Who's got the title?

Dear Editor:

Frank Dietrich's article in the July edition has a picture entitled Studies in Perception I, by Knowlton & Harmon. According to my copy of Cybernetic Serendipity (referenced by Dietrich), this is in fact entitled Mural, and was shown at the ICA in London in 1966 as a 5' by 12' (1.5240m by 3.6576m) mural. The same catalogue references three Studies in Perception, of which the first is Telephone: Studies in Perception I. Naturally enough, this was a telephone. It was done in a similar style to Mural, but using symbols which were communications symbols, rather than the "electronic" symbols.

Besides the possible incorrect title, Mural appears to have been printed as a mirror image. At least, the version printed in Cybernetic Serendipity is the other way round. Which is correct? Does anyone know? (Does anyone care?)

Lastly, is this the first "computer" nude?

Best wishes,
Malcolm W. Clark

Reply from Frank Dietrich

Whether Knowlton's and Harmon's picture represents the first computer nude or not is difficult to establish in view of numerous Snoopies and nudes decorating the computer laboratories. The only other serious early examples of a half-nude I am aware of is Leslie Mezei's Bikini Shifted which probably dates from 1967 or 1968.

Does someone care about the proper title? Well, the creators did not. Ken Knowlton reports that this piece was commonly known as Computer Nude. For publication purposes he and Harmon gave it more "respectable" titles depending on the circumstances. That's why both Mural and Studies in Perception (with varying numbers), appear as titles for the same piece in catalogs and literature. Since the piece was patched together from eight prints to achieve a large scale for the ICA show in London (which took place in 1968, not 1966!) they called it appropriately Mural.

Finally, statistically speaking, the London version of the Nude-Mural-Study is the only one that has been printed as a mirror image. Five or six other publications show it as published in my article.

Being a computer artist myself I do care personally about these and somewhat larger issues. It just so happens that in the same issue of Computer Graphics and Applications (page 8) my picture Fortune Cookie has been printed upside down. Another picture (page 15) carries the caption that it "has been run on a Datavax-UV1." In reality no VAX of any sort was involved, but a microcomputer called Datamax-UV1.

The larger issues, however, are those where the integrity or ownership of the artwork is damaged or infringed. First, there are unfortunate cases where the reproduction of the image is so bad that it no longer does justice to the original quality of the piece. Second, often artists find their work being reproduced without authorization and without payment of royalties or honorarium. Third and worst, the copyright of pictures is directly infringed in a growing number of cases where computer pictures are published with consciously forged credits.

This happened recently to David Em, when he faced one of his images on the covers of a German paperback credited to an anonymous artist. And it happened to me when friends sent me a PR brochure, published by the French computer maker Bull, which contained several of my images presented as research being done at GREPA, an institute at Strasbourg University in France. Of course I never used Bull computers and never worked at GREPA. What can be done about these blatant rip-offs? Complaints by individual artists are ignored or simply rejected. Legal action, especially in international affairs, takes time and even more, money. I believe that a strong stand should be made by academic, artistic, and professional organizations, such as SIGGRAPH, to publicly protect the rights of their members and the sense of ethics of the entire graphics community.

Frank Dietrich