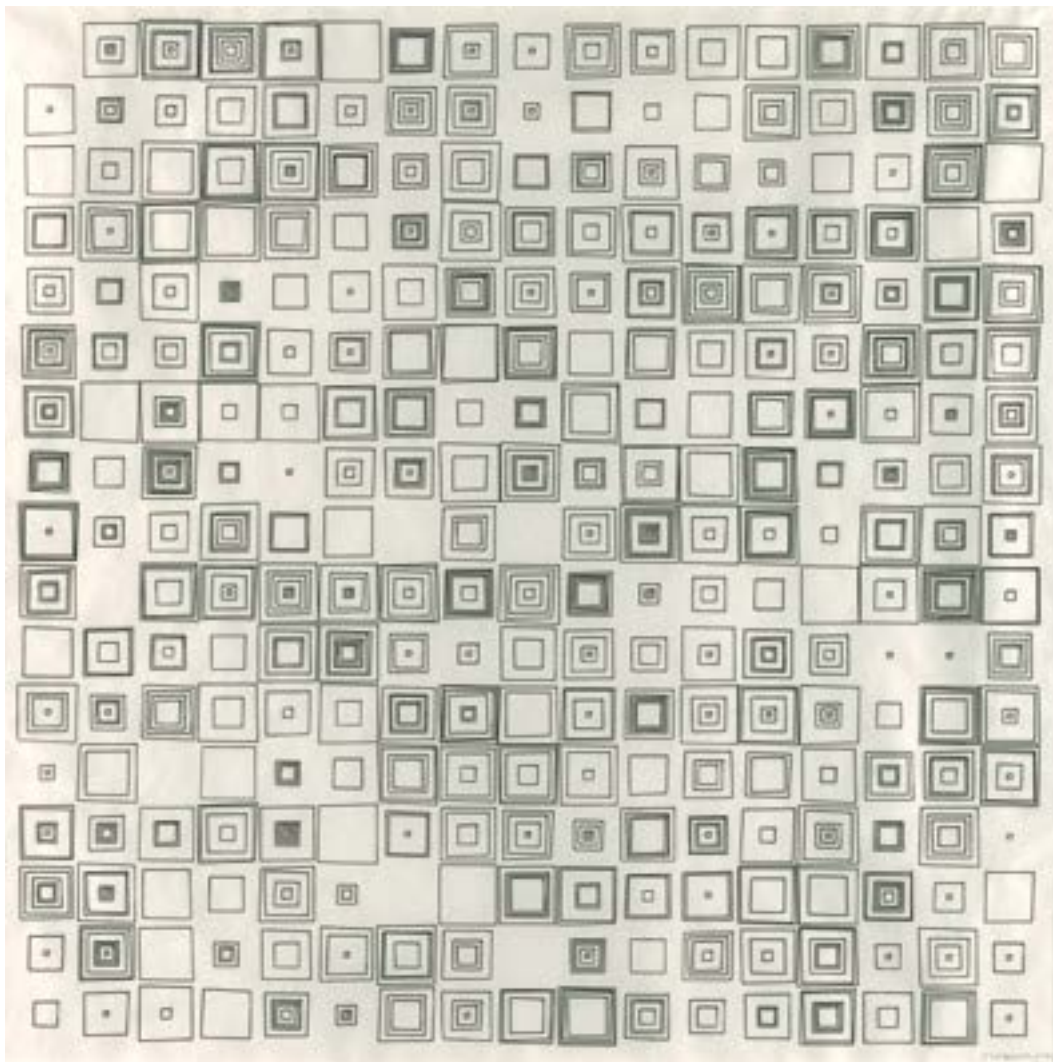
Makelangelo 3 Polarbot

Drawing

Yylene-based Permachrome

Ink on Paper





Vera Molnar

(Des)Ordres

70 x 70 cm, 1971-74

Ink on Paper

Benson Plotter

Roger Vilder

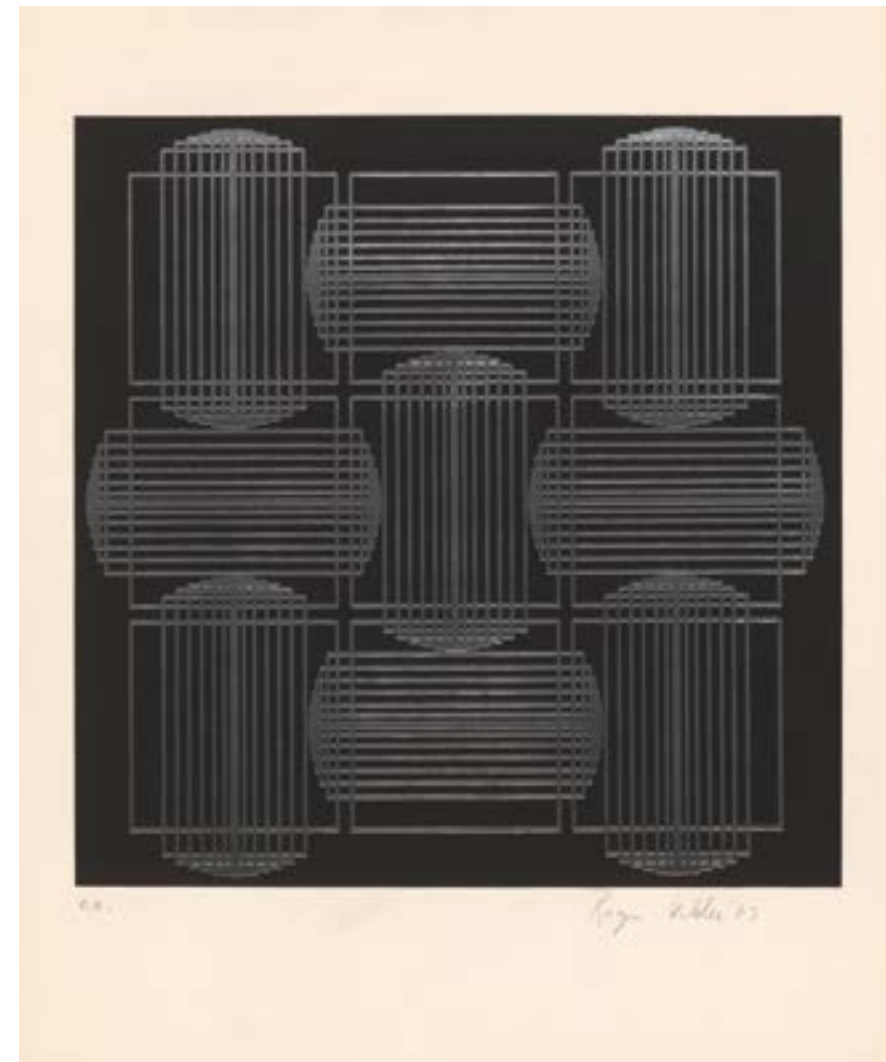
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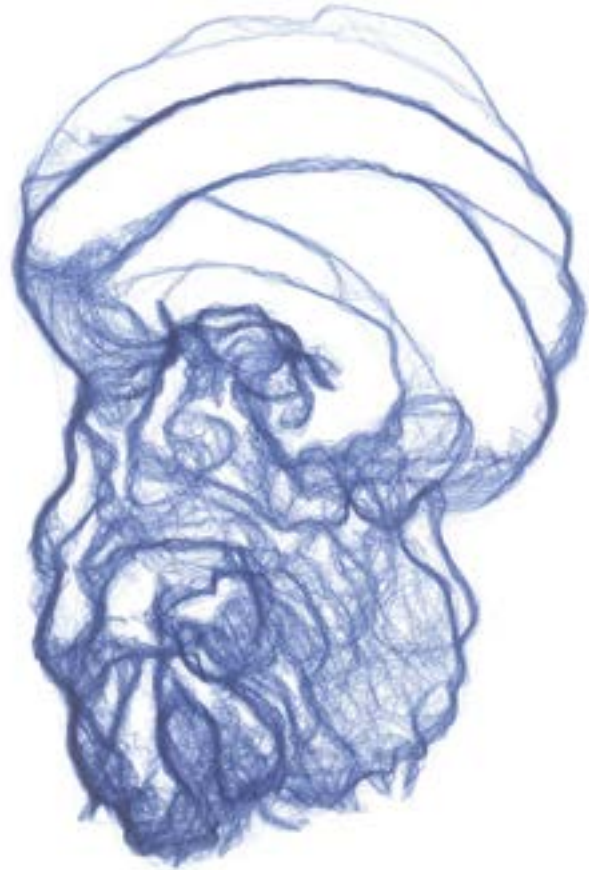
28 x 35,5 cm, 1973

Edition of 100

Silkscreen based on Plotter

Drawing

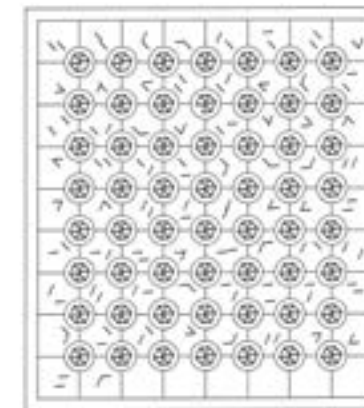
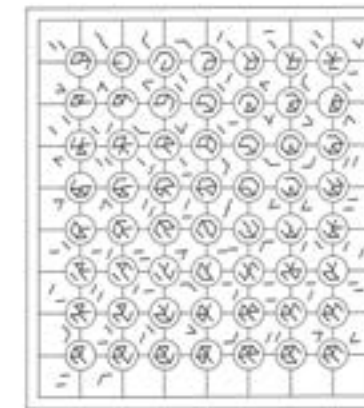
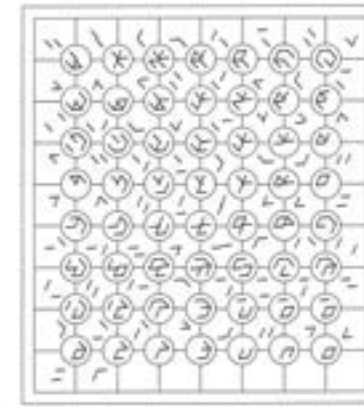
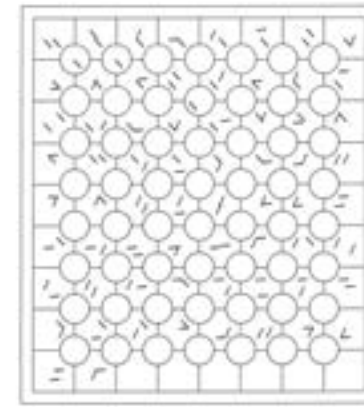




**Rafael
Lozano-Hemmer**

Seismoscopes

Drawing of Abu Hamid
Muhammad ibn Muhammad
al.Ghazali, 28 x 43 cm, 2009
Custom made drawing
machine
PR1F - Blue Ink Fine Point
Space Pen Pressurized
Cartridge



Manfred Mohr

P 163 B

4 Drawings each 19 x 21 cm,
1975
BENSON 1284 Flatbed Plotter
Rotring Ink Black

Ideas, machines, art

The story has often been told. Still, I repeat it for the reader's convenience: Computer art (as it was called in an unfortunate choice of terms) made its first appearance in three exhibitions in 1965. Looking back from 2015, fifty years have passed since the world was made aware of an incredible process that had almost secretly been simmering under the surface of society since 1963. Then it went public. The world—the world of art, to be more modest and precise—did not take much notice. In fact, it couldn't care less.

The time when computer art shyly emerged in its first public shows was the time when op art had its great manifestation with The Responsive Eye (23 February to 25 April, 1965, at the Museum of Modern Art, New York); concrete art was, of course, in blossom everywhere. Video art has its first shows and scandals (Nam June Paik in 1963 at Gallery Parnass in Wuppertal); conceptual art declares, "the idea becomes the machine that makes the art" (Sol LeWitt 1967).

Dear Sol LeWitt, the activists of computer art should have written you a friendly invitation offering a few lessons in computer programming. Dear Sol LeWitt, what you write and publish in 1967, we have been actively pursuing since about 1963—years before. We have actually brought it to the public's awareness in shows in 1965. Did you know this as you wrote your remarkable manifesto two years later in 1967?

Could Sol LeWitt, or any other representative of conceptual art, be aware of the manifesto of generative aesthetics, Max Bense's short text which he read at the opening of Georg Nees' exhibition on the 4th of February, 1965: *projekte generativer ästhetik*?

For the occasion of the first appearance of computer-generated drawings, Bense coined the term generative aesthetics. Some years before, in 1960, he had published the fourth volume of his ambitious series of writings on aesthetics under the title: *Programmierung des Schönen* ("programming the beautiful"). This title was a misnomer insofar as programming—the art of forcing a computer into doing something its human master wanted it to do—did not

play any role in the essay. *Programmierung des Schönen* was a theory of text production but not by the programmable machine.

Bense really never touched a computer. He did not motivate anybody to program a computer to generate poems or music or drawings that could be discussed for their artistic and aesthetic values. He understood well enough what you could do with a computer even though he himself did not use one. He sensed what the relationship between the human (after all: the semiotic animal – Felix Hausdorff) and the computer (after all: the semiotic machine – Mihai Nadin) could possibly be. People read the word "programming" in the title of Bense's book and concluded that he was calling for computer programs.

Dick Higgins, the Fluxus activist and artist, was doing this in 1970. I gave a talk in 1968 at the (former) Hochschule für Gestaltung in Offenbach where I answered the question whether computers should play a role in the early phases of design studies. Even earlier and on a broader scale, an international conference in 1966 in Waterloo, Ontario was dedicated to computer issues of design and planning. And Leslie Mezei, a computer science professor at the University of Toronto (where he could meet with problematic media guru Marshall McLuhan), became the first ever to write about art and computers in an art magazine (with Arnold Rockman).

Three exhibitions

In computer art, the idea and concept is always already "the machine that makes the art". The idea materializes in the program, and the program is machine and text at the same time. A program is nothing but a new kind of text, in some ways comparable to the text of a poem in all its very specific aesthetic qualities, as a genre as well as an individual expression. A program is an automatically executable text. It is a finite operational description of an infinite set of drawings.

This is to the heart of the revolution: finite descriptions and operational infinities. This is a triumph of the rational mind! Dreams come true of the rationalist. Such developments happen at about the same time when some poets in California and elsewhere drown their rational minds in floods of drugs to get rid of thinking in mysteries of emotions.

Computer art began three times. Three exhibitions were shown during the year 1965. The first two were totally independent of each other. The third one was, in some way, connected to the first.

The mathematician, Georg Nees, must be credited for having put up the first exhibition of computer-generated works. He showed a rather small selection of his algorithmic drawings in rooms of Max Bense's Studiengalerie at the University of Stuttgart (then still called the Technische Hochschule, i.e. Institute of Technology. The exhibition was open from February 5–19, 1965). Bense was a great enthusiast of concrete and any other kind of rational art and aesthetics. Therefore, when he heard of computers having been programmed to automatically generate artistic drawings, he immediately reacted by opening his experimental study gallery for such an opportunity.

Only two months later (in retrospect, at the same time), the then leading avant-garde gallery of Howard Wise in New York assumed their exhibition of works by A. Michael Noll and Bela Julesz was the world's premier of this new kind of artistic expression. Computer-Generated Pictures by Bela Julesz and Michael Noll was on display from April 6–24, 1965. Wise could not have known better; there was just no exchange about such events across the Atlantic Ocean. When later that year, Wendelin Niedlich's Gallery in Stuttgart showed Frieder Nake's work under the title "computer graphics", it was a consequence of the February event (the third show was open to the public from November 5–26, 1965). Niedlich invited Bense to speak at the opening. Bense accepted and suggested that Nees' drawings should also be shown again. So this established the connection and became the starting point of a friendship between Nees and Nake lasting to this day.

(Bense actually wrote a text for the opening but then could not come. Reinhard Döhl read Bense's text.)

All three mathematicians had started their computational experiments in aesthetics in the years 1963–64. When results of such experiments appeared in public in the course of 1965 in a few of the white cubes of the world of art, those purely private works were transformed into public works of art. This necessary transgression from work to work of art did not happen quickly or easily. To the contrary, it took a considerably long time. Perhaps, such slow beginning was necessary. Maybe the hesitation and, in part, hostility of the world of art was necessary for today's clear recognition of digital algorithmic and interactive art.

The year 1965 and its three exhibitions thus mark the beginning of the era of digital media. It is the appearance of the algorithmic principle in the visual arts. It may stand for a first remarkable event in culture caused by the algorithmic revolution. And as always, singling out such a date is manifestly wrong. Much had happened before, in music, in automatic text generation, in generally experimental approaches and events. What I say can be upheld when restricting it to the world of visuals; it loses significance in broader perspectives.

I want to briefly mention three more events that became, in hindsight, steps of the ladder in the slow process of visual algorithmic art's recognition as what it is: a genuine blossom in the ever growing jungle of art.

Three more events

The three sites of the shows of 1965 were not top on the list of art institutions: Bense’s Studiengalerie was an academic institution of more or less local recognition. Howard Wise in New York was outstanding and avant-garde. Michael Noll’s secret hope for some sales was met with zero demand. Wendelin Niedlich’s Gallery was a bookstore and gallery, two cultures competing. However, he sold several of my works.

A fourth show followed soon enough, now at a site that would not at all qualify as a place for art: the Deutsches Rechenzentrum in Darmstadt, i.e. the German Computing Center. From 15 January to 15 February 1966, music, poetry, and graphics were presented side by side. Recordings of pieces by Ben Deutschman and Max V. Mathews from the university of Illinois could be heard, while auto poems by Gerhard Stickel , as well as my graphic works were on display. This show is arguably the first where the three genres appear in parallel generated by computers. This is almost a year earlier than the Nine Evenings flashy event of Klüver’s, Rauschenberg’s, and Cage’s Experiments in Art and Technology.

The event attracted the West-German national press. Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, a conservative leading daily newspaper, wrote about it. DER SPIEGEL, comparable to Time Magazine, brought a report. The critical political and cultural television magazine, Panorama, reported. Former Bauhaus teacher Georg Muche visited the exhibition and told some of his artist friends about it. This inspired the Viennese painter, Otto Beckmann, to get in touch with Gerhard Stickel and me. Some hopeful steps were taken towards a serious cooperation, but things came to an end, when all three followed their own agendas. For some time, Otto Beckmann used homemade computers (by his son Oskar and another engineer) for his remarkable experiments.

The unlikely site of a computing center had become the reason for a greater reaction by cultural institutions and individuals. The early days of algorithmic art already indicate its postmodern character.

As long as algorithmic (i.e. generative) art is called “computer art”, it remains confined to circles of specialists and some odd enthusiasts. Two international events in 1968 constitute a first broad recognition and critique. On the 2nd of August, there was Cybernetic Serendipity. The Computer and the Arts opened at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London. One day later, the symposium and exhibition Tendencies 4: Computers and Visual Research began in Zagreb, Yugoslavia. The two events could not have been more different. Together, they establish digital art and media as a coming cultural mainstream.

The London show is well known. Everybody has heard of it. It is a show of popular experiments with cybernetic machines with the addition of the algorithmic genre. It gets publications and many kinds of reactions. Technology and curiosity are its driving forces. Families go there, have a picnic on the lawn; their kids enjoy themselves with the machines. Cybernetic Serendipity established the principle of fun, play, and event in digital media.

The Zagreb endeavor was almost forgotten until only recently when a most remarkable research effort by Margit Rosen provided a plethora of facts and data about this extremely important development in a part of the world between the East and the West. Tendencies 4 was the continuation of New Tendencies 1, 2, and 3—a series of biennales in 1961, 1963, and 1965, all dedicated to concrete and constructivist art, towards the end also to op art. When the Zagreb group asked themselves whether it was possible to do New Tendencies for a fourth time, their answer was a clear “No!” And the solution was established as the continuation of new tendencies of art’s development in the technology of algorithmic methods in the fine arts that, thereby, became a matter of visual research (as Josef Albers had also declared). So Zagreb not only fully accepted generative art as a stream of constructive art, but also established research as the other principle of digital media.

In 1968, when the youth of the West went to war against the established powers of capitalism, algorithmic art was accepted in principle at the fringes of that society, in London and Zagreb. Present were both research and fun, postmodern frames of mind, a strong believe in individual freedom and the openness of things. Computable sign processes came out of machines that were called plotters.

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Frieder Nake

Bremen, 29 May 2015



Georg Nees

No Title

90 x 320 cm, 1971

Photolinen, based on a plotter
drawing of 1968

Frieder Nake

7.4.65 Nr. 1+6

34 x 24 cm, 1965

Ink on Paper
Zuse Graphomat Z 64





Vuk Cosic

Very Deep ASCII

42 x 60 cm, 2015

Ink on Paper

Summa D120R Plotter

Horst Bartnig

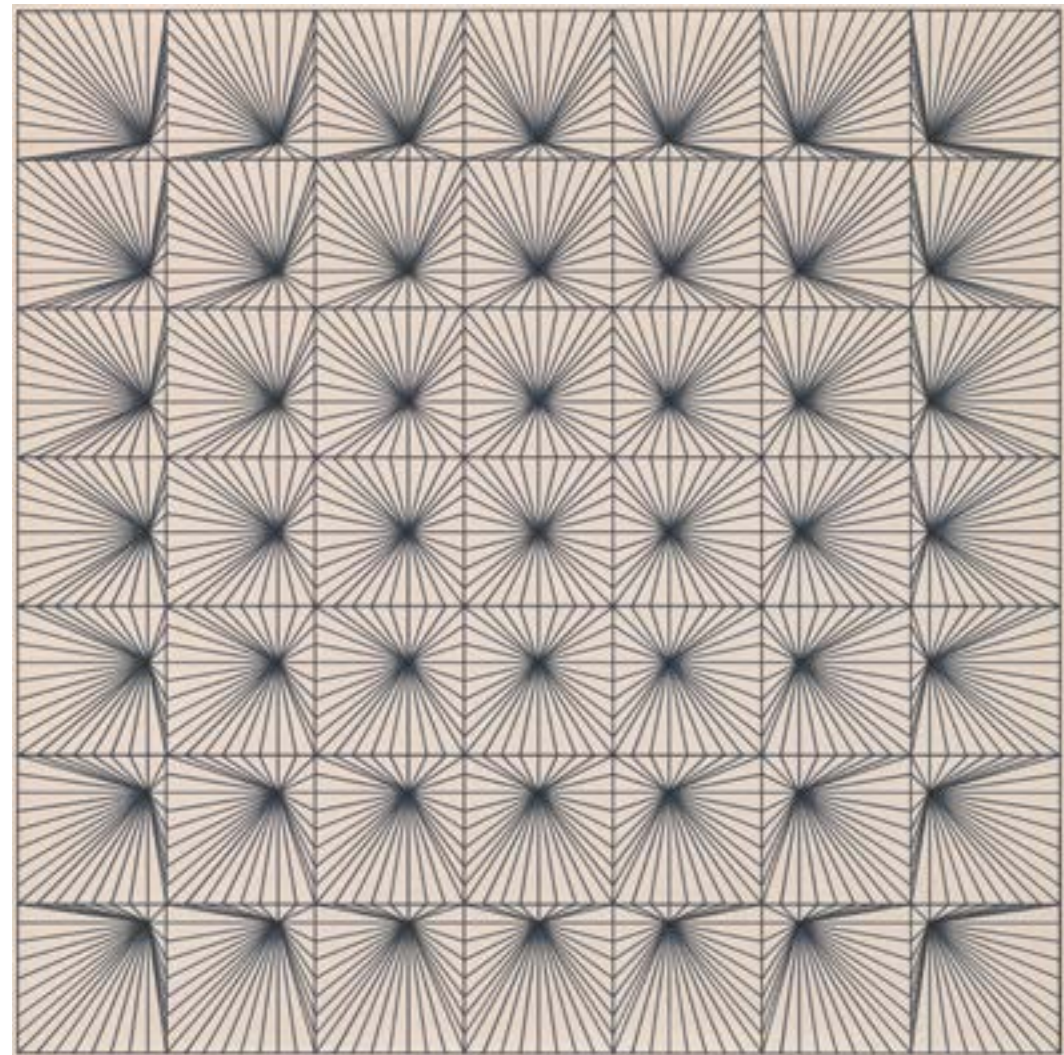
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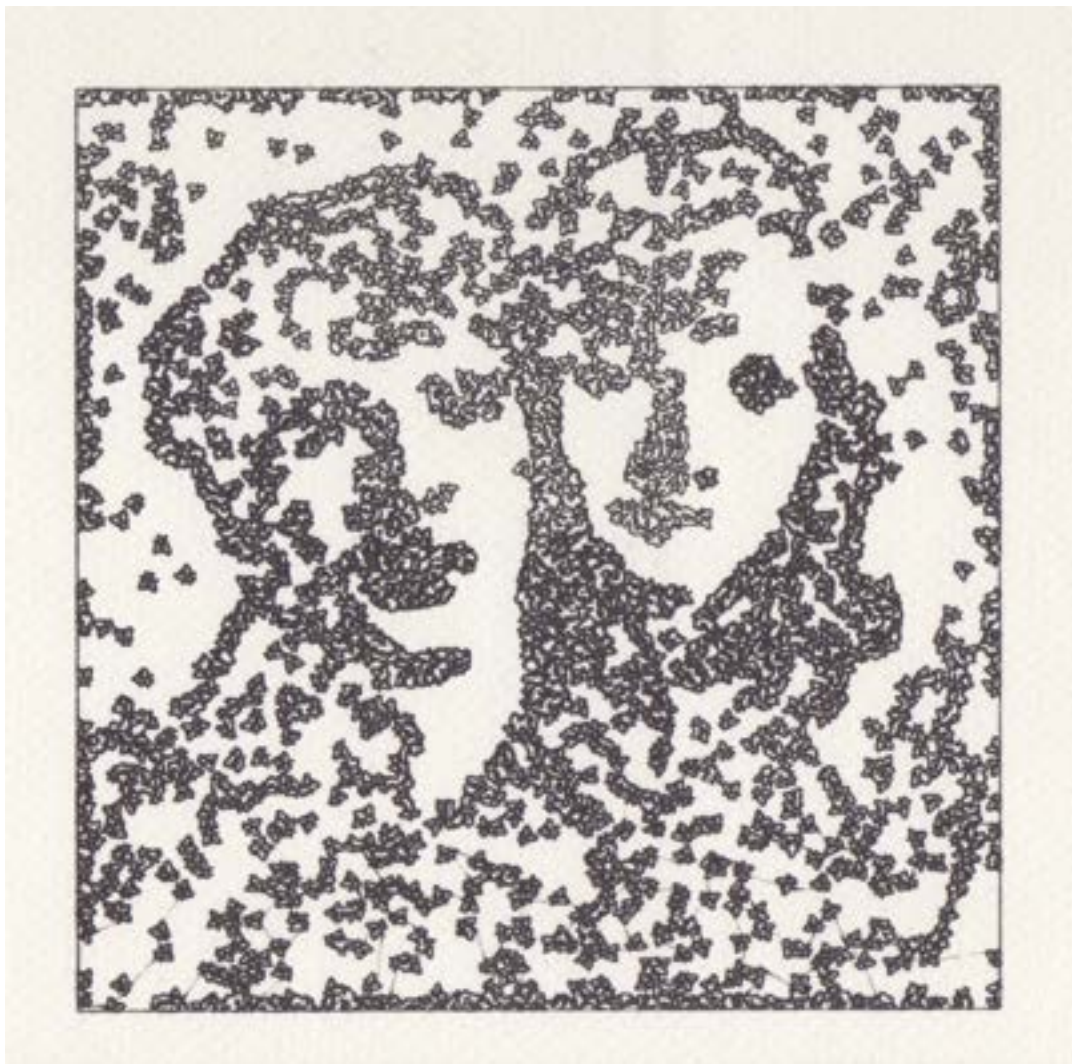
60 x 60 cm, 1979

Felttip Pen on Paper

ESER Rechner, Digigraf 1612

Plotter





Sommerer
+ Mignonneau

Portrait on the Fly

Custom made drawing
machine

Staedler Pigment Liner 308
Fineliner

Arches Watercolour Rag 310
gsm

Roman Verostko

Players 2

20 x 28 cm, 1988

Mixed Inks on Paper

Houston Instruments DMP-52



Collecting Fifty Years of Computer-Generated Art at the V&A

Many people assume that the history of digital art goes back a decade or two, at most. As DAM's Aesthetica show highlights, the first exhibitions of computer-generated art actually took place some fifty years ago, in Stuttgart and New York. Nevertheless, many museums and art galleries have taken a very long time to acknowledge the importance of digital art, if they've recognised it at all. In the UK, the Victoria and Albert Museum began to

collect computer-based artworks as long ago as 1969, when it acquired a set of prints published in conjunction with Cybernetic Serendipity, the landmark exhibition held at London's Institute of Contemporary Arts in 1968. The complete set was purchased by the V&A at a cost of just £5, equivalent to about £200 or €280 today. However, the Museum's official records reveal that some curators definitely weren't persuaded that computer art was worthwhile, at any price. The acquisition files for the Cybernetic Serendipity prints include a number of negative comments, such as "I am far from convinced about their aesthetic validity" or "they should be represented in the museum as characteristic aberrations". The Cybernetic Serendipity Presentation Set, as it was called, ended up in the V&A's Circulation Department, and was subsequently transferred to the Prints, Drawings and Paintings Department. The portfolio includes works by the Computer Technique Group, Charles Csuri and James Shaffer, William Fetter, Maughan S. Mason, Donald K. Robbins and Kerry Strand. The individual prints are now in great demand, and loaned to various exhibitions around the world. One of

them – Running Cola is Africa, by CTG - is even due to go on semi-permanent display in the V&A's Toshiba Gallery of Japanese art and design.

The Museum also acquired some screen prints from Manfred Mohr's Scratch Code series in 1978, but curators at the time were undoubtedly still concerned about collecting examples of computer art. Some original plotter drawings were known to be light sensitive, or produced on thin computer paper, or both. Other works were thought to be of limited aesthetic quality, or simply inappropriate for a major museum. As a result, the V&A collected very few computer-based artworks until the 2000s, when the Museum's focus changed significantly. An increasing awareness of the significance of digital art and design led to the acquisition of two major collections, both of which contained a substantial number of individual artworks. First, the Museum's newly established Word and Image Department acquired the Patric Prince Collection, which contained some 250 artworks - plotter drawings, prints, photographs and computer files - plus a huge amount of supporting documentation. Patric was an art historian and archivist of computer art, and she had accumulated a large library of printed books, plus correspondence, photographs, digital recordings and ephemera in addition to the individual artworks. In parallel, the V&A obtained the archives of the Computer Arts Society, established after the Cybernetic Serendipity exhibition of 1968. The CAS collection also contained around 250 artworks, plus some archival material. With more than 500 computer-based artworks by 2008, the Museum suddenly became one of the world's leading public collections of early computer art and graphics.

In the following years, the V&A created digital images and online catalogue records for the Patric Prince Collection and the Computer Arts Society archive, plus numerous other individual acquisitions. We also undertook a research project funded by the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council, and this resulted in a V&A exhibition entitled Digital Pioneers (2009-10). The Digital Pioneers show attempted to provide a brief overview of the history of digital art and design, based upon the Museum's holdings at the time. Artists in the show included Ben Laposky, D.P Henry, Georg Nees, Frieder Nake, Herbert Franke, Vera Molnar, Ken Knowlton, Lillian Schwartz, Charles Csuri, Harold Cohen, Manfred Mohr, Paul Brown, Jean-Pierre Hébert, Roman Verostko, Mark Wilson, Barbara Nessim and James Faure Walker, among others.

In parallel, the Museum also organised a contemporary exhibition entitled Decode: Digital Design Sensations (2009-10), which was heavily interactive and hugely popular too. The V&A's Word and Image Department subsequently acquired some of the born-digital pieces, including Daniel Brown's On Growth and Form, Aaron Koblin's Flight Patterns and Karsten Schmidt's Recode Decode digital identity for the show itself. We also purchased some pieces with a physical aspect to them, such as Random International's Study for a Mirror.

The success of Decode and Digital Pioneers certainly put the Museum on the digital art map, and our holdings have grown significantly in recent years. Highlights include additional works by Frieder Nake, A. Michael Noll, Vera Molnar, Manfred Mohr, Harold Cohen, Roman Verostko, Mark Wilson and Casey Reas, all of whom are represented in the Aesthetica exhibition. In some cases the works were acquired with the help of DAM, which remains one of the few European galleries with real expertise in this area. Other recent acquisitions include plotter drawings by Darrell Viner and Stephen Scrivener, both of whom attended the Slade School of Art in London during

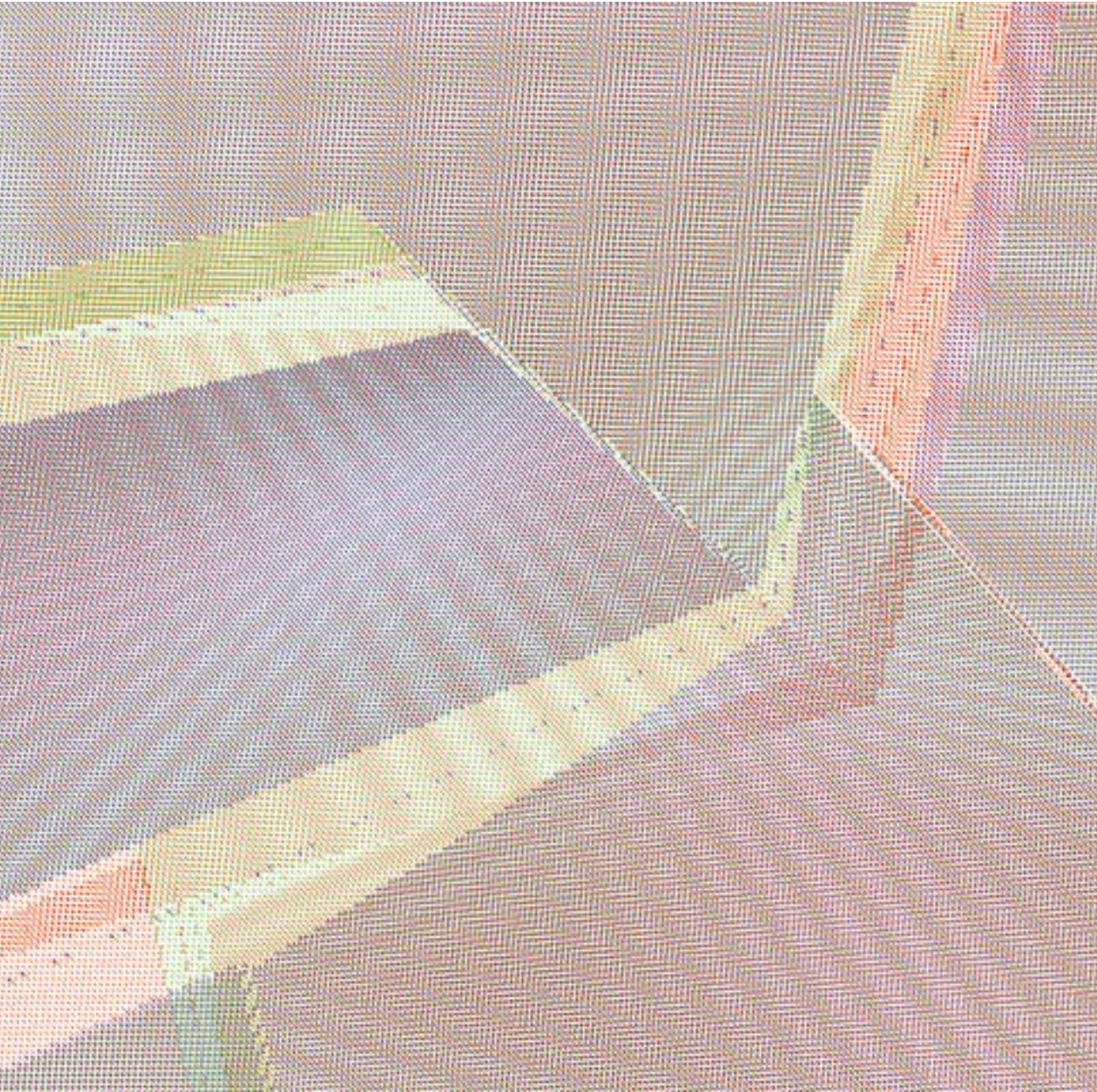
the 1970s. In addition, we have an increasing number of "Computer Creations" by Lloyd Sumner, produced in the late 1960s, plus a complete set of impact prints by the American hard-edge painter Frederick Hammersley. The Museum has also continued to collect works on paper and born-digital artworks by pioneering artists such as Ernest Edmonds and Paul Brown. As a result, we now have some 1,500 artworks in total, plus a great deal of documentary material. The Museum even has a set of Fortran punched cards, used to create one of Manfred Mohr's artworks in 1970.

Of course, there are still many significant gaps in the V&A's collections, and we hope that some of these can be filled in the coming years. The Museum's newly established Design, Architecture and Digital Design department is also heavily involved in documenting the impact of digital technology, acquiring works that range from Flappy Bird to Cody Wilson's infamous 3D-printed gun. We have thus come a long way from the 1960s and – like many other museums -are actively engaged in the ever-evolving world of digital art and design.

Douglas Dodds

Senior Curator, Word and Image
Department, Victoria and Albert
Museum

April 2015



Casey Reas

RGB-I-013-010-120-255-352

30 x 30 cm, 2015

Koh-I-Noor Rapidoplot Archival

Ink on Stonehenge 100%

Cotton Paper

Roland GX-24 Plotter

Antoine Schmitt

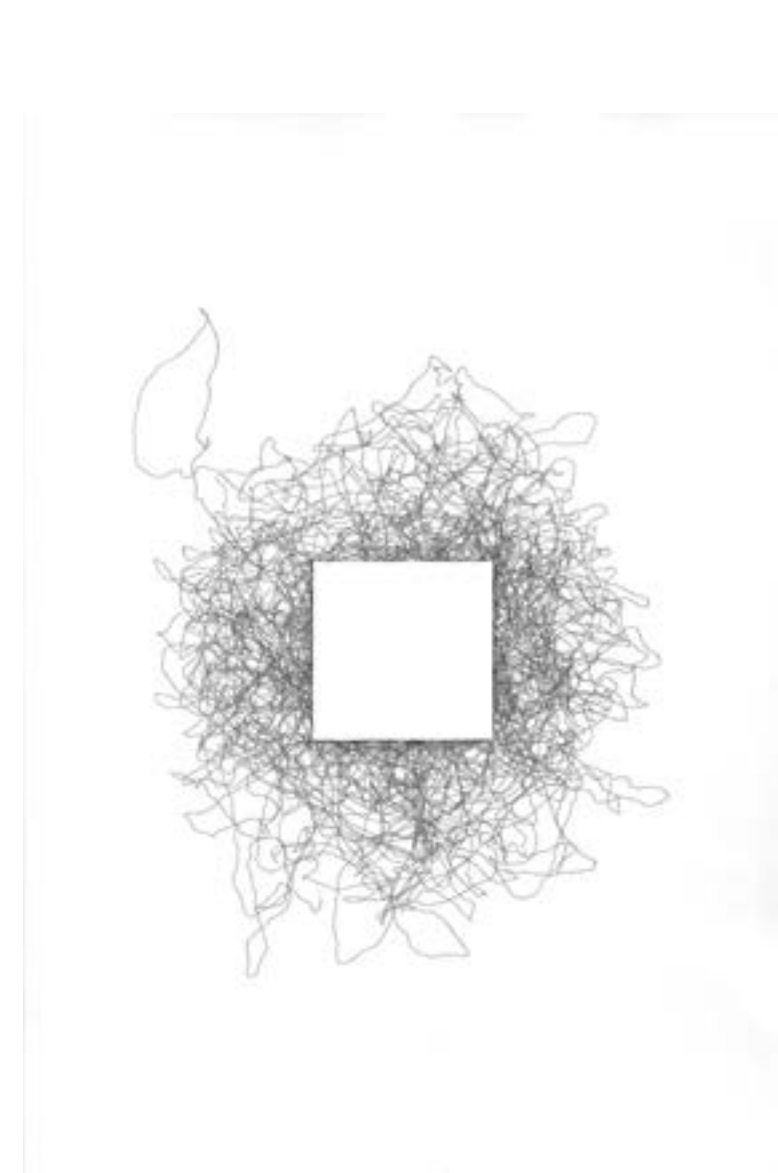
Carré Blanc

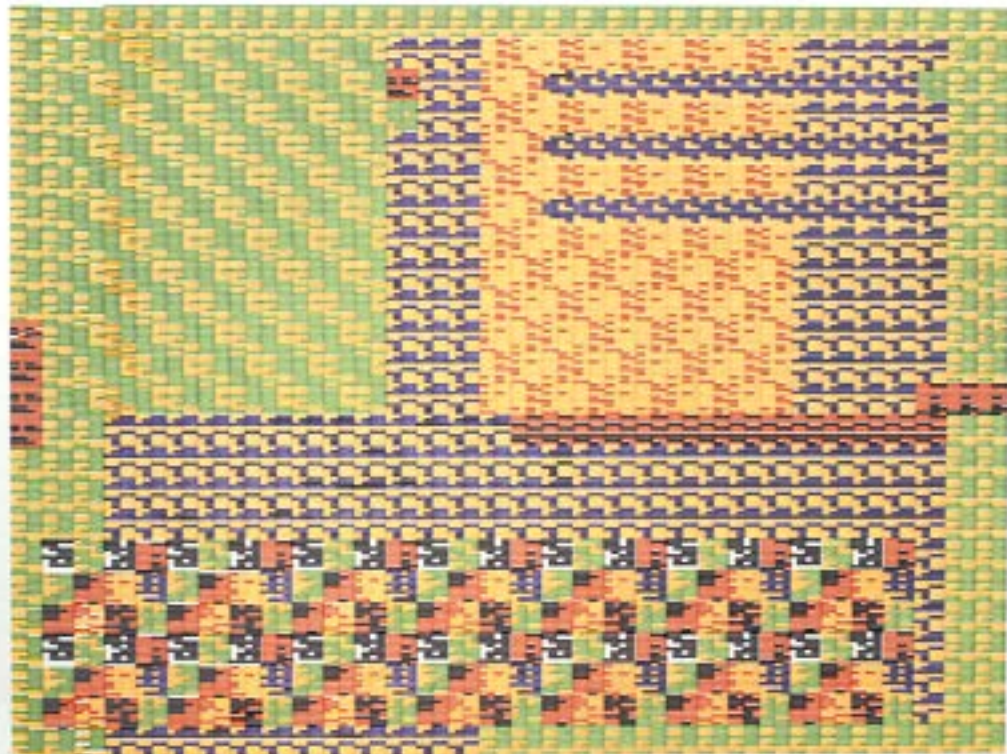
21 x 29,7 cm, 2015

Bic Cristal Medium

Ballpointpen

HP 7550B Plus Plotter





Mark Wilson

Douat Dump B3

32 x 24,5 cm, 1981

Pelikan Ink on Paper

Houston Instrument DMP

Plotter

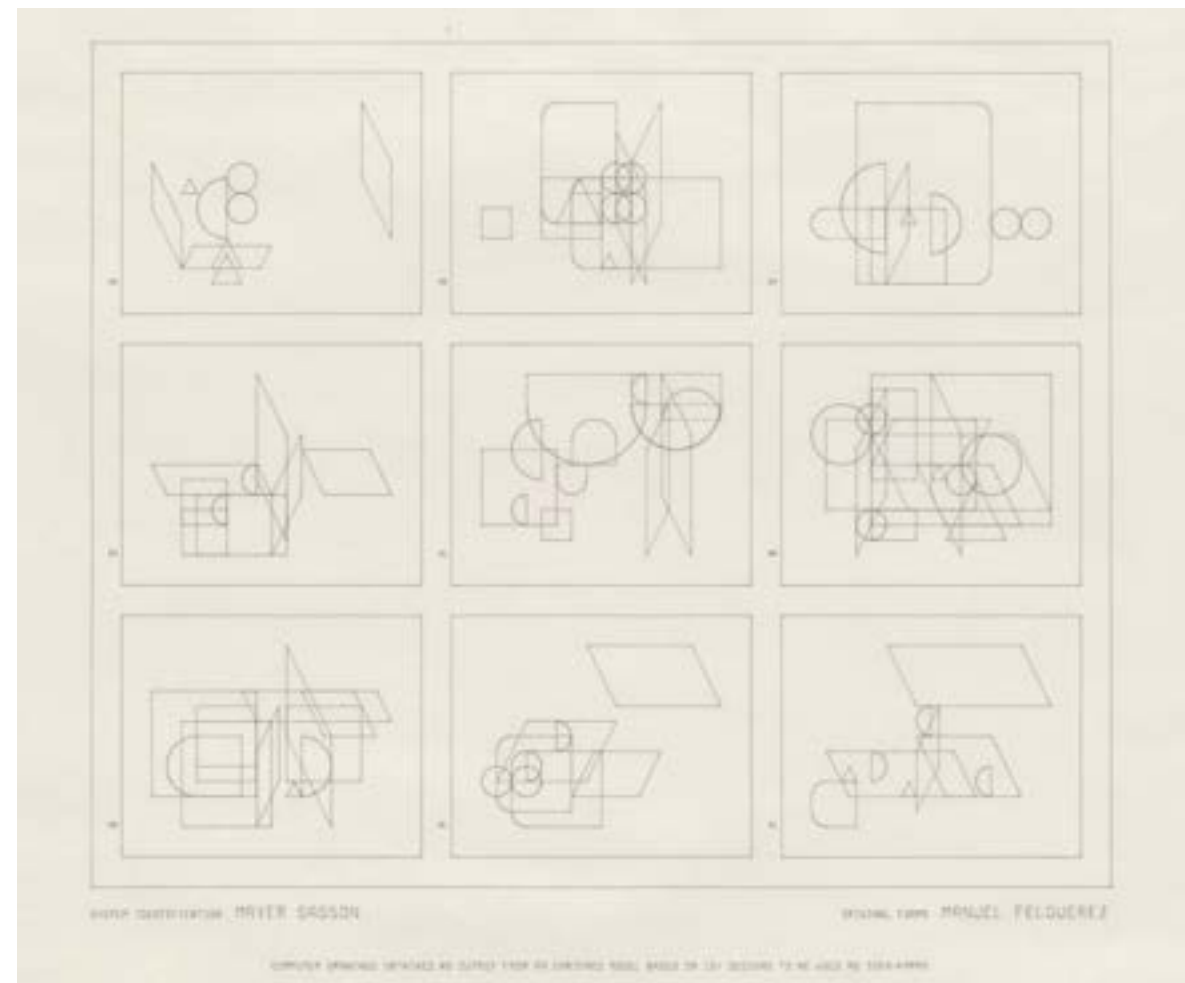
Manuel Felguerez
+ Mayer Sasson

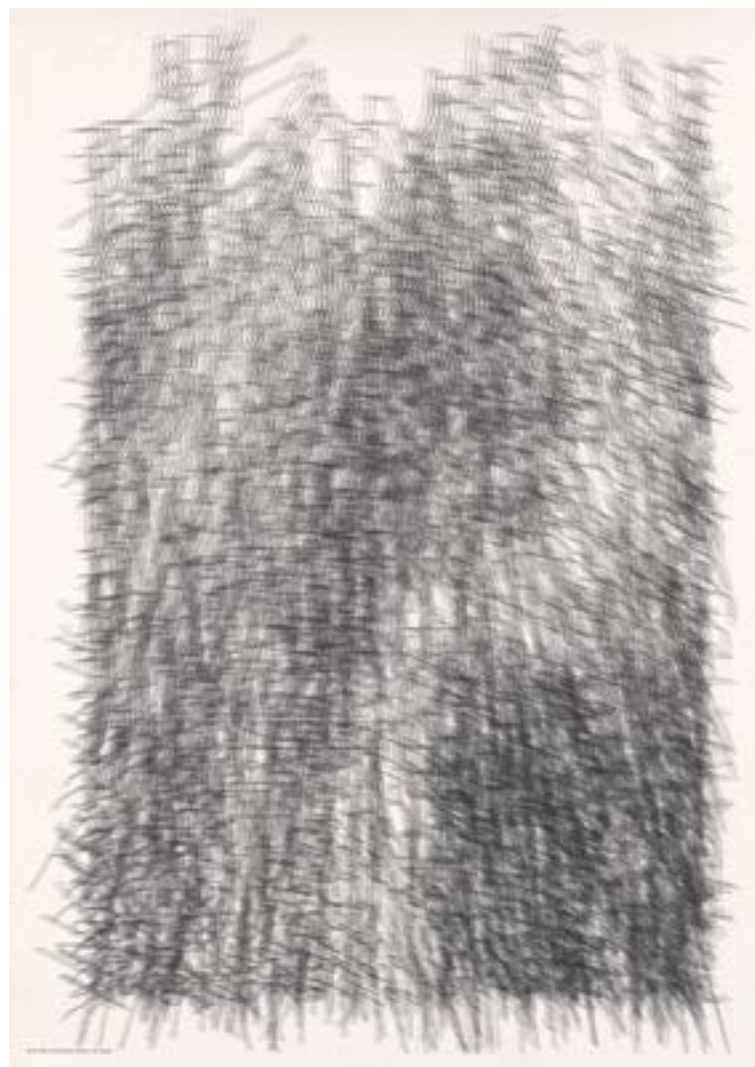
104 Designs

51 x 41cm, 1975

Ink on Paper

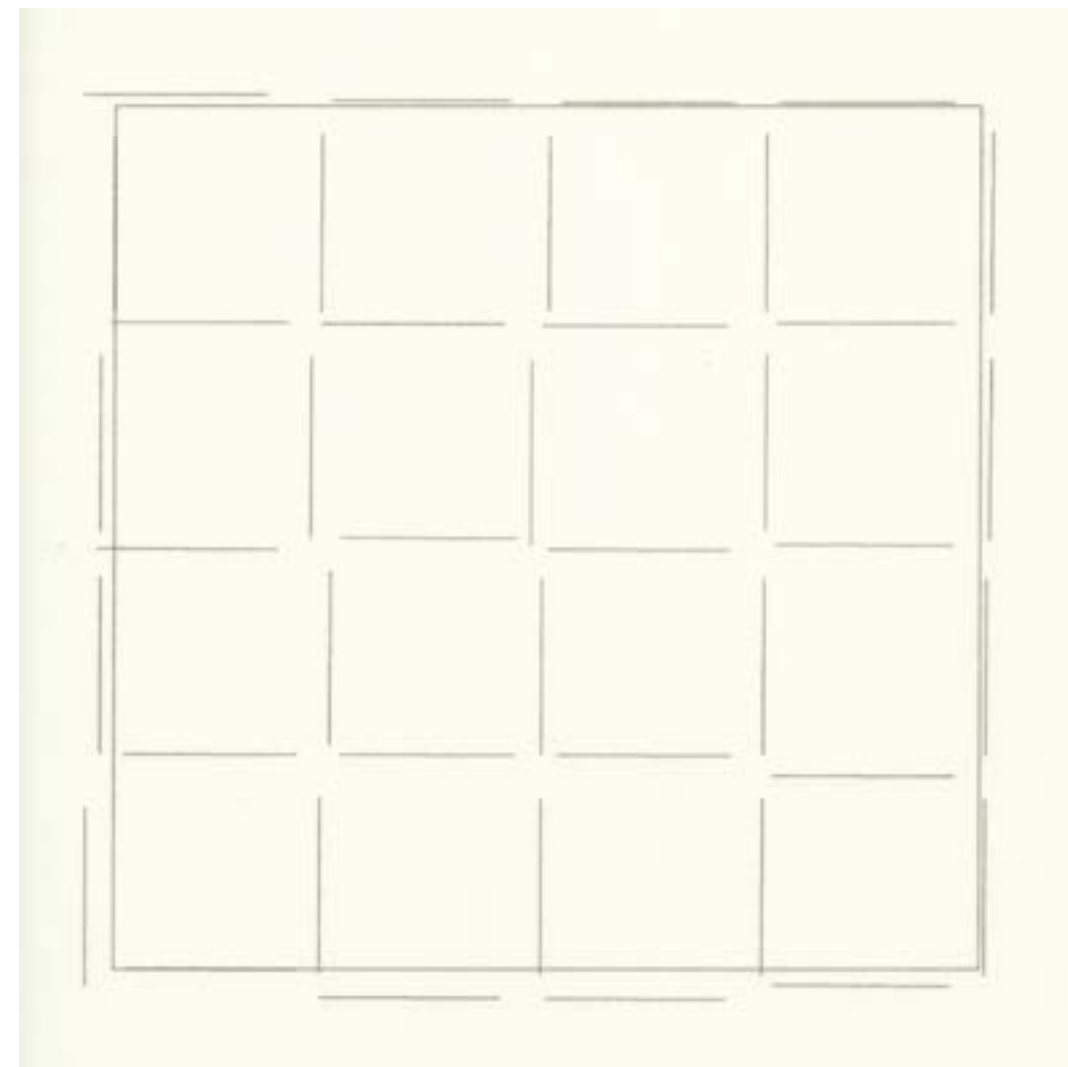
Plotter





Hans Dehlinger
SN-340_ [2011]
 72 x 102, 2011
 Rollerball Pen, Black on Paper
 Mutoh XP 500 Pen Plotter

Tony Longson
Grid View 1-4
 29 x 29 cm, 1974
 Ballpointpen on Paper
 CalComp 565 plotter





Kerry Strand

Fisherman

30 x 40 cm, 1968

Ink on Paper

Calcomp 760/502 Incremental

Plotter

Brian Reffin Smith

From West to East

6 Drawings, each 30 x 21 cm,

1988

Ink on Paper

Calcomp 84 Plotter

Computer BBC Micro Model B,

32 Kb memory



Acknowledgements

‘AESTHETICA – 50 Years of Computer Generated Art’ would not have been possible without the invaluable contributions of the skilled artists exhibited.

The DAM Gallery is deeply grateful to Horst Bartnig, Peter Beyls, Vuk Cosic, Hans Dehlinger, Manuel Felguerez, Patrick Lichty, Tony Longson, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, Manfred Mohr, Vera Molnar, Frieder Nake, Georg Nees, Casey Reas, Brian Reffin Smith, Antoine Schmitt, Sommerer & Mignonneau, Kerry Strand, Roman Verostko, Roger Vilder, Mark Wilson .

I express my sincere gratitude towards their dedication as their talented works made this exhibition a reality and great experience.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Wulf Herzogenrath, Douglas Dodds and Frieder Nake for their expertise and insightful contributions to this catalogue. Each article enables us to view the exhibits within their context and historic perspective.

Also I would like to express my gratefulness to the ‘Stiftung Deutsches Technikmuseum Berlin’, in particular to Eva Kudraß, for an original Zuse Graphomat Z 64 from 1958, the early plotter drawing machine that will be on loan to the exhibition.

Furthermore, I would like to express my thanks to Jana Lange for the great design of this catalogue and to Christine Lang for her support in managing all the bits and pieces that had to be taken care of along the way.

Wolf Lieser

Berlin, May 2015

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