

deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Drawing with Code:
Works from the Anne and Michael Spalter Collection
Opens January 29, 2011 at deCordova

Lincoln, MA, January 10, 2011 – DeCordova Sculpture Park and Museum is pleased to announce that director of the Boston Cyberarts Festival and former deCordova curator of New Media, George Fifield, will curate an exhibition of the earliest computer drawings, prints, and animations by the field’s innovators. Curated from the Providence-based collection of Anne and Michael Spalter, *Drawing with Code* is one of the first American museum exhibitions to document broadly this early period of new media art. The exhibition will be on view from January 29 – April 24, 2011 to coincide with the 2011 Boston Cyberarts Festival. DeCordova has been supportive of new media artwork since the 1980s and, since its inception in 1999, has subsequently participated in every Boston Cyberarts Festival. The Public Opening Reception will be held Saturday, February 5, 2011, 7-9pm at deCordova.

Drawing with Code will feature computer-generated art from the 1950s to the mid-1980s alongside the more recent work of these early practitioners. Starting with the seminal *Electronic Abstraction 4*, 1952, by Ben Laposky, a silver gelatin print of an abstract image from an oscilloscope screen and possibly the earliest artwork in existence made using a computer, the exhibition will present 40 works of 21 pioneering artists, including Jean-Pierre Hébert, Manfred Mohr, Vera Molnar, Mark Wilson, Stan VanDerBeek, Roman Verostko, and Edward Zajec, who had the foresight to see the creative possibilities of the dawning computer age. As our lives are becoming increasingly digital, it serves us well to remember a time when computers were clunkier—if not simpler—creatures. This was an era when, in the words of programmer and artist Harold Cohen, “You used card-punch machines to punch your program onto IBM cards... There was little chance you would get any results the same day, [and what you would often get] was a cryptic message saying that there was a missing comma on card seventy-three.” The prints and drawings in *Drawing with Code* represent some of the most elegant and innovative images from this bygone computer era.

Drawing with Code provides a window into the past with some of the best examples of an incredibly productive collaboration between technology and art. In addition, the exhibition will present a group of the earliest computer animations produced at Bell Labs under the auspices of Kenneth Knowlton. Knowlton was a pioneer researcher in computer graphics at Bell Lab’s Murray Hill facilities in New Jersey and invited a number of artists to the lab, including Lillian Schwartz and the experimental filmmaker Stan VanDerBeek. While primitive by today’s

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standards, these animations revolutionized the field and paved the way for the wealth of computerized media we see today.

Director Dennis Kois noted: “DeCordova has been an enthusiastic supporter of computer-generated art and new media since the 1980s—in 1994, George Fifield curated an exhibition at deCordova with now Deputy Director of Curatorial Affairs Nick Capasso entitled *Computer in the Studio*—and we are proud to now blaze a trail in documenting the history of the medium. The Spalter collection is among the most important troves of this early, and now rare, material in the world.”

This exhibition is organized by guest curator George Fifield, independent curator of new media, founding director of Boston Cyberarts, Inc. and adjunct faculty at the Digital + Media Department at the Rhode Island School of Design. Fifield has a long-lasting relationship with not only deCordova, but also with Anne and Michael Spalter; *Continuum*, an exhibition featuring part of the Spalters’ extensive collection, was included in Fifield’s Cyberarts Festival 2009 and was comprised of experimental digital computer animations from the 1960s.

Equally passionate about computer-generated art, Providence-based Anne and Michael Spalter are major collectors and boast the largest private collection of its kind. Work has been lent to leading institutions such as the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and the Museum of Modern Art in New York, which organized *On Line: Drawing Through the Twentieth Century* this fall, featuring work from the Spalter collection. In addition, Anne Spalter published *The Computer in the Visual Arts* (1999), “the first comprehensive work to combine technical and theoretical aspects of the emerging field of computer art and design,” according to artist and author James Faure Walker. Mrs. Spalter also combined math, science, and design to create the first computer fine art courses at Brown University and Rhode Island School of Design.

Educational Programming

All programs are free with Museum admission unless otherwise stated.

Winter Exhibitions Opening Reception

Saturday, February 5, 2011, 7–9pm

Artist Talks

Meet some of the artists whose work is exhibited in *Drawing with Code* and hear the inside perspective on their work, process, and creative inspirations. Talks begin at 3pm in the 3rd Floor Lobby, and will be followed by a brief Q & A period.

Manfred Mohr

Saturday, February 5, 3pm

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Mark Wilson

Saturday, March 12, 3pm

Eye Wonder Family Program

Sunday, March 6, 1–3pm

Panel Discussion at MIT, moderated by John Maeda, President, Rhode Island School of Design

Tuesday, March 8, 7pm

Bartos Auditorium, MIT Campus

Join deCordova and MIT for an evening event focused on how the computer has creatively influenced both the visual and literary arts in this panel discussion. Hear from *Drawing with Code* curator George Fifield, exhibiting artist Mark Wilson, and writers who employ computers in their creative practice as they discuss the history behind this fascinating intersection between science and art. Held in collaboration with MIT's Purple Blurb series, this event is co-organized by deCordova and MIT.

Curator Talk: Guest Curator, George Fifield with Douglas Dodds, Senior Curator, Word and Image Department, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Saturday, April 23, 3pm

Cell Phone Audio Tour

Listen to artists explain how they manipulated early computers to create stunning works of art, hear collectors Anne and Michael Spalter discuss why they collect this compelling work, and learn how this show was curated and installed, from guest curator George Fifield.

Family Gallery Guides

Gallery Guides are available throughout the museum and provide information about *Drawing with Code: Works from the Anne and Michael Spalter Collection* in a family-friendly way.

About deCordova

DeCordova Sculpture Park and Museum was established in 1950 to educate the public about American contemporary art. DeCordova's unique campus features both indoor and outdoor venues, allowing its visitors to celebrate and explore contemporary art across 35 acres. Inside, the Museum features a robust slate of rotating exhibitions and innovative interpretive programming. Outside, deCordova's Sculpture Park hosts more than 60 works, the majority of which are on loan to the Museum. DeCordova also offers the largest non-degree granting studio art program in New England. DeCordova Sculpture Park and Museum attracts more than 100,000 visitors from New England and tourists from around the world to its campus each year and enrolls more than 3,000 students of all ages in its studio art program.

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General Information

DeCordova is open Tuesday through Sunday, from 10am to 5pm and on selected Monday holidays. General admission during Museum hours is \$12 for adults; \$8 for senior citizens, students, and youth ages 6-12. Children age 5 and under, Lincoln residents, and Active Duty Military Personnel and their dependents are admitted free. The Sculpture Park is open year-round during daylight hours. Guided public tours of the Museum's main galleries take place every Thursday at 1pm and Sunday at 2pm.

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