EVL and Midwest contribute to book on “Rise of women in the digital arts”

Back in 2009 Maxine Brown, who heads UIC’s Electronic Visualization Lab (EVL), received an email from Donna Cox, currently Director of UIUC’s Advanced Visualization Lab (AVL) . . .

“We are gathering vital information for a book on how Midwestern women in the arts contributed to the digital revolution... You are a key person because you not only have contributed but you also have a unique historical perspective.”

That email sparked a chain of events that would eventually lead to the publishing of “New Media Futures: The Rise of Women in the Digital Arts,” in which Cox is one of three co-editors along with Ellen Sandor and Janine Fron, all long-time EVL collaborators. The book, containing 356 images and personal narratives from its 22 contributors, goes on sale June 15th.

UIC put its mark on the book with nine of the 22 contributing women (list below) having ties to UIC and the EVL. The reason almost half of the book’s contributors hail from UIC is due to the early emergence of electronic visualization between the Computer Science Department and the School of Art & Design (now the School of Art & Art History). The EVL was founded in 1973 by computer science professor Tom DeFanti and art professor Dan Sandin, who were interested in interdisciplinary collaboration to advance the development of interactive, real-time, computer-generated imagery.

“In the 70’s there were very few computer science departments in the U.S., let alone places where young people interested in both art and technology could go to school,” Brown said. “In fact, in the early days, the ‘electronic visualization’ art program was more renowned than the computer science program, and attracted very technical-savvy artists, including a number of women. In the computer science department, students who had artistic hobbies (e.g., painting, ballet, playing a musical instrument, singing) gravitated to the program.”

The EVL was such an early pioneer in the digital arts that it collaborat-ed not only within UIC, but with others, notably at School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC), and with book co-editors Sandor at (Art)n Laboratory and Cox at the National Center for Supercomputing Applications (NCSA) at UIUC.

“I know most of the women who contributed to the book, many from the time they were either EVL students or collaborators or both, and am thrilled to see this compendium that recognizes their achievements,” said Brown. “While I don’t consider myself an artist; I am an art appreciator. I was active in the computer graphics community since 1976 and met EVL faculty and students, starting in 1977. I recog-nized how special EVL was, so was thrilled when offered a position here in 1986, where I started helping write grant proposals and promotional materials. Co-editor Cox told me that I am included in the book because I am an ‘artist of words and a collector of [computer] art’.

Brown went on to talk about the significance of the book and what readers will learn from it. “While this is not a history book, it certainly provides an historical perspective on the influence of Midwestern women in helping establish digital media as a true art form, and in helping promote its importance, both nationally and globally” she said.

**NEW MEDIA FUTURES**

The Rise of Women in the Digital Arts

Contributors:

**UI Press**

On Sale: June 15th

Publisher: UI Press

Pages: 328

Color Photos: 356

Contributors: 22

**UIC Affiliated Contributors**

Maxine Brown

Carolina Cruz-Neira

Margaret Dolinsky

Cooper Gibson

Lucy Petrovich

Dana M. Plepys

Mary Rasmussen

Sally Rosenthal

Barbara Sykes

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“New Media Futures: The Rise of Women in the Digital Arts”

Members of the UIC Electronic Visualization Laboratory (EVL) attended the Supercomputing (SC) 1993 conference to showcase the CAVE, but took time out to celebrate Dan Sandin’s birthday. (Top row: Jim Barr, Sumit Das, Terry Frangulidakis, Trina Roy, Randy Hudson, Carolinas Cruz-Neira, Chris Cedervall, Marcus Thiebaux. Front row: Tom DeFanti, Maxine Brown, Dana Plepys, Maggie Rawlings, Gary Lindahl, Dan Sandin. Foreground: Michael Papka)