



Dan Sandin, *Spiral PTL*, Video, 1980

## Vga Exhibition Tells Underrecognized Story Of New Media In Chicago

This project is funded by the Terra Foundation for American Art and is part of Art Design Chicago, an exploration of Chicago's art and design legacy, an initiative of the Terra Foundation for American Art with presenting partner The Richard H. Driehaus Foundation

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**CHICAGO** — VGA announces its "Chicago New Media 1973-1992" exhibition, public program and catalogue, in partnership with Gallery 400 at the University of Illinois at Chicago November 1-December 15, 2018. This expansive project chronicles the under-recognized story of Chicago's contributions to new media art by artists at the University of Illinois at Chicago's (UIC) Electronic Visualization Laboratory (EVL), the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) and at Midway and Bally games from 1973-1992. *Chicago New Media 1973-1992* will feature video game artifacts, new

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media technologies, historical photographs, game stills, playable video game consoles, and virtual reality modules.

The exhibit, public program and catalogue are organized by VGA Gallery in partnership with Gallery 400 and the EVL. It is curated by SAIC Associate Professor of Film, Video, New Media, and Animation, **Jon Cates** with curatorial assistance by VGA Director of Exhibitions and Programs **Chaz Evans** and Executive Director **Jonathan Kinkley**. The catalogue will contain new scholarship about this relatively unknown era in art history and original documentation of important artworks in the exhibit, many of which have never been photographed or studied. The education program will include a symposium of new media artists and scholars. The public of the Midwest and audiences of the Terra Foundation's Art Design Chicago initiative will benefit.

### **Project Description:**

Chicago is not often thought of as a center for new media art, technology or industry, yet the city was home to some of the earliest and most important experiments in new media in the late 20th century. Chicago's under-recognized contributions in these areas are due for a deep scholarly examination and public presentation. A key milestone as an incubator for new media was the 1973 founding of UIC's Electronic Visualization Laboratory (EVL) by chemist and computer scientist **Thomas DeFanti** and artist and physicist **Daniel Sandin**.

EVL produced many important technical and artistic breakthroughs, including the first dataglove, which allowed the user to interact with a computer without a mouse or keyboard, in 1977. EVL faculty also developed an early graphics hardware system named the Datamax UV-1 and its software, ZGRASS. And in 1992, EVL created the world-renowned CAVE™ (CAVE Automatic Virtual Environment) immersive virtual reality system. The lab's artistic breakthroughs also included Electronic Visualization Events (EVE) in the mid-1970s that consisted of live, real-time performances featuring computer graphics, video image processing using the Sandin Analog Image Processor (IP), and synthesized electronic music.

During the same time period, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) was educating generations of new media artists. Artist **Phil Morton** developed the nation's first Video Art degree program at SAIC, and simultaneously, artist **Sonia Landy Sheridan** developed the ground-breaking Generative Systems program at SAIC. Soon after, artist **Bob Snyder** developed SAIC's Sound Art program. All of these intersecting programs in the 1970s became the basis for subsequent developments in new media. Generations of now well-known and acclaimed artists, scholars, designers, developers,

curators and organizers have since moved through UIC and SAIC, all of whom shaped the development of new media locally as well as on the burgeoning international stage.

The exhibition will explore the rich exchange between industry and academics during this heady time. In 1969, Chicago's Midway Manufacturing, an amusement game manufacturer, was acquired by Bally Manufacturing, known for manufacturing pinball games and slot machines. Bally released a game console with video display that became EVL artists' hardware system of choice. In 1978, Midway became a global leader in video games with the license and U.S. release of *Space Invaders* by Japanese developer Taito. *Chicago New Media 1973-1992* will exhibit a range of ephemera documenting this period of industry incubation and globalization and its connections to new media art.

Preceding the exhibition opening on November 1st, VGA Gallery will host a symposium featuring artists and scholars affiliated with this era of design. Confirmed guests include:

- **Christiane Paul**, curator of New Media Art at the Whitney Museum
- **Oliver Grau**, founder in the field of Media Art Histories, Danube University
- **Ellen Sandor**, artist and co-editor of *Women in New Media Arts: Perspectives on Innovative Collaboration*
- **Dan Sandin**, Professor Emeritus of the School of Art & Design, University of Illinois at Chicago, Co-founder and Co-director of the Electronic Visualization Laboratory
- **Jamie Faye Fenton**, software developer for key systems used by artists in exhibition
- **Sabrina Raaf**, artist and Associate Professor in the Department of Art at the University of Illinois at Chicago
- **Josh Tsui**, Midway Games documentarian

The companion exhibition catalog will include a foreword from the executive directors of VGA Gallery and Gallery 400, a new scholarly essay by curator **Jon Cates** on the full content of the exhibition, along with a checklist and color plate images of work from *Chicago New Media*.

**Funding and Sponsorship:** Major support for *Chicago New Media 1973-1992* is provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art. Additional generous support is provided by The Chicago Community Trust. VGA Gallery is supported by The MacArthur Funds for Arts and Culture at The Richard H. Driehaus Foundation, a CityArts Grant from the City of Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs & Special Events and the Illinois



Arts Council Agency. Gallery 400 is supported by The School of Art & Art History, College of Architecture, Design, and the Arts at the University of Illinois at Chicago, and by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council Agency.

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**About VGA Gallery:** Founded in 2013, Video Game Art (VGA) Gallery was created in response to a need for a public forum for the visibility, understanding and critique of an emerging and exciting new medium: video games. Signature programs include exhibitions, artist residencies, education, publications, and other events. VGA has partnered with a range of venues to collaborate on these projects. In the past year, exhibitions and events were mounted at Rebuild Foundation, Columbia College Chicago, Mana Contemporary and The Nightingale cinema; an artist residency was carried out in partnership with University of Illinois at Chicago's Maker Space; and VGA mounted a public panel discussion in conjunction with the Adler Planetarium and Bit Bash, among many other programs. Recent conferences VGA has participated in include the INTERPLAY Conference (co-hosted by University of Chicago and Northwestern University), College Art Association New Media Caucus, Chicago Video Game Law Summit, and an Adler Planetarium Panel Discussion: *Chicago Made Games as New Media Art*. VGA has published articles for *Leonardo*, Routledge Press, the *Journal of Games Criticism*, the AV Club, Motherboard, and the Illinois Game Developers Association. VGA has received grants from The Terra Foundation for American Art, the City of Chicago's Department for Cultural Affairs and Special Events, The Elizabeth Morse Charitable Trust, the Graham Foundation and Illinois Arts Council Agency. It served approximately 25,000 individuals with cultural and educational programming in the last year. [www.vgagallery.com](http://www.vgagallery.com)

**About Gallery 400:** Founded in 1983, Gallery 400 is one of the nation's most vibrant university galleries, showcasing work at the leading edge of contemporary art, architecture, and design. The Gallery's program of exhibitions, lectures, film and video screenings, and performances features interdisciplinary and experimental practices. Operating within the School of Art & Art History in the College of Architecture, Design, and the Arts at the University of Illinois at Chicago, Gallery 400 endeavors to make the arts and its practitioners accessible to a broad spectrum of the public and to cultivate a variety of cultural and intellectual perspectives. Gallery 400 is recognized for its support of the creation of new work, the diversity of its programs and participants, and the development of experimental models for multidisciplinary exhibition. [www.gallery400.uic.edu](http://www.gallery400.uic.edu)

**About the Electronic Visualization Lab:** The Electronic Visualization Laboratory in the Department of Computer Science at the University of Illinois at Chicago is an internationally renowned interdisciplinary research laboratory whose mission is to

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enable scientific discovery through interdisciplinary collaboration, in which computer scientists work with domain scientists and artists to create useful and usable visualization, virtual reality and visual analytic tools and techniques to tackle real-world problems. EVL's focus has always been on inventing the future – from pioneering real-time interactive graphics and video game technology, to scientific visualization to advanced virtual reality using high-speed networking infrastructure, to collaboration software on large-scale tiled display walls. <https://www.evl.uic.edu/>

**About Art Design Chicago:** Art Design Chicago is a spirited celebration of the unique and vital role Chicago plays as America's crossroads of creativity and commerce. Spearheaded by the Terra Foundation for American Art, this citywide partnership of nearly 60 cultural organizations explores Chicago's art and design legacy and continued impact with more than 25 exhibitions, hundreds of events, as well as the creation of several scholarly publications and a four-part documentary presented throughout 2018.

Support for Art Design Chicago is provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art and Presenting Partner The Richard H. Driehaus Foundation. Additional funding for the initiative is provided by Leslie Hindman Auctioneers, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, and the Joyce Foundation. The Chicago Community Trust and Leo Burnett are providing in-kind support. [www.ArtDesignChicago.org](http://www.ArtDesignChicago.org)  
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**About Terra Foundation for American Art:** Since it was established in 1978, the Terra Foundation for American Art has been one of the leading foundations focused on the historical art of the United States. Headquartered in Chicago, it is committed to fostering exploration, understanding, and enjoyment of American art among national and international audiences. To further cross-cultural dialogue on American art, the foundation supports and collaborates on innovative exhibitions, research, and educational programs. Implicit in such activities is the belief that art has the potential both to distinguish cultures and to unite them. The foundation also provides opportunities for interaction and study through the presentation and ongoing development of its own art collection in Chicago, recognizing the importance of experiencing original works of art. [www.TerraAmericanArt.org](http://www.TerraAmericanArt.org)

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