

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](http://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 Gustav Metzger and has since been edited by Alan Sutcliffe, Dominic Boreham, Paul Brown and others.

**PAGE** 1 SIXPENCE APRIL 1969  
BULLETIN OF THE COMPUTER ARTS SOCIETY  
A SPECIALIST GROUP OF THE BRITISH COMPUTER SOCIETY

**COMPUTER ARTS SOCIETY**

**PUBLIC MEETINGS**  
Nash House Cinema The Mall London SW 1  
Sundays at 7.30 pm  
4 May How to write a Computer Poem  
Robin Shirley explains  
With Spike Hawkins  
1 June To be announced  
20 June To be announced  
Tickets 7/6 (Members 5/-)  
Obtainable at door or in advance from  
Dorothy Lansdown 50/51 Russell Square  
London WC1 - 01-580 2410

**SOCIETY MEETINGS**  
British Computer Society  
23 Dorset Square London NW 1  
Wednesdays at 6.30 pm  
23 April EVENT ONE Autopsy  
A discussion of the comments  
on EVENT ONE and the pattern  
of future events  
28 May To be announced  
18 June To be announced

Computer Arts Society members and guests  
only. No charge.

PAGE will print a list of exhibitions conferences  
events in the field of computer art graphics design.  
Organisers in any part of the world are invited to  
inform the Editor.

PAGE is available to libraries and institutions.  
Annual subscription £1 (3/6). Order from Alan  
Sutcliffe.

Books periodicals off-prints reviews and news  
items relevant to the work of the Society are  
welcomed for the library now being established.  
Please send material to John Lansdown.

The Computer Arts Society can recommend speakers  
on many aspects of the creative application of  
computers in the pure and applied arts and for  
introductions to computers and programming.  
Write to the Secretary:  
R. John Lansdown 50/51 Russell Square  
London WC1

The Committee of the Computer Arts Society wish  
to thank the many individuals and organisations who  
helped to make EVENT ONE a technical and  
artistic success.

Copies of the 23 page programme for EVENT ONE  
containing articles graphics etc. can be obtained  
from Alan Sutcliffe. Price (post inclusive)  
3/6 (£.50).

**PUBLICITY**  
If you have access to a notice board please pin up  
this bulletin or circulate it to those who may be  
interested.

A section of the stage during EVENT ONE  
Phot: Peter Hunt

A conference on the use of computers as an aid to  
design will take place at the University of Southampton  
15-18 April 1969. The conference is organised by  
the Institution of Electrical Engineers.

A one-day symposium on computer graphics arranged  
by the Association for Computing Machinery takes  
place at Brunel University 25 April 1969.

'Computers and Visual Research'. The Gallery of  
Contemporary Art Zagreb has arranged an inter-  
national exhibition, competition, and symposium under  
this title. The symposium will be held 5 - 7 May.  
The exhibition opens 5 May 1969 and ends in August.  
For details write to Dr. Boris Kelemen galerija  
savremene umjetnosti Katerinina trg 2 Zagreb  
Yugoslavia.

The Gallery of Contemporary Art Zagreb launched  
an important international movement 'New Tendencies'  
with the exhibitions 'NT 1' (Zagreb 1961) 'NT 2'  
(Zagreb Venice Ljubljana 1963) 'NT 3' (Zagreb 1965).  
Concurrently with 'Computers and Visual Research'  
the Gallery will hold the exhibition 'New Tendencies 4'  
which, as well as having recent work by artists  
associated with NT, will be in the nature of a  
retrospective.

Computer Graphics 70, Second International Sym-  
posium 14 - 16 April 1970. Papers are being invited.  
In combination with Symposium CG 70 International  
Exhibition is announced as 'the greatest ever  
Computer Graphic event'. Details from the  
organizer; R.D. Parslow Computer Department  
Brunel University Uxbridge Middlesex.



**PLANS FOR THE SOCIETY**

Following the success of EVENT ONE, the  
Society is planning a full programme of activities.  
The first of these are detailed at the head of this  
issue.

**Meetings**  
A series of three public lectures in the Nash  
House Cinema will show some of the ways that  
computers can be used in the arts. No knowledge  
of computers will be assumed, and the intention  
is to impart information rather than general views.

Three meetings of the British Computer Society  
will allow new members to see how the Society  
should develop, discuss our attitudes to other  
technologies in the arts, and the aesthetics of  
computer art.

Based on these, a full programme of public and  
Society meetings will be arranged for 1969 - 70,  
beginning in September.

**Workshop**  
A major aim of the Society is to found a permanent  
workshop having computing facilities, where co-  
operative projects can be undertaken and discussions  
carried on in a working atmosphere. As a test-bed,  
we are hoping to arrange a week-end workshop at  
Brunel University sometime during June.

**Joint Presentations**  
We are being invited increasingly to take part in  
exhibitions and conferences organised by others.  
This is welcome not only as relieving us of some  
of the organisational work, but more important as  
allowing the use of computers in the arts to be seen  
as part of the ever more overlapping areas of arts,  
technology and science.

**EVENT TWO**  
Initial thoughts are now being gathered for the  
Society's second main event, to be held towards  
the end of 1969.

**AIMS AND MEMBERSHIP**  
The aims of the Society are to encourage the creative  
use of computers in the arts and allow the exchange  
of information in this area.

Membership is open to all at £1 (£.3) per year  
(students half-price). Members are entitled to  
reduced prices for all the Society's public meetings,  
and to a copy of PAGE.

The Society has the status of a specialist group of  
the British Computer Society, but membership of the  
two Societies is independent.

On all matters of information, circulation and  
membership, write to the Chairman:  
Alan Sutcliffe International Computers Limited  
Brandon House Bracknell Berkshire

**OPINION**

The Computer Arts Society's EVENT ONE at the  
Royal College of Arts 29 - 30 March 1969, attracted  
700 visitors. The key to the impact and success of  
EVENT ONE lies in the computer-linked equipment  
presented. A PDP-7 computer with visual display  
unit (Imperial College); 2 Teletype terminals plus  
graph plotter (Tring Shoring Limited); 2 Teletype  
terminals and graph plotter (S.E.I.S. Limited); a  
telephone link to Peter Zinoviatff's PDP-8: the  
Visual Display Unit by International Computers  
Limited.

The introduction of this working equipment within a  
fine art context represents a revolution in the  
British art world. After years of theoretical  
work, and isolated contacts with technology,  
here was the major COLLECTIVE step forward.  
It is important to remember that the men who with  
exceptional skill and energy engineered this, are  
primarily professionals in the field of computing  
and architecture.

The event was apprehended by the visitor and  
participant as a continuum of activity and sound.  
Having passed Brown Hatcher's programmed  
sculpture that was being erected in the foyer  
throughout the week-end, and the few exhibits at  
the entrance to the Culterkin Hall, the visitor  
was immediately caught up with the terminals, and  
the PDP-7 under the charge of Chris Jones, whose  
display was often surrounded by up to 15 people  
watching the light-pen in use.

The central area was used for performances and  
discussions. Moving beyond this, one entered the  
screened-off stage. Here more visitors, aided by  
technicians, were working terminals and plotter,  
whilst the light structures including Adrian Nutbeam's  
Object-Text-Light Interval, and The Folder by  
John Bucklow, were seen (and heard) at their best  
in the occasionally darkened space. Some of the  
performances suffered from sounds carried across  
the hall, but this mobility of sound and people added  
to the excitement and sense of integration. Films  
made by computers, or dealing with the subject, were  
screened in the lecture theatre in three daily sessions.  
Gustav Metzger.

Extract from programme for EVENT ONE describing  
Philip Hodgetts's light/sound structure illustrated  
overleaf.

\* Light bulbs are situated at selected nodes in a three-  
dimensional cubic lattice. Selective illumination of  
sets of these lights plots out planes and patterns in this  
3-D space. A mechanism for sequencing the illumina-  
tion of lights has been built and used so that changing  
patterns and transformations of patterns can be ob-  
served. This device embodies a fixed sequence of  
transformations.

The current experiment involves a tape reading  
mechanism and a computer terminal. Required se-  
quences can be programmed for the computer and  
output on to punched tape. The tape is then used to  
drive the sculpture via the tape reader. This will  
enable the sculptor to develop and control sequences  
more easily.

PAGE is a publication of the Computer Arts Society,  
appearing 8 times a year. All views are those of  
the individual contributors. On all editorial matters  
(not circulation) write to the Editor:  
Gustav Metzger BM/Box 151 London WC1

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](http://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 of 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](http://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](http://computer-arts-society.com/cas50)

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

[interactdigitalarts.uk/cas50](http://interactdigitalarts.uk/cas50)

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

