Untitled Computer Drawing

Harold Cohen

Not on display

Title/Description: Untitled Computer Drawing

Artist/Maker: Harold Cohen

Born: 1983

Object Type: Print

Accession Number: 31583

Historic Period: 20th century

Credit Line: Bequeathed by Joyce and Michael Morris, 2014

This abstract digital drawing was generated automatically by an experimental computer programme that the artist Harold Cohen developed in the early 1970s. Cohen was fascinated by relationships between art and artificial intelligence, and the decision-making power of computer programmes. He designed the programme AARON in 1973 to 'do what human artists do when they make images', describing it as an 'expert system'. [1]

Untitled Computer Drawing was created by one of four 'drawing machines' running the AARON programme that Cohen installed at the Tate Gallery in 1983. Cohen describes the process in the exhibition catalogue:

'AARON makes a very large number of unique drawings: in fact, with all four drawing machines running, the installation is capable of making about twelve drawings every hour throughout the exhibition. One program, thousands of original drawings. You will need to judge for yourself what significance to attach to this volume. No doubt we would agree that unless each individual drawing is worthy of attention - and not simply because it was made by a computer program - a thousand of them won't be either. If they are worthy of attention, though, the fact that they were generated by a computer program becomes significant.' [2]

Lisa Newby, June 2022

[1] Harold Cohen, exh. cat. (London: Tate Gallery, 1983), p.7.

[2] Ibid., p.8.

Provenance

In October 1984, the University of East Anglia accepted a planned bequest from Joyce and Michael Morris (UEA Alumni). Michael died in 2009 and Joyce in December 2014 when the couple's wishes were implemented.