

HOW QUANTEL'S PAINTBOX CHANGED OUR WORLD

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE



© Keith Haring Foundation. Courtesy of Andrea De Gioia/Young B&V

HOW QUANTEL'S PAINTBOX

CHANGED OUR WORLD

THE COMPUTER ARTS SOCIETY

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Curated by Adrian Wilson

Designed by Kim Mannes-Abbott

Produced by Sean Clark

Intro | The Origin of the Paintbox

PRN Kellar 2023

There is no doubt in my mind that Paintbox was the vision of Richard Taylor, Quantel's Managing Director. What he saw was a machine which real artists would use to create their works of art directly in digital space. This was the agenda for a legendary meeting, chaired by Richard himself, in the late 1970s. At this time, there had been attempts by several companies, including Micro Consultants, then Quantel's parent company, to design a graphics machine for television use. They all suffered from the inherent failings of 8-bit false colour machines, and at that meeting it was well understood that such a machine could fundamentally not realise Richard's vision. Uniquely at that time, we understood that a machine with three or more separate full framestores could be commercially viable, if the value justified the cost. We had already launched the DLS 6000, a digital library system, which had a new and outstanding control system to exploit its multiple framestores for both preview and on-air transitions. What we did not have, before that meeting, was a mechanism for drawing in our three full framestores in a naturally smooth way, without the binary jagged edges which would be fatal to real artists' use. At this point, we suddenly, collectively, realised that there was a way to achieve this: by repeatedly blending the existing picture with the correct brush shape, the correct colour, and the correct intensity, at the correct position, rate and spacing, it was possible to create exactly the result which an artist would achieve. Looking ahead, this mechanism – brilliantly implemented in the first instance by George Catlow and Tony Searby – became and remained the fundamental genius inside Paintbox. There were other inventions – the pressure-sensitive pen ('just like a real paintbrush') and the stencil mechanism ('Letraset which never runs out of E') – but it was all built on the insight of this meeting. To me, it seemed that we had suddenly found an unimaginably beautiful jewel, and I spent the rest of the day admiring it.

Intro | The Paintbox Experience

Keith Haring 1989

Every time I use a graphic paintbox, I rethink the whole concept of an "image." The computer has totally changed the whole concept of what composes and defines a "picture space." The whole relation between the creator and the viewer has changed. The relationship between the physical gesture of drawing and the resultant image has changed. It is totally abstract now, with very little relation to the original "act" of drawing or painting. Images can be moved, stretched, multiplied, shrunk, enlarged, recolored, altered, rotated, flipped, digitized, edited, refined and obliterated in fractions of a second. The image has been reduced to electronic information (programmable) that is totally lucid and malleable.

Illusion is everything. This paintbox I was using in Rome could mix colors just like a palette as well as pick up colors from the photos and duplicate them. It was just like mixing paint, except no mess. It's only electrons and light. I did some simple animations also. Really great. My style of drawing is very adaptable to this technology. It's really primitive high-tech.

It has totally revolutionized the notion of *art* and the image - why hasn't anyone noticed?

Intro | The Paintbox Owner

Adrian Wilson 2023

The 1981 Quantel Paintbox not only changed my life, it transformed the world by bringing digital images into every home via news & weather graphics, titles, logos, plus countless music videos and TV adverts. We were astounded by its revolutionary digital graphics, typography and video effects, all of us learning that nothing you see on a screen is in fact real. The Paintbox taught us the aesthetics, visual language and the fake news of our digital age, a decade before Photoshop or the internet existed. The Paintbox was the first user-friendly digital studio but at \$250,000 it was out of reach of most artists, so Quantel donated them to art colleges, invited artists to be involved in its development and ran a paid apprentice scheme for emerging artists who wanted to learn highly sought after creative digital skills. A Paintbox software engineer told me his proudest achievement was that his work enabled so many artists' successful careers and, being paid \$500 an hour in 1986, that included mine.

Despite global dominance and Paintbox being the verb for digital manipulation, Silicon Valley would take over with its unelegantly designed but far cheaper PC/Mac business model. Quantel predate Apple and the Paintbox predates Adobe but both have been Photoshopped out of history for too long. As an original artist who owns one of the last Paintboxes, plus has built up a large archive of artwork and contacts over the last thirty eight years, it has been my honor to curate this, first group exhibition of Paintbox Art on the 50th Anniversary of Quantel. Thanks to the support of the creatives, academics and historians who made this show possible, the Paintbox's important role in art, digital and cultural history is finally being noticed.

Intro | The Paintbox Designer

Kim Mannes-Abbott 2023

Quantel's Paintbox revolutionized the 80s, opening up a creative Pandora's Box for graphic designers, whose clients and TV audiences craved to see the latest digital tricks delivered directly to their living rooms. In the same way that modern digital trends such as Snapchat bunny ears, NFTs and AI-generated images engage people today, Paintbox graphics amazed audiences with logos that would change from chrome to marble, turn 3D, and then fly around the screen.

As a design student, the Paintbox was my ultimate creative tool. I taught myself how to use it and graduated with a unique portfolio of Paintbox mixed media Art and Graphic work. This led me on an incredible adventure; developing the graphic language and animations for the MTV Europe launch, travelling the world for Quantel to demonstrate the full potential of Paintbox, working closely with their R&D department to help develop functions such as the stencil and cut & paste, as well as constantly pushing boundaries with my personal digital work. In 1994 I was given the ultimate compliment when my digital self-portrait was selected for the front cover of the iconic book *Paintboxed!*, which showcased the world's best Paintbox art and design.

Four decades on, I run a Design and Branding agency in Amsterdam, feeling forever indebted to the Paintbox and privileged to have been part of the exciting transformation from Letraset to pixels. Designing this landmark exhibition and catalogue is an expression of my extreme gratitude and forty-year love for Quantel's Paintbox.

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01 | Jennifer Bartlett

Untitled 1986 - 35mm Paintbox output slide

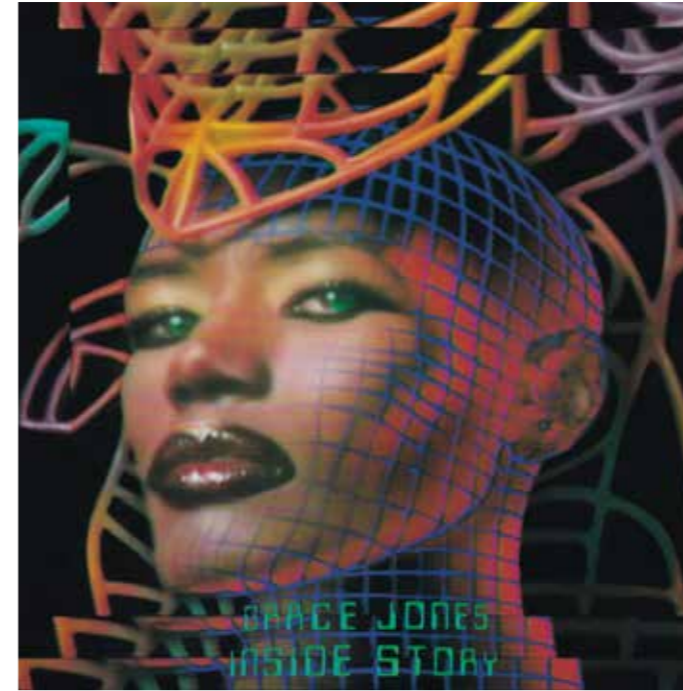
Bartlett found the interesting thing about the Paintbox was to “work for two days on a series of drawings which do not exist ... There were never any **real** drawings even though they had the **appearance** of real drawings”- the same philosophical and artistic quandary we have about digital images today.



02 | Richard Bernstein

Grace Jones Album Cover 1986 - Album cover & dust sleeve scans

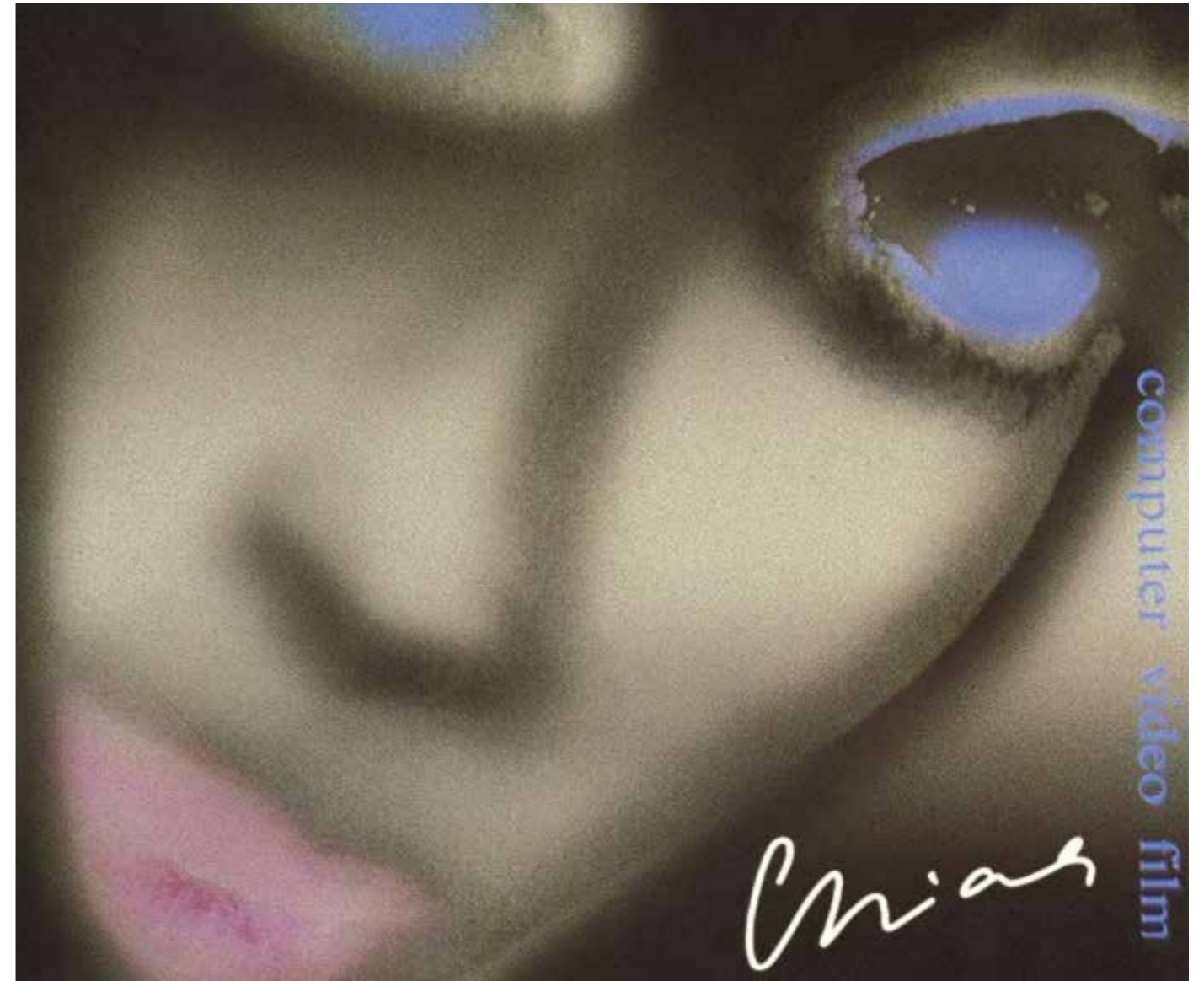
Bernstein was the cover artist and logo designer of Andy Warhol's Interview magazine but following two iconic Paintbox record covers for Grace Jones, Bernstein was the first artist to have a solo show of Paintbox art, curated by Joan Agajanian Quinn, at Cornerstone Gallery, Beverley Hills in 1991.



03 | Chiara Boeri

Blue Dream 1984 - Digital file

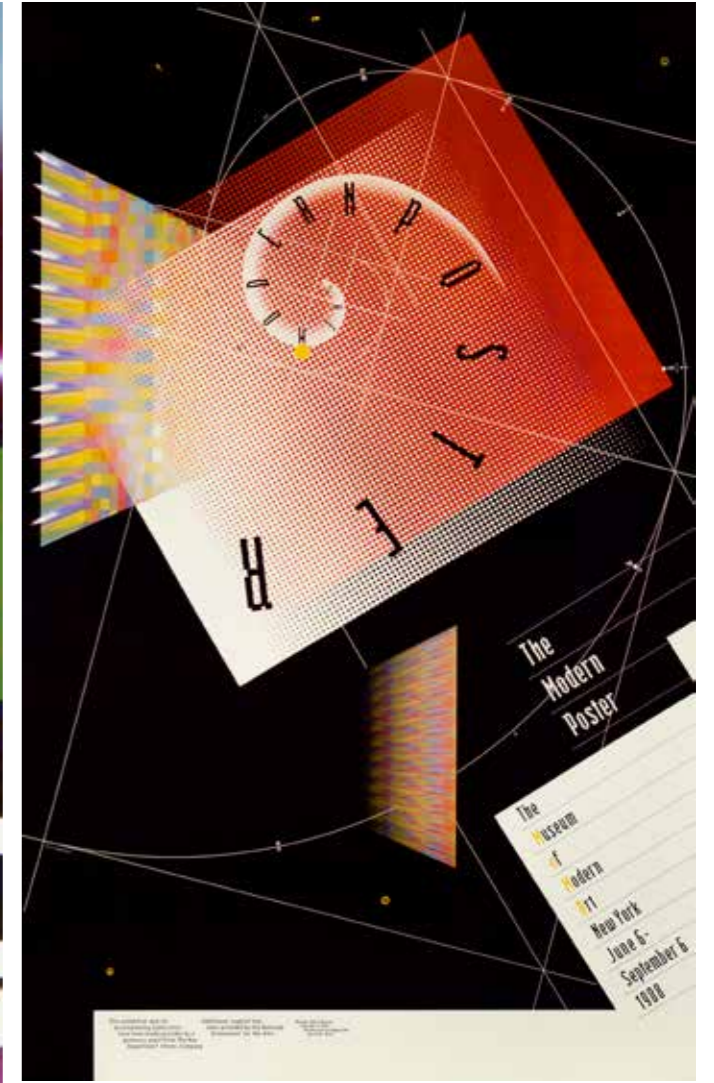
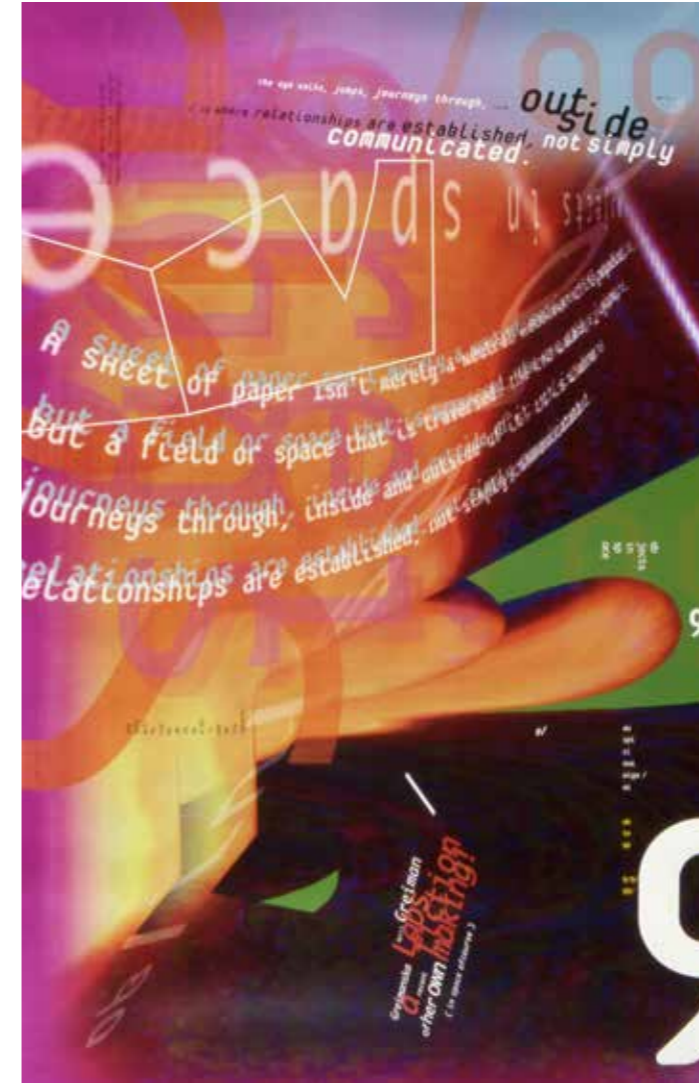
Selected for the Siggraph Art Show over a record 20 years. An important 1960's activist against racism while in the US, Boeri and her husband Cesare Massarenti left for Paris and set up CVF, their 'Digital House of Medici', with France's first Paintbox in 1983.



04 | April Greiman

Posters for MoMA and AIGA 1988 - Poster scans

One of USA's most celebrated designers, April Greiman describes herself as a 'transmedia Artist' and her work defined both the New Wave style and Postmodern Design. Transitioning to Apple, Greiman recalled that "The Mac seemed like it mimicked everything the high-end Paintboxes could do."



05 | Richard Hamilton

Just what is it that makes today's homes so different? 1992 - Scan of digital print

Richard Hamilton was so impressed with the Paintbox in 1986, that he bought one for his studio. From conceptualizing paintings now in the Tate Modern, to using it to update his classic 50's pop art interior, Hamilton completely immersed himself in the Paintbox's creative potential.



06 | Keith Haring

Pisa 1989 - Paintbox digital output file

A few months before his untimely death, Haring flew to Rome just to work on a Paintbox. Intrigued by computer's impact on art and culture throughout his life, Haring excitedly wrote about the prescient changes that the Paintbox heralded in his Journal, yet was surprised " ..why hasn't anyone noticed?"



07 | David Hockney

Celia Birtwell 1985 - 35mm Paintbox output slide

Hockney spent eight hours on the Paintbox at Quantel in June 1985, recording the pilot for the 'Painting With Light' series, shown on the BBC in 1987. This unseen portrait of Hockney's muse, Celia Birtwell, was never broadcast but was fortunately rescued after one of Quantel's many takeover clearouts.



08 | Martin Holbrook

Spitfire 1981/82 - Paintbox digital output file

One of the earliest known pieces of Paintbox art is by the artist employed by Quantel to design the user-friendly UI Paintbox menu and launch it in 1981. Extracted from an original Quantel 8 inch floppy disk, Holbrook described it as being "executed in a matter of 20-25 minutes from scratch, with no reference"



09 | Ellen & Lynda Kahn TwinArt

Double Date 1984 - 35mm Paintbox output slide

Ellen and Lynda Kahn AKA TwinArt, were among the first artists to use the Paintbox in 1982. The Emmy Award-winning multi-disciplinary artists have collaborated with Nam June Paik, worked with MTV and their art has been exhibited in The Whitney, The Met, Centre Pompidou and ICA, London.



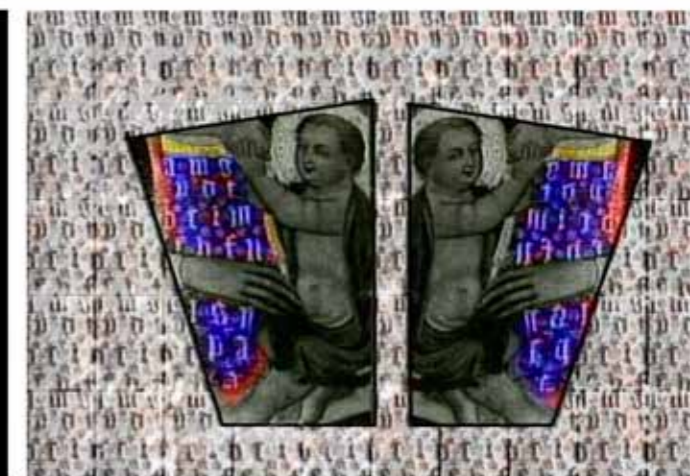
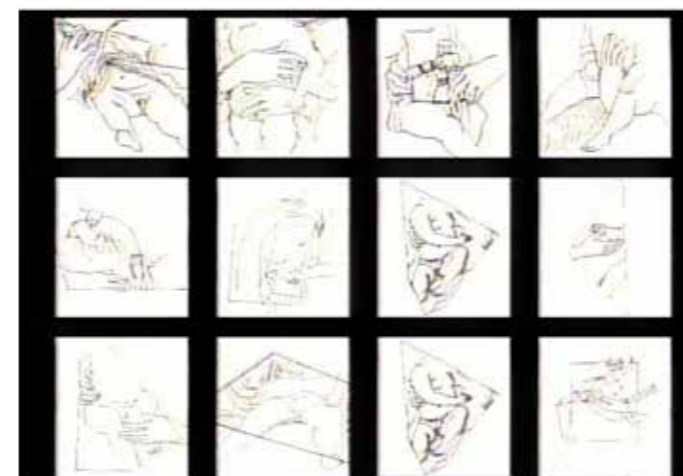
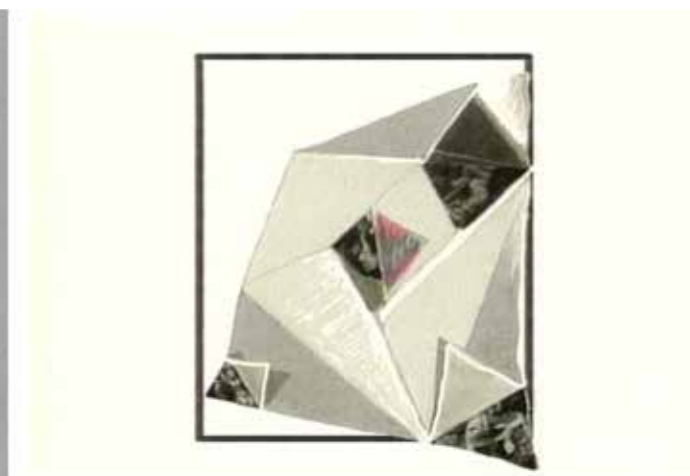
10 | Lea Lubin

Untitled 1985 - Video screenshot

Argentinian-French painter, sculptor and performance artist, whose work is in MoMA and Centre Pompidou. Lea Lubin created these on Paintbox for the '6 Peintres Sur Ordinateur' video, commissioned by the French Ministry of Culture in 1985 and produced at Computer Video Film's studio in Paris.

Quand disparaîtra l'habitude
de la conscience de voir dans
les tableaux la représentation
de petits coins de la nature,
de madones ou de Venus
impudiques, alors seulement
nous verrons l'oeuvre picturale.

K. Malevitch — 1915.



11 | Kim Mannes-Abbott

Untitled 1992 - Scan of digital print

Mannes-Abbott started working with Paintbox in 1984. Soon after, she won the ICA New Contemporaries competition with a pioneering series combining Paintbox and mixed media. In 1987, she developed the iconic Paintbox graphic language for MTV Europe's launch. Her work has been featured in several exhibitions and graced the cover of the Paintboxed! book. Mannes-Abbott is currently living and working in Amsterdam as a Designer & Artist.



12 | Sidney Nolan

A Sculpture for Sydney Harbour 1986 - Medium format Paintbox output slide

Edited out of the BBC's Painting With Light before this artwork was complete, it was rescued from Quantel's discarded archives and is being shown for the first time. Nolan was at first assisted by Martin Holbrook but produced many pieces himself on the Paintbox, preserved in The Sidney Nolan Trust archive.



13 | Stephen Partridge

The Sounds of These Words 1990 - Video screenshot

Renowned video artist Partridge was born in Leicester, Studied at the RCA and established The Television Workshop at Duncan of Jordanstone College with a Paintbox donated by Quantel in 1984. His famous 'Monitor' is in Tate London. From Channel 4's TV 'Interventions' series, this video still shows how Partridge used the Paintbox to interplay the spoken word and animated text.



14 | Kiki Picasso

Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Winnie Mandela 1984 - 35mm Paintbox output slide

Kiki Picasso AKA Christian Chapiron embraced the Paintbox possibly more than any other artist, investing in one himself after using one at CVF in Paris. His distinctive style was well-suited to the technology and his work ranged from fine art pieces to music videos for artists such as Boy George.



15 | Larry Rivers

Portrait of Green Gartside 1986 - Medium format Paintbox output slide

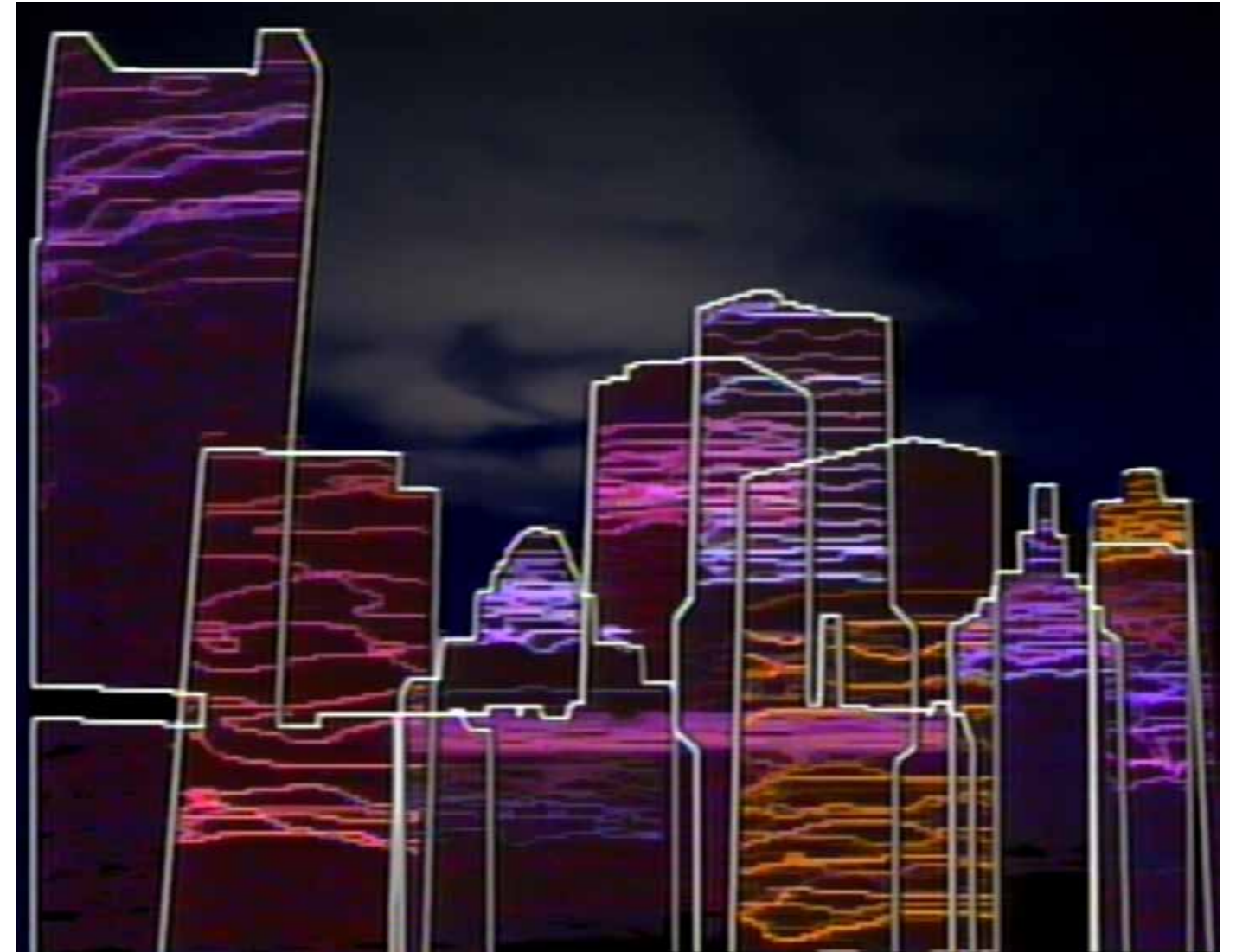
Creative polymath, Larry Rivers, spent time becoming familiar with the Paintbox at NBC's studios in New York before flying to Quantel in 1986 to create this digital portrait of Scritti Politti's lead singer, Green Gartside on what he described as a new creative toy that gave him a thrill.



16 | John Sanborn & Dean Winkler

Renaissance 1984 - Video screenshot

Sanborn and Winkler are two of the best known digital video art pioneers, with work in MoMA, Centre Pompidou and the Whitney Museum. Commissioned by the Computer Museum in Boston, Renaissance used the Paintbox to transform the skyline of Boston Harbor into a futuristic cityscape.



17 | Mechteld Schmidt Feist

Mensch + Schmidt Feist, No 88-1 1988 - Video screenshot

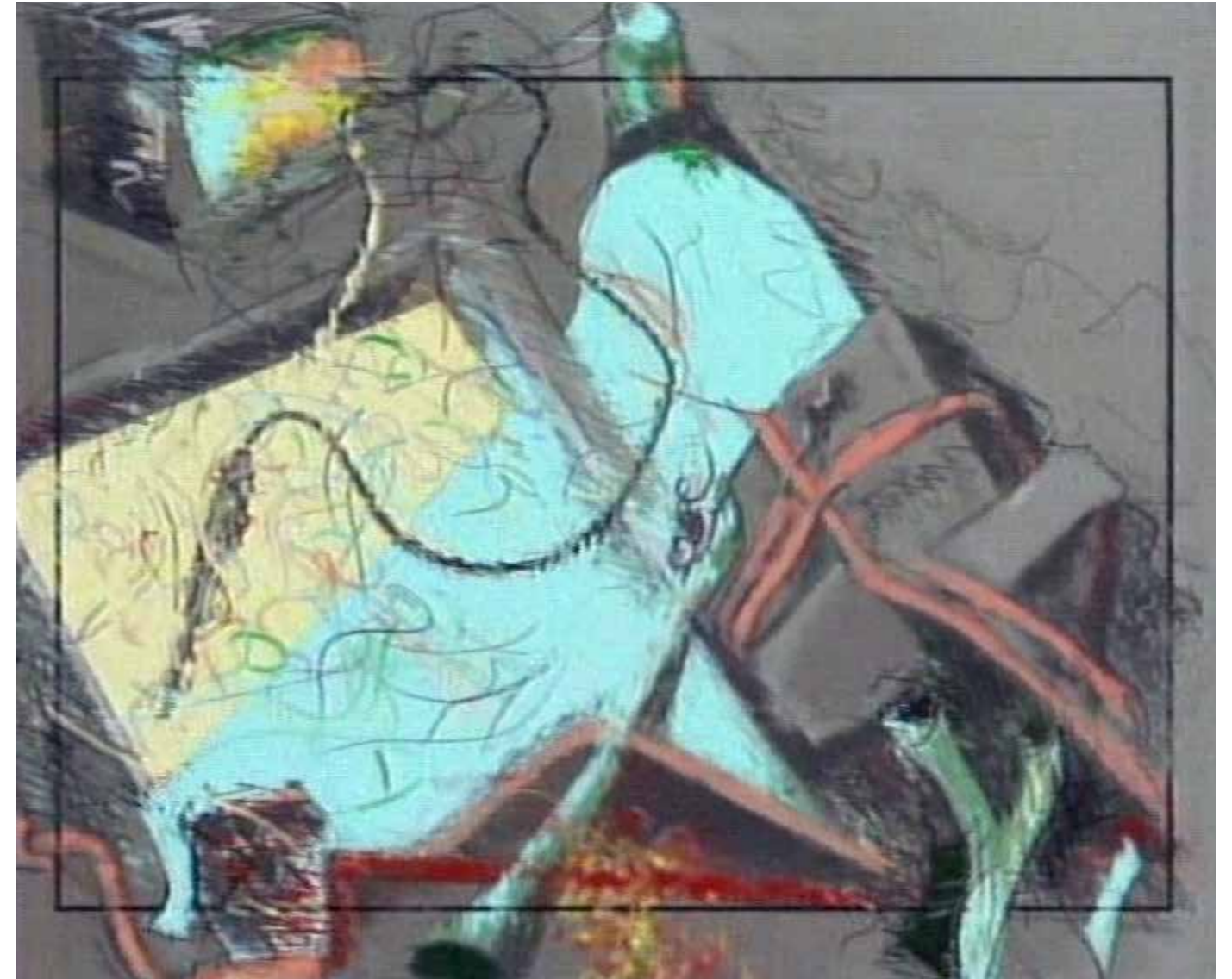
Artist, Animator, long-standing SIGGRAPH NY Board Member and NYU's Professor of Digital Communications & Media for 20 years, Mechthild's experimental Paintbox work, such as this from 1988, was an important part of her incredible digital art career.



18 | Hervé Télémaque

Untitled 1985 - Video screenshot

Haitian surrealist painter Hervé Télémaque painted this on Paintbox for the near impossible-to-find, '6 Peintres Sur Ordinateur' video, commissioned by The French Ministry of Culture and created at CV's studio in 1985.



19 | Adrian Wilson

New Photography 1986 - 35mm Paintbox output slide

Wilson is considered the first photographer to specialize in the digital manipulation of photographs, using Quantel's paint system. Images we now call 'photoshopped' were originally referred to as 'paintboxed' and in 1986, Wilson recognized that Paintbox heralded the start of a new photography era.



20 | Brandon Wisecarver

Paintbox Self-Portrait #1 2023 - Paintbox digital output file

New York based Wisecarver is a cutting-edge VR digital painter, posting his process and final pieces on TikTok. Even though the Paintbox was launched years before he was born, he found the intuitive UI had very familiar features found in current creative beta software menus.



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