

MICROCOMPUTER AS COLLEGE ARTIST'S APPRENTICE

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The slide presentation is an overview of the early efforts of art faculty in a liberal arts college to examine the versatility and appropriateness of the microcomputer as a fine artist's apprentice. Information is included from the College Artists and the Computer Symposium that was hosted by Skidmore College last November with financial assistance from the EXXON Educational Foundation.

A short history is provided of the educational and artistic changes that have happened since the advent of the microcomputer. Specific examples of computer assisted instruction in teaching the elements of art and design are discussed as well as aesthetic considerations in using the microcomputer for creating digital prints.

1.0 FINE ARTS CURRICULUM

Prior to the end of the sophomore year, art students complete the sequence of foundation level courses before concentrating in a studio area. The sequence consists of a year each of drawing, painting, art history survey, and two and three-dimensional design. The attitude presented to the students is that the computer is just one technology among many technologies used by artists to create art. The electronic medium does not mimic drawing but rather offers another art technology for mark-making with its own distinctive visual qualities and limitations. The student makes artistic decisions as to matching medium with ideas to be expressed. Since we are living in a technological society it seems appropriate to provide information on the new technologies to art students. A student in a foundation level drawing course should be given an opportunity to accumulate and test a repertoire of drawing strategies, including the electronic stroke, that can later be called upon in advance studios or independent studies.

1.1 UTILITARIAN USE

The introduction of the microcomputer has had a curricular impact in the areas of weaving, design, and printmaking. The Art Department currently has an Atari microcomputer with weaving software interfaced to a Macomber loom, two Apple IIe microcomputers available to students for independent study, and makes use of several MacIntosh systems in the library microcomputer lab. Various peripherals are attached to

the microcomputers including the Thunderscan infrared camera that assist in the creation of graphic images.

1.2 AESTHETIC USE

In addition to using the microcomputer as an artist's apprentice, the mark-making characteristics of the new medium is investigated. The Imagewriter printer when interfaced to the MacIntosh becomes a new type of electronic mark-maker. Students explore the tool to find out what it can do well and what are the unique qualities. As images are brought onto the screen, manipulated, and printed, the conception for the picture changes as the imagery is developed. This method of creating is compatible with the storage and retrieval capability of the computer. The computer memory in this instance is not a static record but an integral part of an active system.

2.0 REMARKS

Artists generally still have reservations over the use of the computer but are beginning to realize what computer art pioneer Robert Mallery is quoted as saying in the article, "The Electronic Palette," by Paul Gardner, February 1985, Art News, "Creative decisions on a computer are just as hard as with paint and canvas." Art department faculty are open to exploring the versatility of the new electronic medium and its appropriateness within the context of a liberal arts college.

3.0 REFERENCES

Gardner, Paul, "The Electronic Palette," Art News, February 1985, pp. 66-73.