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## “Computer Art in the Mainstream”: How the Venice Biennale Responded to the Historisation of Computer Art in the 1980s

Working for the Computer Art & Technocultures project has given me the opportunity to analyse and research the material left by American art historian and independent curator Patric Prince to the V&A. This experience also has allowed me to connect this research to my personal interest in computer art and the Venice Biennale.

This paper investigates the main points of Patric Prince's article “*Computer art in the mainstream*” written for the 1986 SIGGRAPH catalogue. How do these points connect to the Venice Biennale's approach to computer art in the 80s?

The mid 1980s have witnessed the first genuine attempt of historisation of computer art. A seminal example is given by the major retrospective of computer art organised by Patric Prince for SIGGRAPH in 1986. The ACM/SIGGRAPH '86 was a travelling art show connected to the SIGGRAPH Conference that took place at the Convention Centre in Dallas. Patric Prince, chair of the 1986 SIGGRAPH exhibition, chose that year as a historical turning point to celebrate the 25th anniversary of computer art. To mark this anniversary Prince invited most computer art pioneers to present their works. The exhibition featured a total of 450 works and included 6 hours of animations, two projected installations and 18 interactive and online works. Among the artists participating to the show were Manuel Barbadillo, Charles Csuri, Billy Culver, Jeremy Gardiner, Kenneth Knowlton, Masao Komura, Ben Laposky, Manfred Mohr, Vera Molnar, and Frieder Nake. A lecture presented at the Dallas Art Museum titled “*Computer Art in the Mainstream*” was presented by Patric Prince and artists Tony Longston and Barbara Nessim.

The historisation of computer art in the mid 1980s can be seen as an essential factor that helped making computer art ‘safe’. This allowed the acceptance of computer art in conservative art institutions worldwide, particularly the Venice Biennale. How did the Biennale respond to these circumstances, in a decade where the interest in technological developments applied to art was so central? To answer this question I will analyse two main Venice Biennale's shows, i.e. the 1980 Biennale show *Cronografie* and the 1986 Biennale devoted to art and science.