Welcome to the Conference

It has become something of a tradition for each year’s Program Chairs to choose a way to make a contribution to the VL Symposium series. This year, the theme of the conference is “Visual Languages and Innovation,” and in keeping with this theme, we have chosen diversity as our contribution. Our goal was to encourage a diverse group of researchers to participate in this conference so that we would have interaction among a wide variety of ideas relevant to visual languages. Towards this end, we formed a heterogeneous program committee composed of researchers representing a wide variety of areas including: HCI issues of languages; visual programming language design, theory, and implementation; visual databases; software visualization; and end-user programming languages, to name but a few.

We are very pleased that we received such a wide variety of high-quality submissions. Eighty submissions were received, and of these we accepted 35 papers plus 10 posters. We have attempted to arrange the program so as to encourage plenty of interaction among the attendees. In addition to formal paper presentations, there are informal one-on-one presentations in the form of demos and posters, sizable coffee breaks, and unstructured lunch breaks to give people a chance to brainstorm and exchange ideas.

We have also arranged special events aimed at sharing ideas from two particularly challenging applications of visual languages. The first of these special events is the Child’s Play pre-conference workshop organized by Alexander Repenning, Roland Huebscher, and Clayton Lewis. This workshop brings together researchers interested in programming languages for end-users — particularly children. Demos from this workshop will be presented during the main conference to share the highlights of this work with the rest of the VL community. The second of these events is the Visual Programming Challenge, organized by Allen Ambler. Throughout the year, participants in this event have been working on using their own visual languages to manage the control of vehicles built from LEGO Programmable Bricks in real-time, and the results of their work will be shared during a special session. Many thanks to the organizers of these events for their imagination and hard work in finding ways to share the excitement and innovative ideas gleaned from these areas with the rest of the conference.

Our goal of diversity includes not only bringing in brand new research ideas, but also looking at how the mainstream ideas from this research area have grown and matured over the years. For VL research to reach its zenith, we must not only concentrate on innovation in the future, but also study and build on the gains made in the past. One way we are addressing this need is through tutorials — from an introductory tutorial aimed at newcomers to the VL field to in-depth tutorials on VL topics aimed at those who may be familiar with VLs in general but wish to learn more about specific topic areas. We also thank Nick Wilde for organizing a panel of three of our most distinguished pioneers, S.-K. Chang, Philip Cox, and David Canfield Smith, who will give their perspectives on VL research over the long-term.

We would also like to thank John Stasko and Trevor Smedley for overseeing the special events and tutorials programs; John Atwood, Judy Gurka, and Judy Hays for helping in numerous ways with the administrative tasks; and general chair H.-J. Hoffmann, the steering committee, and the program committee, for helping us plan and implement a high-quality conference. Most of all, we would like to thank all of the authors and attendees for helping to make this conference a source of new ideas and greater understanding of the VL research area.

Welcome to VL ’96!

Margaret Burnett and Wayne Citrin
Program Chairs