WRITING NEW CODES

Waldemar Cordeiro
Robert Mallary
Vera Molnár

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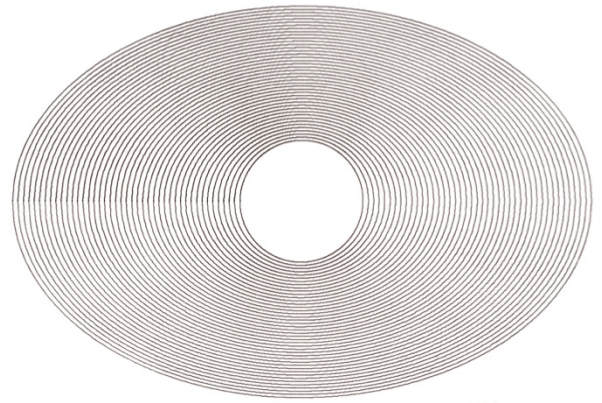
The computer like any tool or machine, extends human capabilities. But it is unique in that it extends the power of the mind as well as the hand - Robert Mallary

'Writing New Codes' presents three major pioneers of computer art – Waldemar Cordeiro (b. 1925 Rome, Italy – d. 1973 São Paulo, Brazil), Robert Mallary (b. 1917 Toledo, USA – d. 1997 Northampton, USA) and Vera Molnár (b.1924 Budapest, Hungary) from three different corners of the globe with early computer art from 1969 – 1977. Although each has an original style and distinctive approach, influenced by aspects of Constructivism, Op Art, Systems Art and Conceptualism and Concrete art, with these works can be seen a similar modernist aesthetic and common interest in exploiting the unique capabilities inherent in the computer. Artists have always been early adopters of new technology, but the complexity and rarity of computers meant that any art form based around them was bound to be a particularly specialised branch of modernism.

Computer art is an historical term to describe work made with or through the agency of a digital computer predominately as a tool but also as a material, method or concept from around the early-1960s onward, when such technology began to become available to artists. The writing of an algorithm, a step-by-step procedure fed into the computer on punched cards or paper tape would produce lines (visible on an oscilloscope or CRT screen if one was available), which could be output to a plotter. Plotters conveyed the image direct to paper via a moving pen, felt-tip or pencil. Due to their very nature, plotter drawings from this pioneering period are fairly rare today.

2018 marks the 50th anniversary celebrations of *Cybernetic Serendipity*; the now legendary exhibition of 1968 held at London's Institute of Contemporary Arts which featured work by both Mallary and Molnár - the first comprehensive international exhibition in Britain devoted to exploring and celebrating the relationship between new computing technology and the arts. Exhibited there was probably the first sculpture created via computer, Robert Mallary's sculpture *Quad I*; (*Quad 3* from the same series will be exhibited here) modelled with plotter print-outs of drawings. In Brazil, Waldemar Cordeiro foresaw great possibilities for computers and communication and believed the computer could be an agent for positive social change and even lead to greater democratisation of art.

In recent years there has been interest in rediscovering hitherto overlooked aspects of modernism and increasingly, exhibitions featuring digital art are being mounted at major institutions around the world such as at MOMA New York this year; *Thinking Machines: Art and Design in the Computer Age, 1959–1989*, which included work by Cordeiro and Molnár; *Artistes & Robots* at the Grand Palais, Paris including Molnár. Forthcoming major shows include Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) and this year Victoria & Albert Museum opens *Chance and Control: Art in the Age of Computers*, to celebrate both their collection and the anniversary of *Cybernetic Serendipity*, featuring Cordeiro, Mallary and Molnár works from the permanent collection.