

In the decades following World War II, technology proliferated at multiple scales. Large mainframe computers, alongside their human programmers, previously used by the military to break codes and direct bombs, soon appeared in research institutions as well as manufacturing and communications industries. Computing allowed for new creative processes that could be utilized to generate ideas about the future. Assembled to execute complex calculations and solve problems, computers were designed to think.

Drawn largely from The Museum of Modern Art's collection, this exhibition features the pioneering developments of artists, designers, and architects who engaged with computational thinking and also includes notable examples of computer and component design. It presents overlapping narratives in which the computer—as machine, medium, and method—was used to challenge established modes of representation and production, redefining the limits of the work of art.

Many artists working in diverse mediums channeled the promise of computing into the conceptual foundations of kinetic sculptures, animated films, videos, alternative networks, and machine drawings. By producing systems on their own or in partnership with universities and corporations, artists and designers explored how computational logic reframed questions surrounding labor, communication, and perception. Seen together, their endeavors suggest a history of postwar art that unfolded in parallel to technological advancement while revealing the generative codes that structure our present.

Organized by Sean Anderson, Associate Curator, Department of Architecture and Design, and Giampaolo Bianconi, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Media and Performance Art.

The exhibition is supported by the Annual Exhibition Fund.

The exhibition title above alternates between two fonts: MoMA Sans, which is used throughout the installation, and OCR-A, which was designed by American Type Founders in 1966 and gifted to the Museum by Monotype Imaging Inc. in 2010.