CAS50 EXHIBITION

CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF THE COMPUTER ARTS SOCIETY

COMPUTER ARTS SOCIETY
British Computer Society Specialist Group

The Computer Arts Society was established in the UK in 1968 and pioneered the development of digital arts worldwide. In this exhibition we celebrate 50 years since the founding of the Society.

The exhibition features artwork by **Stephen Bell**, **Peter Beyls**, **boredomresearch**, **Daniel Brown**, **Paul Brown**, **Sean Clark**, **Ernest Edmonds**, **Sue Gollifer**, **Desmond Henry**, **William Latham**, **Andy Lomas** and **Stephen Scrivener**.

THE COMPUTER ARTS SOCIETY

The three founder members of the Society – Alan Sutcliffe, George Mallen and John Lansdown – had been involved with computing and its related concepts for some time. They knew Jasia Reichardt, the curator of **Cybernetic Serendipity** (1968) and had participated, in or advised, on aspects of the exhibition. Sutcliffe was involved with the Cybernetic Serendipity through his collaboration with composer Peter Zinovieff and Electronic Music Studios (EMS). Mallen was working with the English cybernetician Gordon Pask at Systems Research and assisted on the production of the interactive robotic work **Colloquy of Mobiles** shown at the exhibition. Although not mentioned in the catalogue credits, Reichardt knew and respected Lansdown, who from 1963, had used computing techniques in architectural design and planning.

The original idea for a society dedicated to the computer arts (which was to become the **Computer Arts Society**) was instigated by Sutcliffe at the IFIP (International Federation for Information Processing) Congress in August 1968 in Edinburgh. Sutcliffe and Zinovieff had won second prize with ZASP, their piece of computer-composed music. Members of the Congress suggested to Sutcliffe that he might like to convene a meeting of people working in a similar field whilst they were all together at the Congress, as most had not had a chance to meet like-minded persons outside their own team before. Sutcliffe collated the names of interested individuals and the group formed out of this, with the first meetings in London held in a room belonging to University College London, in or near Gower Street in September 1968. Subsequent meetings were often held at the offices of Lansdown's architectural practice (he became the Secretary with Sutcliffe the Chairman and Mallen, Treasurer).

The **Computer Arts Society** was founded to encourage the creative use of computers and to allow the exchange of information in this area. It was recognised that this was an area where there had been increasing activity, but with little formal publication of methods and results and little communication between artists in different fields (music, visual, performing arts, and so on).

computer-arts-society.com

PAGE

PAGE is the bulletin of the **Computer Arts Society**. It was first published in 1969 and was an important vehicle for communicating the Society's activities, particularly in its early years. The bulletin was first edited by auto-destructive artist Gustaz Metzger and has since been edited by Alan Sutcliffe, Dominic Boreham, Paul Brown and others.

Between 1969 and 1985 there were 52 issues of PAGE - ranging in size from one-page bulletins to full magazines. There was then a hiatus from 1985 until 2004, after which 13 additional issues have since been published. As of March 2018 a complete set of scanned copies of PAGE can be found on the **Computer Arts Society** website.

computer-arts-society.com/page

RECENT ACTIVITIES

The **Computer Arts Society** originally ran from 1968 until 1985. In 2002 the **CACHe** project at the Vasari Lab in the School of History of Art and Visual Media, Birkbeck, University of London began to digitise and catalogue the image holdings of the Society and related archives. This resulted in a re-establishment of the **Computer Arts Society** in 2004. The core archive was then acquired by the Victoria and Albert Museum and now forms part of their Computer Art Collections.

Two books, **A Computer in the Art Room: The Origins of British Computer Arts 1950-1980** (2008) by Catherine Mason and **White Heat Cold Logic: British Computer Art 1960-1980** (2009) by Paul Brown, Catherine Mason, Charlie Gere and Nicholas Lambert, have been published that detail the early history of computer art, including the early CAS period.

A follow-up project entitled **Computer Art and Technocultures**, based jointly at Birkbeck and the Victoria and Albert Museum ran from December 2009 until April 2010. This project ran a symposium, **Ideas Before Their Time**, at the British Computer Society, and a two-day conference, **Decoding the Digital**, at the V&A on 4th-5th February 2010.

Since re-forming in 2004, the **Computer Arts Society** has run an extensive speaker programme from its base at the **British Computer Society** in London, as well as from other London venues, and more recently in Leicester.

The Society also runs the annual **Electronic Visualisation & the Arts** (EVA) conference in London. Through its status as a Specialist Group of the **British Computer Society** it is regularly able to support exhibitions and other computer art activities throughout the year.

The Computer Arts Society is currently creating an on-line archive of its activities over the past 50 years. Work in progress can be seen on the CAS website.

THE CAS50 COLLECTION

As part of its 50-years celebration, the **Computer Arts Society** agreed to support an exhibition of artwork from artists who have been associated with the Society. It was planned that this exhibition would be first shown in Leicester in Summer 2018 and then tour elsewhere over the following year.

Support for the exhibition from the artists invited has been such that the project is now being expanded to become the **CAS50 Collection**. This will be a collection of high-quality computer artworks, donated by the artists, that we intend to develop over the coming years and ultimately donate to a suitable museum or gallery.

The collection is currently being curated by Sean Clark of Interact Digital Arts in Leicester, who has donated much of his own collection or artworks to the project. As the collection grows, with more artists and collectors becoming involved, we hope to establish a unique and accessible resource for people interested in digital and computer-based art.

The current artists in the collection – and whose work is being shown here – are **Stephen Bell**, **Peter Beyls**, **boredomresearch**, **Daniel Brown**, **Paul Brown**, **Sean Clark**, **Ernest Edmonds**, **Sue Gollifer**, **Desmond Henry**, **William Latham**, **Andy Lomas** and **Stephen Scrivener**. Many of the artists featured are in the V&A collection and are Lumen Prize winners.

The CAS website includes detailed biographies and background information about the artists and their work.

computer-arts-society.com/cas50-collection

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This exhibition would not have been possible without the support of the **British Computer Society**, **Interact Digital Arts**, the **LCB Depot Lightbox Gallery**, **Nicholas Lambert** (Chair) and **Paul Brown** (Treasurer) of the **Computer Arts Society** and, of course, the participating artists.

Thanks also to A&G Framers, WhoArtNow printers, Stephen Lynch and Carise ZM.

Additional information about the CAS50 programme and the CAS50 Collection can be found on the CAS website.

computer-arts-society.com/cas50

Documentary materials can be found on the Interact Digital Arts website.

interactdigitalarts.uk/cas50

The CAS is a Specialist Group of the British Computer Society.