Sue Gollifer

Retrospective

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Introduction

I briefly met Sue Gollifer at the first ArCade exhibition in Brighton in 1995. It was while I was working as a researcher at Loughborough University with Stephen Scrivener. I have to say can't remember too much of the encounter, but the ArCade exhibition impressed me greatly and I felt lucky to have seen it. Now, almost 30 years later, I am happy to be able to return the favour and present this exhibition of Sue Gollifer's own printed work at BCS Moorgate in London.

The prints in the exhibition were selected from Sue's extensive collection of her own work at her home in Brighton. With the aid of Sue's friend the artist Anna Dumitriu, what I thought would be a daunting task – reducing so many works to a collection of just 20 – was actually achieved quite quickly. My selection process was very simple. We first simply chose our favourites. then we reduced this selection to 20 by looking for a variety of styles, colours and time periods.

This is a bit more informal than my normal process. However, it has still resulted in a very strong collection that cover the broad variety of Sue's output. It's a testament to the quality of Sue's work that on a different day we may have picked some very different artworks, but the collection would have been of equal strength.

The work included spans much of Sue Gollifer's career, from the early-1970s up to the late-2000s. You can see an ongoing interest in rule-based composition. Images are often constructed in a quartered square, with the four parts resembling folded forms. These features are visible across the variety of media used.

I would also note that the original works, in particular the screen prints, have a quality that cannot be fully captured in this catalogue. For this reason I hope that as many people as possible get to see the originals at BCS Moorgate and that we have opportunities to show the exhibition elsewhere.

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Sue Gollifer at her home in Brighton, July 2024
Photograph: Catherine Mason

Sue Gollifer Interview

with Catherine Mason

This interview took place between Sue Gollifer and Catherine Mason in July 2024. Sue Gollifer (b. 1944) is a printmaker, pioneering new media artist, curator, educator and academic. Catherine Mason is a writer and author who has been recovering the history of computer arts since 2002. They are both committee members of the Computer Arts Society.

Catherine Mason: Sue, here we are at your home in Brighton. Can you begin by telling us about how you got started in art?

Sue Gollifer: I studied at Coventry University [1964-67 – then called Lanchester Polytechnic] and always had an interest in minimalism and systems art. The group Art and Language were in my year [a group that challenged the status quo of art and art education]. Although I officially studied painting, I actually did a lot of printmaking, but back then you couldn't get a degree in print making - now it is commonplace. Screen printing was not a method that was considered 'proper' art. I was influenced by Victor Vasarely and once I

was able to visit his studio just outside Paris – his son Eve, asked me out!

CM: But you had a great success with printmaking, didn't you?

SG: Yes, I got a commission from Christies auction house to make a series of four editions of prints. These were traditional silkscreens. After that I had two dealers – the Francis Kyle Gallery in Maddox Street and the art dealers Prue O'Day and Don Anderson. I sold to a lot to offices which were interested in suites of work. I was working with my partner at that time Phil Wetton, collaborating with him.

I signed my name just 'Gollifer' in capitals. Dealers used to say to me that the buyers didn't realise I was a woman - they thought this might have helped with sales. Eventually Phil went off to America and I stayed in the UK; and then people used to say – "I wonder who really made the work?"

CM: You are kidding – you mean people thought that the man must have actually made it? Unbelievable!

CM: By now you had moved to Brighton?

SG: I did my masters in printmaking at Brighton University. And I was teaching at Hastings Art College one day a week. I had a show at the Serpentine Gallery. I won some awards. I was selling a lot, people were buying prints in those days – the 1970s.

CM: You also did some teaching?

SG: I was teaching part time at art colleges – it seemed like everywhere: Eastbourne, the London Institute, Epsom, Hastings. My husband was a student, and I had a young child.

CM: You were busy!

SG: I used to get somewhere and think "Where am I?" "What am I teaching today?" [laughs] These days it is very different. Most people make a living by getting grants. There is less emphasis on selling at galleries now. Lots of people work in pairs now, as it's easier to get grants.

CM: That is interesting, the nature of the funding system now is such that it encourages people to work in a different way from previously.

CM: So why did you think computing was the way to go?

SG: You could tell they were coming – computers. All my early work was systems based, I worked on graph paper and I screen printed and liked the idea of the screen print because it was so flat and you can't tell layers, without expression…

CM: No impasto, no visible brush marks. You liked the flatness?

SG: Yes, when I was in Coventry, I thought, "I need to use computers" because I was working systematically but on paper with numbers. I came down to Brighton and was hanging around with people from Sussex University. I met one guy who worked with computers, and I told him that I wanted to work with computers too and he said, "You are a woman and they are too expensive"!

CM: Oh no! What an example of terrible sexism.

SG: I said well, F-you! So initially I turned myself into a computer. There was nothing else I could do.

I think that is the only thing that I regret - that I didn't learn programming. I'm thinking about the founding people of the Computer Arts Society - the majority of them are men and from computer science backgrounds, and so I feel that I was a pioneer of using computers in art as a woman.

CM: You certainly are!

SG: The perennial challenge is how to get it out of the screen? But as I am a printmaker, I could understand layers, and so on, that applied equally well to computer software use. So that by the time I came to computers, I understood how to construct an image.

CM: Ok, so now Brighton University was significant in establishing a fully funded research lab - the Rediffusion Simulation Research Centre, funded by John Vince and his company.

SG: Yes, it was positioned in the Art & Design Faculty. Professor Colin Beardon became the Principal Researcher – he had started the journal Digital Creativity [published by Routledge]. I was invited by him to do a show in the early '90s as there weren't many people who were using computers at that time. Colin was keen to make an information website and produce a newsletter. I

was appointed as the Senior Art researcher in 1989/1991. My research was the impact of new technologies in Printmaking. Later to be expanded to Fine Art.

CM: Tell me about Computers in Art and Design Education - CADE.

SG: We established the first CADE conference from our Lab. I then curated the first UK Open International Biennale Exhibition of Digital Fine Art Prints, which I named ArCade in 1995. This was met with great enthusiasm and toured museums and universities in the UK. Subsequently I went on to curate ArCade II (1998), III (2001), IV (2003-5) and V (2007) - where a selection of work was shown in Europe, and in various parts of Russia and Australia. However, eventually Colin moved on to another University. So, we changed the Centre to become the Centre for Computers and Creative work.

CM: What happened then?

SG: It was obvious that computers were coming into education. In the mid-1990s we were asked by HEFCE [Higher Education Funding Council for England] to bid to host the CTI Centre in Art Design and Technologies. I got involved with the

CTI – Computers Teaching Initiative. Brighton became one of the centres and, because of my interests, we specialised in computers in art. There were centres all over the UK – but Brighton got the computer art one.

CM: That is quite an achievement – what things did you do there?

SG: There were other Centres covering various aspects of degree specialisms. We were lucky to be selected and funded to do computers and art. I was made the Centre Manager working with three staff. We gave advice across the UK including Scotland, and visited Universities to give workshops and set up websites and we also published a free newsletter. We were also on call to any academics in the Art & Design subject field, who might want information. Plus, of course we were linked with the peer review publication Digital Creativity, of which I edited the Art Space column.

CM: You had become an acknowledged expert in the field.

SG: Yes, I would go around and talk to people about how computers would change the nature of art teaching. But as things evolve, HFCE thought the CTI Centres were too narrow in their remit and it changed to being an Academy. Unfortunately, I wasn't appointed to the new role. But luckily I was fully seconded to promote a DVD about drawing to the London Institute for staff development.

Then my life changed yet again. So, as well as being an artist, curator, researcher and academic, I returned to running an MA in Digital Media Arts, in conjunction with Lighthouse Brighton and an MA in Printmaking at the London Print Studio.

CM: And you've been heavily involved in ISEA - International Symposium on Electronic Art, over the years. First as a participant, then on the Board and then you took over the running of the international headquarters.

SG: I told Colin I wanted to go to ISEA, but there was no money. However, then somebody visited the Lab who had a place, but couldn't go for some reason or another. So I was able to take their place in Helsinki 1994 and I was supposed to give this person's paper, but there was only an abstract – no actual paper. Paul Brown and Roy Ascott and many others were all there. When it came to my turn, I said I'm sorry I'm not whoever it was supposed to be, and I just read the abstract very

slowly! And Roy and Paul felt sorry for me and took me out for a beer.

Then, later, when there was a bid to run ISEA International HQ, we won it at Brighton - although many people didn't think we would get it. I ran it for about 15 years - working with the Board and Symposiums past and present. It was hard work – I went to lots of convention centres and presented to various people from around the world [to recruit hosts for the symposiums]. I went to every city you could think of and talked about it. I even visited Korea. I had some fun times. Even the CTI was fun because we would travel and go to cities and meet people.

CM: You got to know a lot of people over the years. After that it was a natural thing to become involved with SIGGRAPH? [Special Interest Group on Computer Graphics and Interactive Techniques, part of the Association for Computing Machinery in United States]

SG: I was chair at SIGGRAPH 2004 in Los Angeles. I have a sake barrel from Yoichiro Kawaguchi's famous sake party that he hosts at SIGGRAPH every year. They packaged it up for me and sent it back home to the UK.

CM: I can see you have it as a nice table now!

SG: I volunteered for a while in the art gallery. Then 2004 I ran the art show, with a team. I called it Synaesthesia and I showed 2-D work, 3-D, web-based and a few pieces of interactive art. I also had animation. There were 150 artists.

CM: Wow!

SG: It's changed now – today they have only three artists.

CM: Because they don't want to do a big mixed show?

SG: Well, it's large-scale installation pieces now and they are expensive.

CM: And you are still involved with SIGGRAPH – on the Digital Arts Community and on the SIGGRAPH Asia jury. I remember when you were the Chair of the Distinguished Artist Award for Lifetime Achievement in Digital Art - I got involved on the jury for that. You became a great networker and because you knew almost everybody in the field, you were a great facilitator and really could make things happen.

SG: There are lots of politics involved with these different organisations. Sometimes people ask me how I survived? Well, I assume they are sh**s and if they are not, then I am pleasantly surprised! [laughs]

CM: Did you come up against any old-fashioned misogyny?

SG: I think it's the beehive syndrome – sometimes people at the top don't want anyone up there with them.

CM: You have lived through a very interesting time in art education, haven't you? Have you seen some changes for the good?

SG: In 2000 I retired from ISEA and the University had recently made me an Associate Professor. I now have better access to things, now I get involved with the union. I ran the health & safety during the COVID Pandemic. When I retired, they closed my course and there are fewer research groups now.

CM: So, there are fewer MA courses now?

SG: When I taught printmaking, it was a specialist centre and we had a degree in digital printmaking.

We were the only University at the time that had this facility with specialist equipment – I fought to make it happen. I've been an external examiner [in printmaking] at lots of other places, but I found it was always a sort of add on – whereas we had a dedicated centre.

CM: You really helped to put Brighton on the international digital art map. It is sad that this has diminished somewhat.

SG: I've been working with technology for over 60 years. I'm still here making artwork and presenting papers.

CM: And your work is in many important collections including the Victoria & Albert Museum, the British Council, and lots of private collections including the Spalter Digital collection in the United States.

CM: What is next for you, Sue?

SG: The main thing I want to do is sort all my prints out. Some need tearing up!

CM: Oh no, why?

SG: Because I know what makes a good print! I

would like to archive everything and make a decent website. And find a good London gallery.
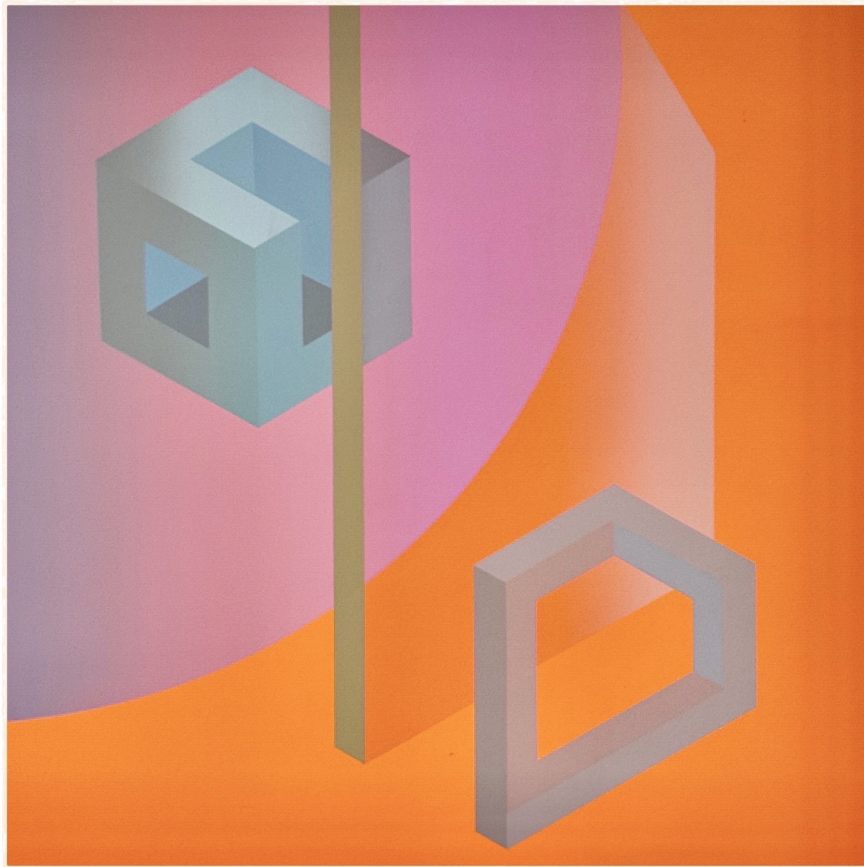
CM: And you are planning a show in Brighton in 2026, we look forward to that. Thank you Sue for sharing your fascinating story.
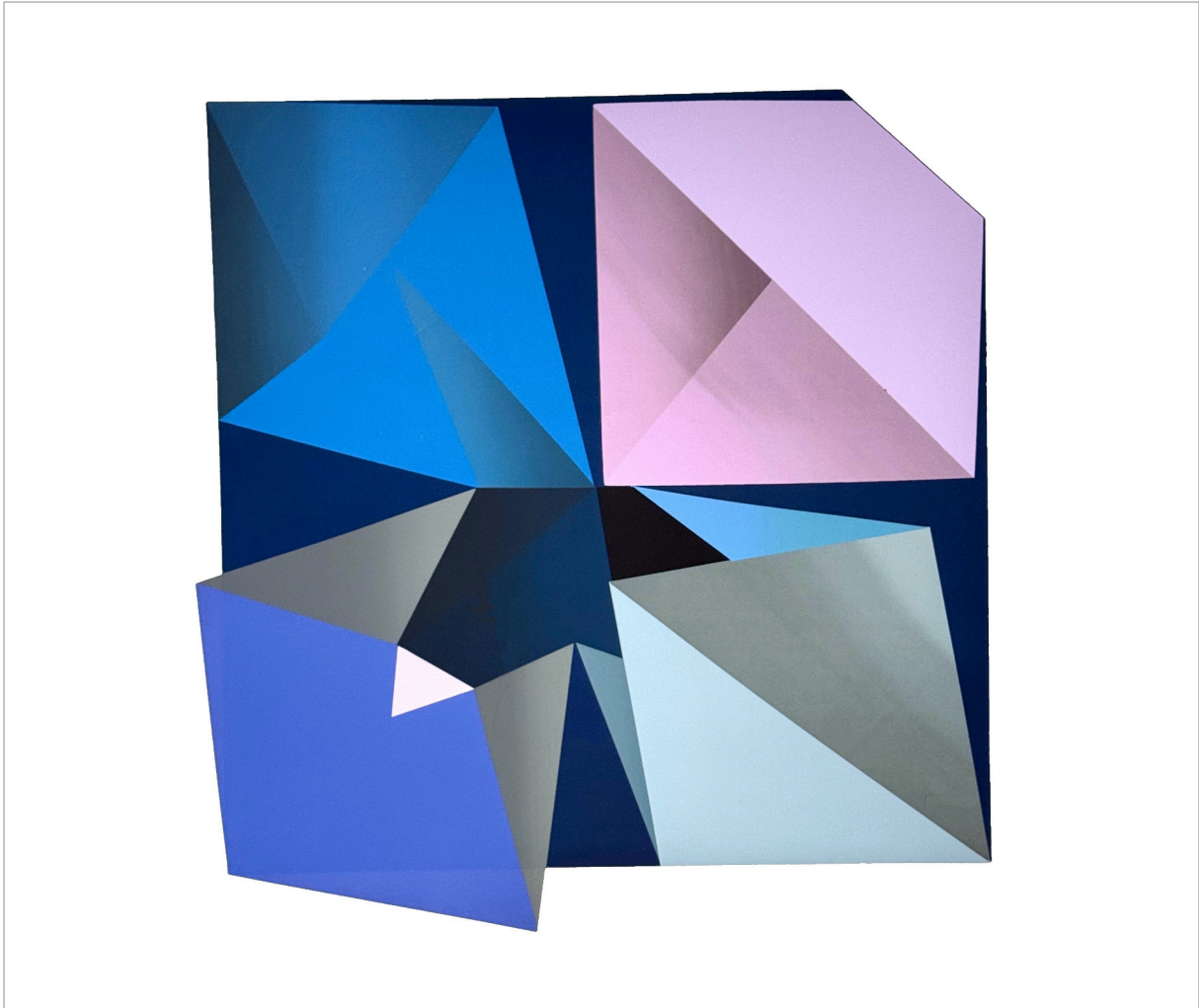
Catherine Mason
www.catherinemason.co.uk
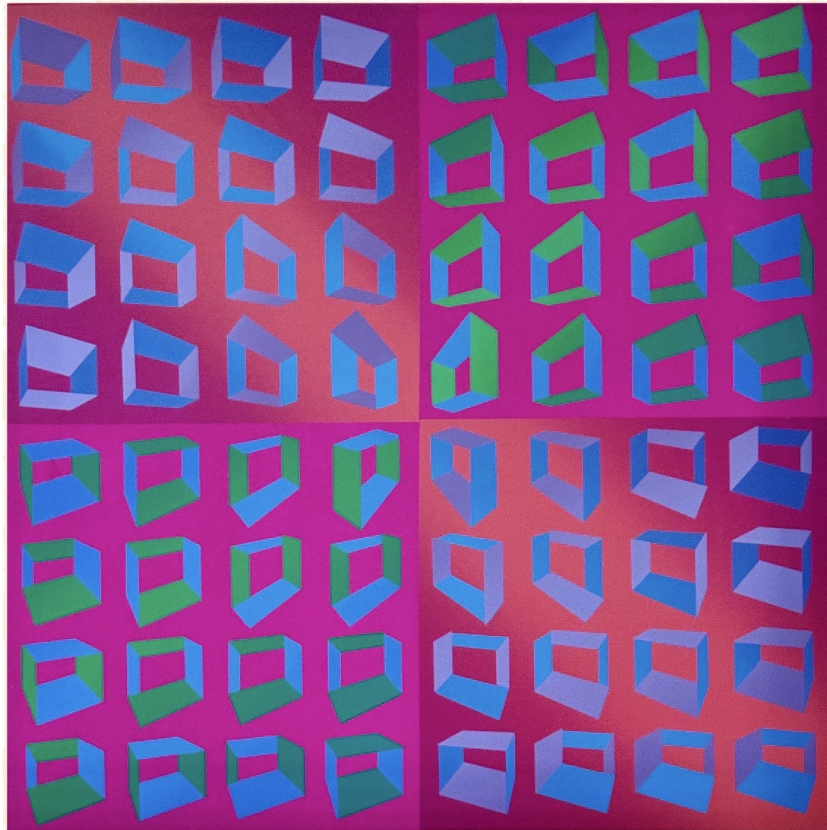July 2024

Artworks

Untitled R1 1982
Screen print. 19" x 19"
"Exploring layers and perspective."

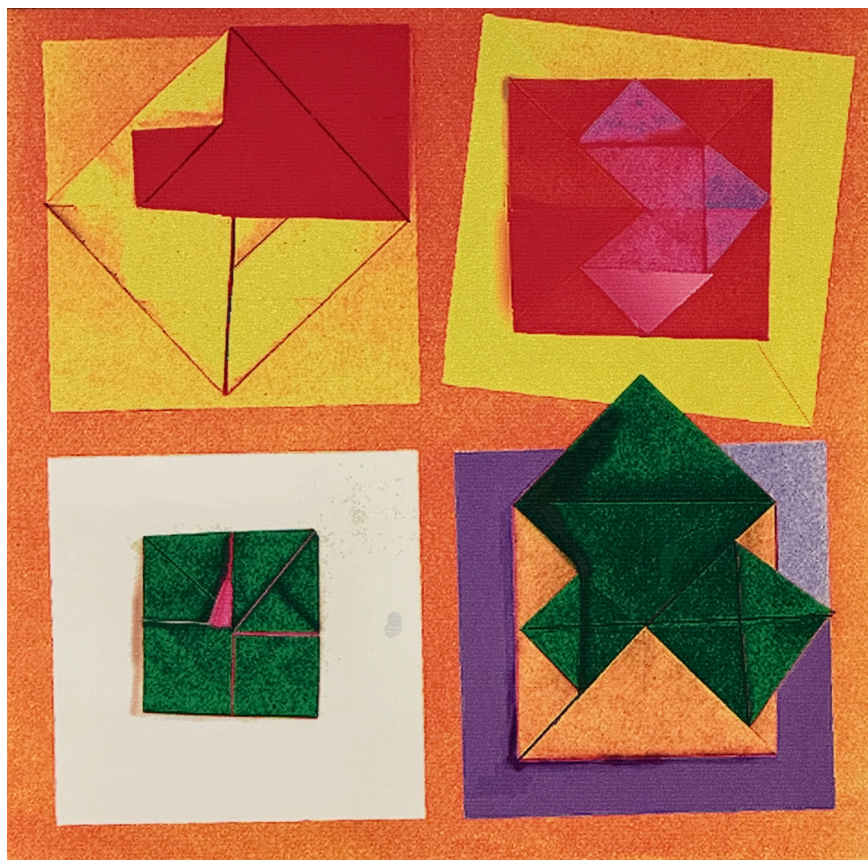**Untitled U1 1986**
Screen print. 19" x 19"
"Inspired by origami and the idea of folding."

Untitled 1976
Screen print. 19" x 19"
"Constructed according to a rule-based system."

Untitled CG8 1994
Digital print. 10" x 10"
"Original image constructed out of folded paper, then digitally scanned and colourised."
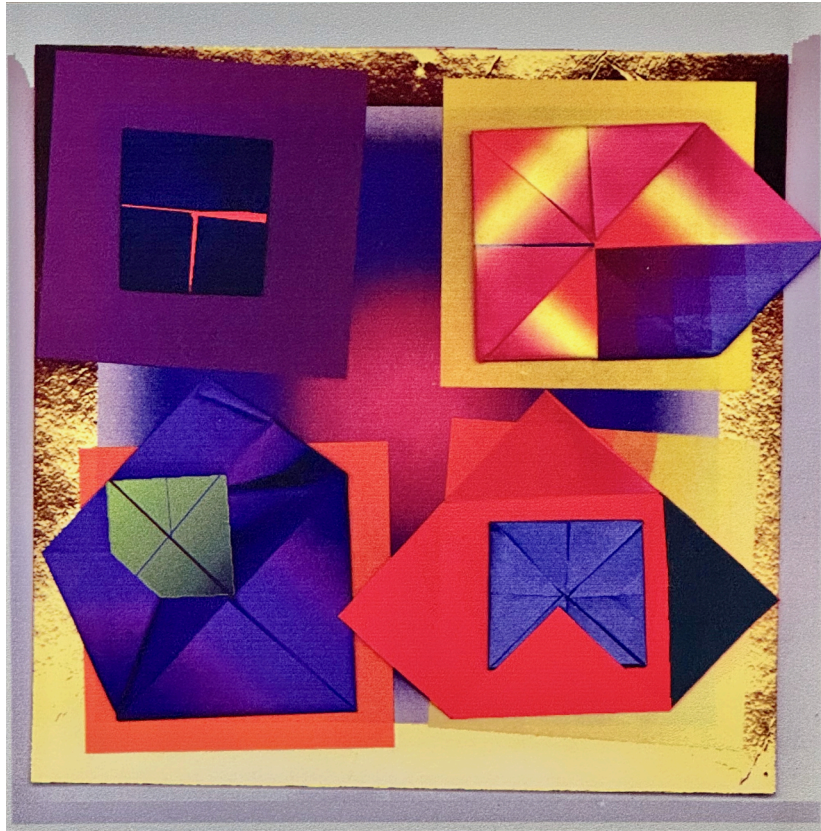
Untitled 1998
Digital print. 10" x 10"
"Original image constructed out of folded paper, then digitally scanned and colourised."
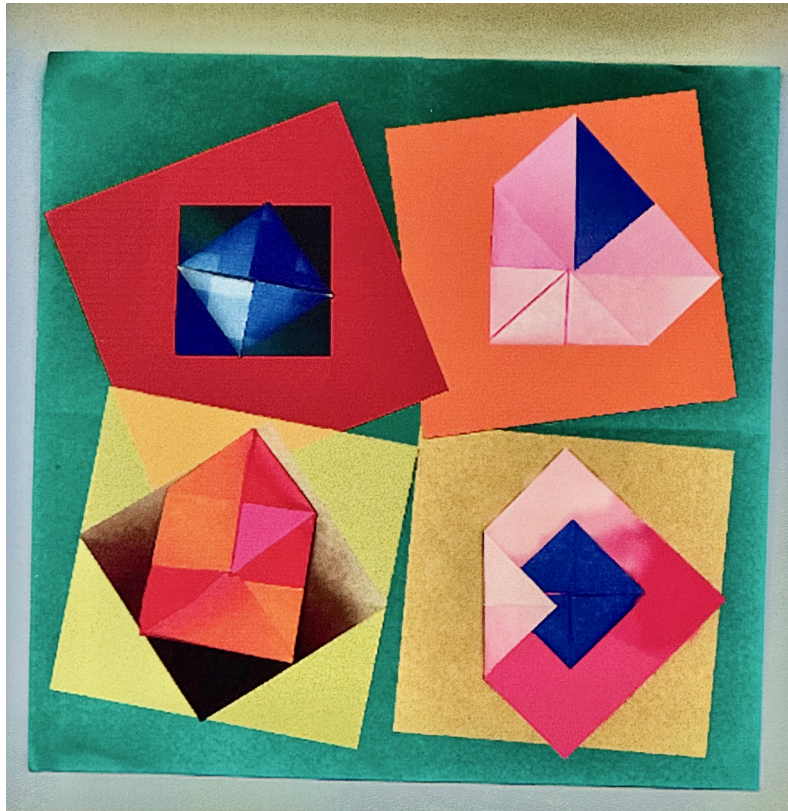
Untitled circa 1998
Digital print. 10" x 10"
"Original image constructed out of folded paper, then digitally scanned and colourised."
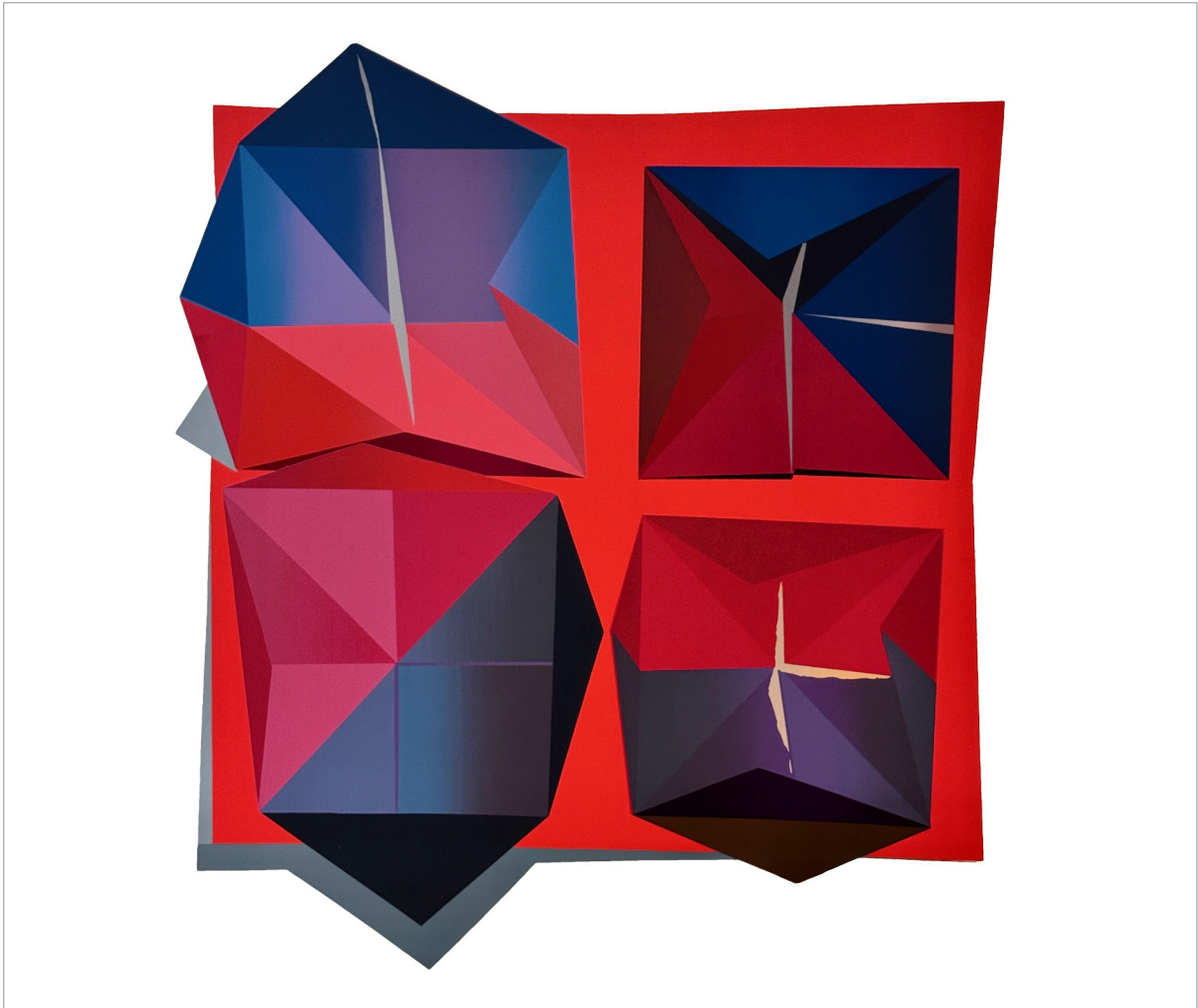
Untitled W1 1988
Screen print. 19" x 19"
"The final screenprint I made."

Untitled S1 1984
Screen print. 19" x 19"

Untitled T2 1985
Screen print. 19" x 19"
"Expanding beyond the square."
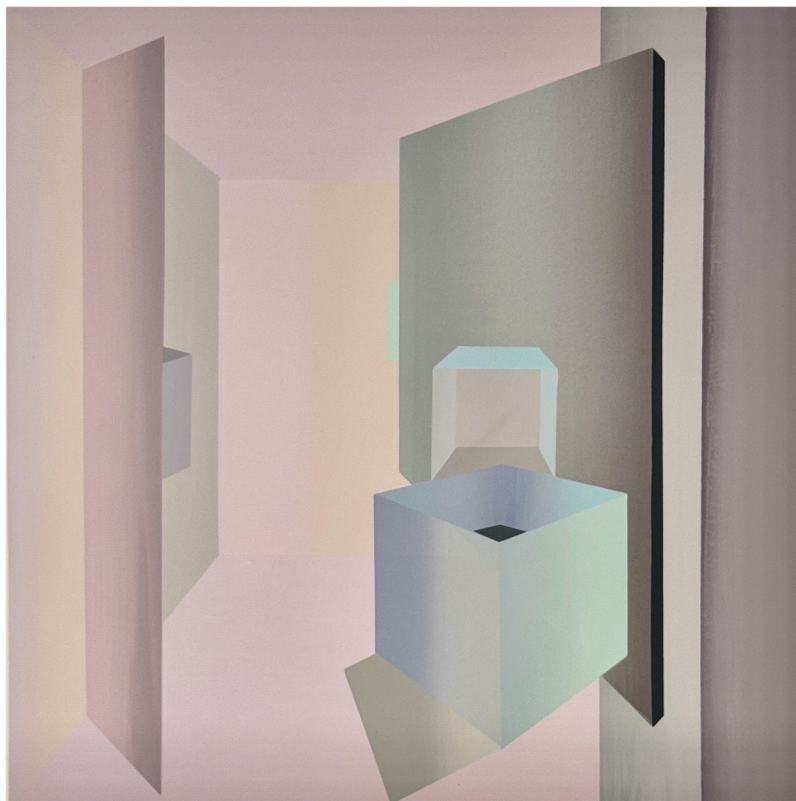
Untitled P4 1980
Screen print. 19" x 19"
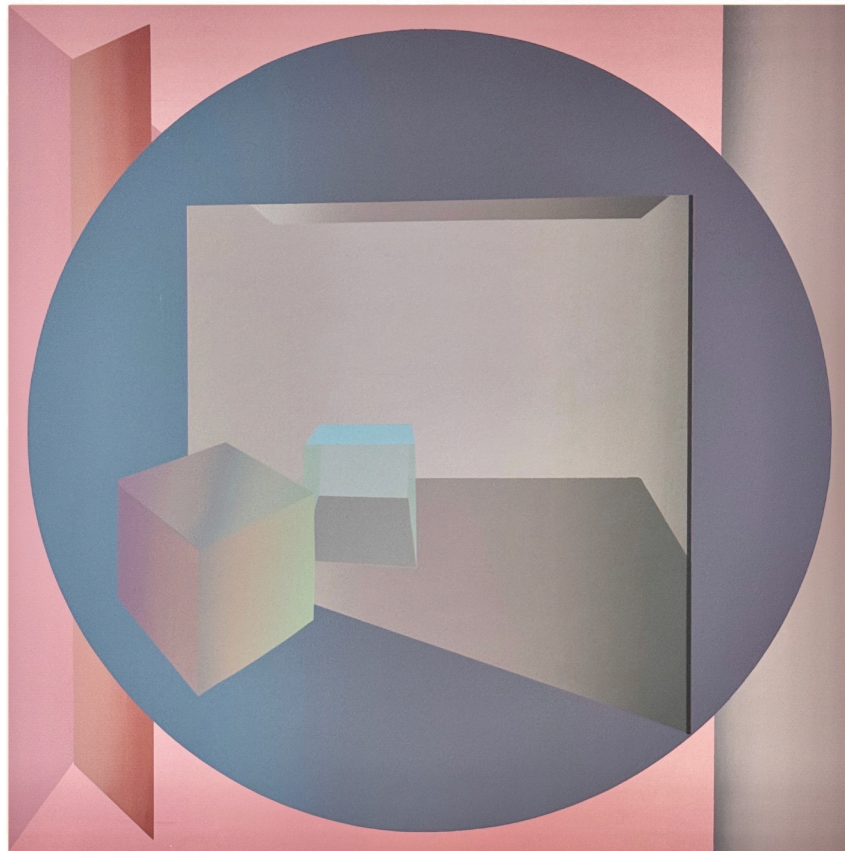
Untitled P5 1980
Screen print. 19" x 19"
"Made for Christies auction house."
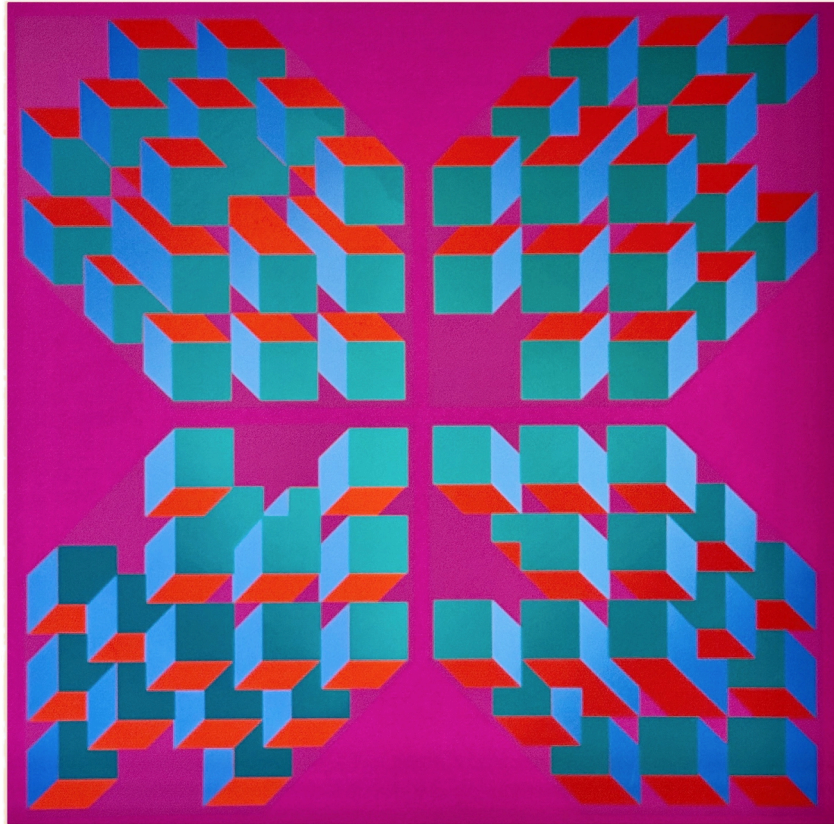
Untitled J2 1975
Screen print. 19" x 19"

Untitled T1 1985
Screen print. 19" x 19"
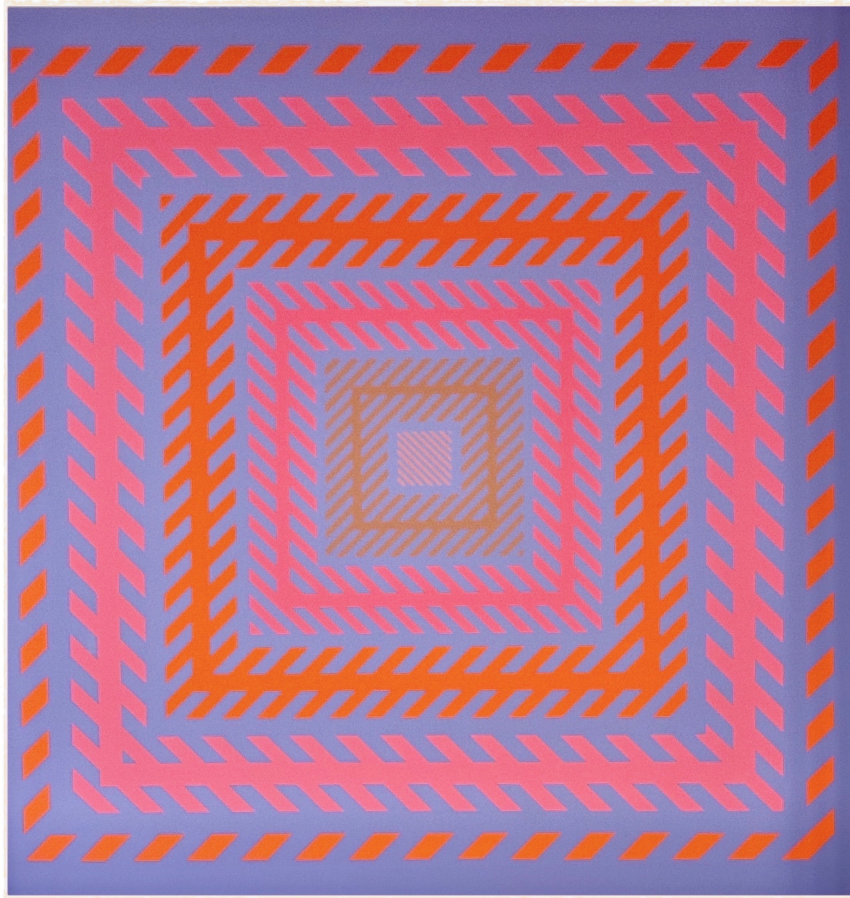
Untitled circa 1972
Screen print. 19" x 19"
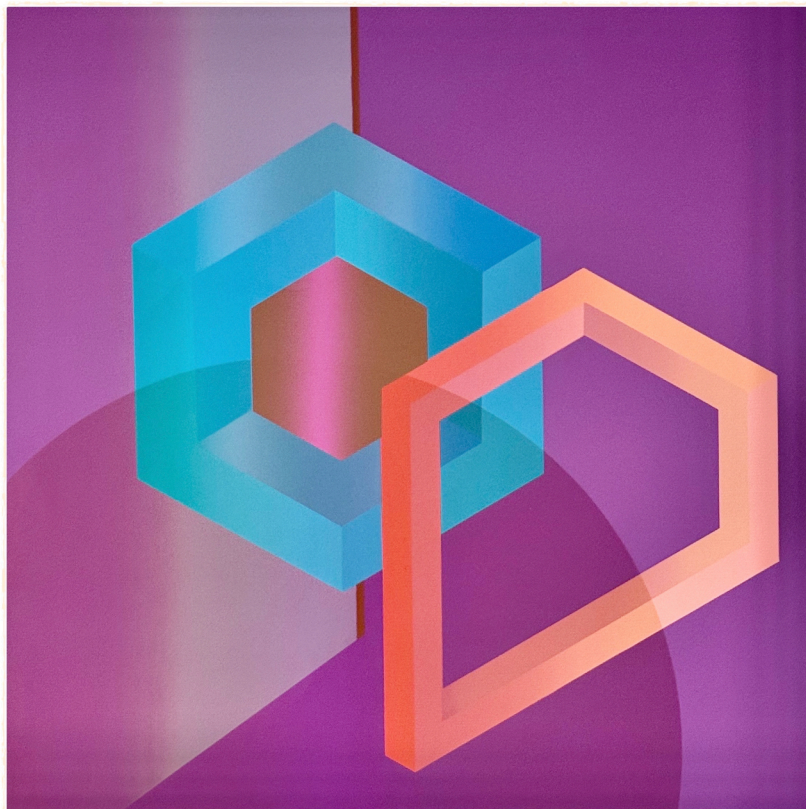
Untitled R4 1983
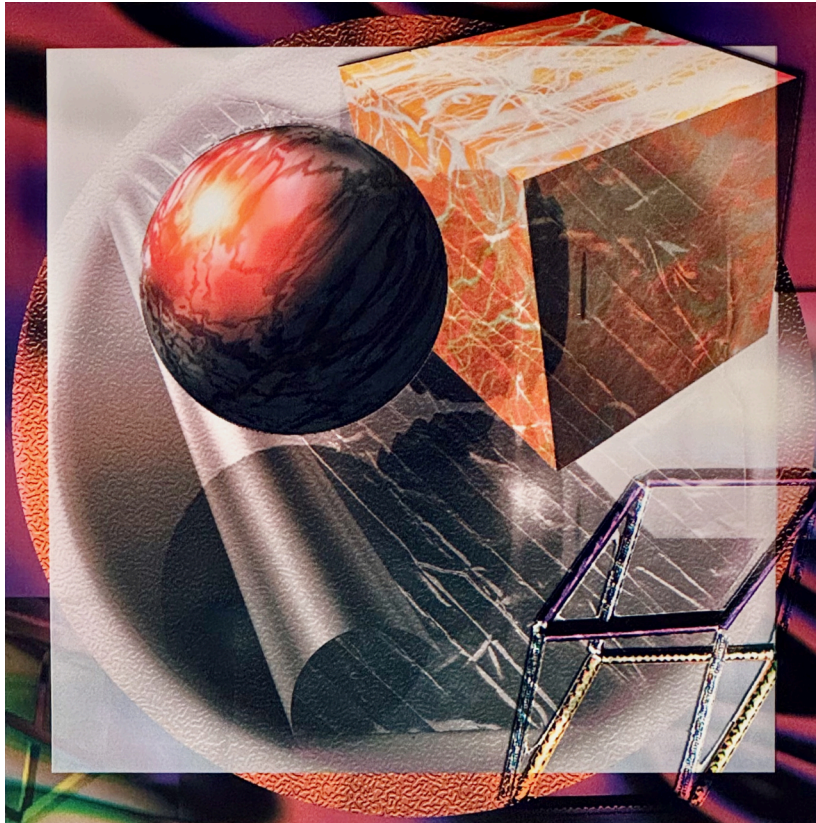*Screen print. 19" x 19"*

Untitled 1974
Screen print. 19" x 19"
"Constructed according to a rules-based system."

Untitled X1 1989
Digital Print. 19" x 19"
"Constructed out of paper, digitally scanned and colourised."
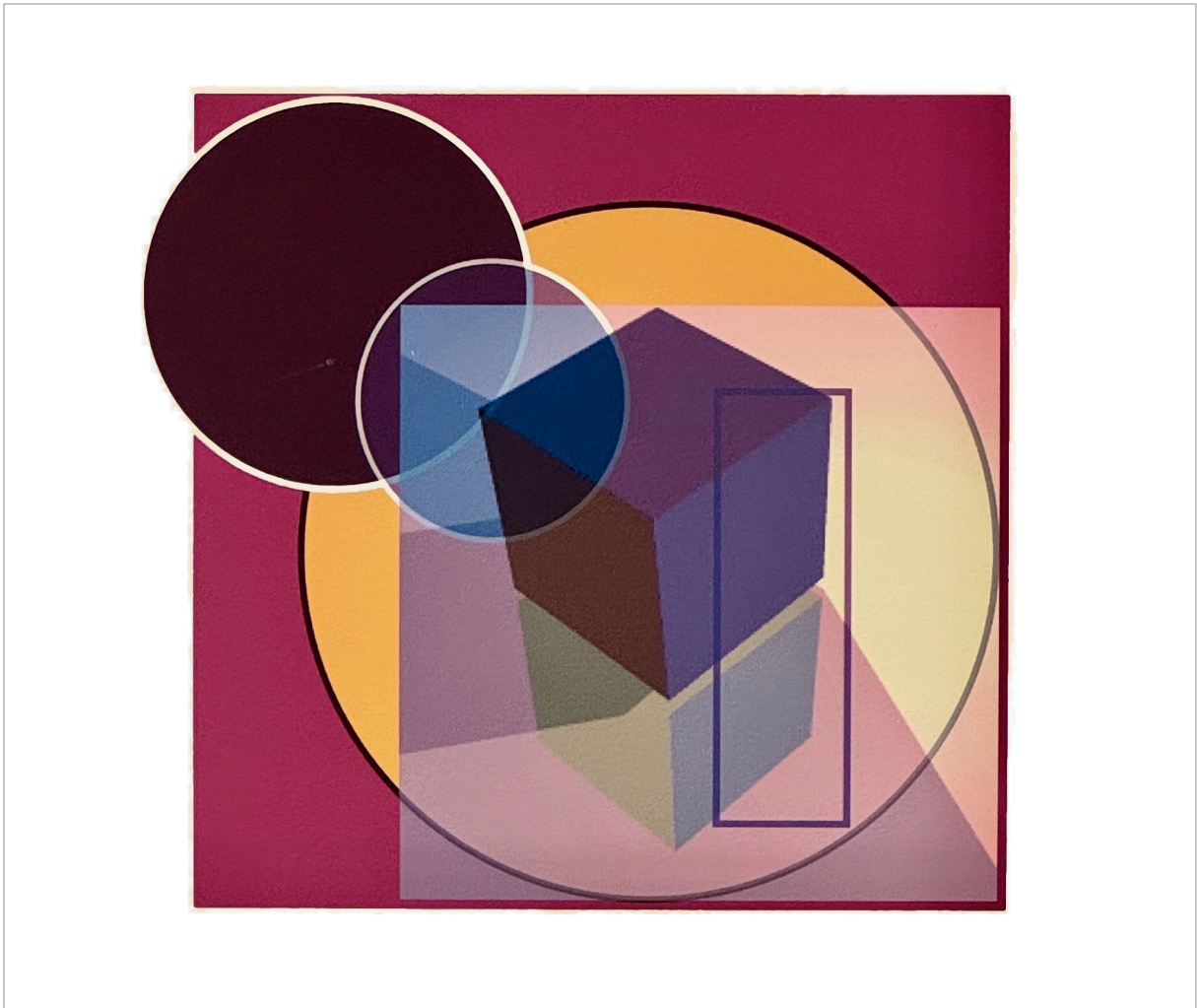
Untitled CG6 2000
Digital print Approximately 9" x 9"
"Part of a series of four created as part of a prize."

Untitled U4 1986
Screen print, 19" x 19"
"More explorations of folding and squares."

Untitled BX1 2007
Digital print. Approximately 7" x 7"

Credits
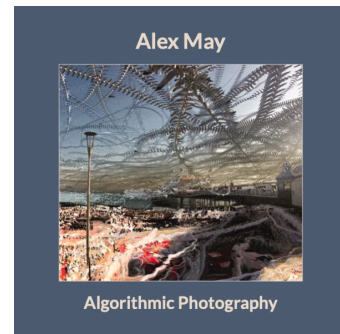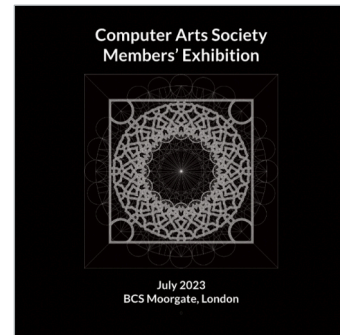
Other CAS Exhibitions

The **Computer Arts Society** runs regular exhibitions at BCS Moorgate in London and Phoenix Cinema and Arts Centre in Leicester. PDF copies of exhibition catalogues, videos of talks by the artists and other documentary materials are available from the **Computer Arts Society** website. A limited number of printed copies of the catalogues are available from the **Computer Arts Archive s**hop.

shop.computer-arts-archive.com

Paul Brown
Retrospective
1966–2022

Leicester Computer Art Pioneers
Exhibition Catalogue

Computer Arts Society
Members' Exhibition
July 2023
BCS Moorgate, London

Computer Arts Society
Members' Exhibition
July 2024
BCS Moorgate, London

HOW QUANTEL'S PAINTBOX
CHANGED OUR WORLD
EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

Alex May
Algorithmic Photography