

An artists' brush with CAD

By KESTER CRANSWICK

TAKE a group of artists and some graphics computers like the Amiga, mix well for three weeks and you end up with a heady brew of creativity and computer art.

You also end up with many of those artists wanting to go out and buy their own computers to continue the experience.

All that happened in Adelaide recently, when the Australian Network for Art and Technology (ANAT) held its second annual national summer school in computer aided design and manufacture.

ANAT began in 1985 through a grant from the Australia Council. It now receives support from a variety of government and private bodies.

In its first year the school attracted a dozen artists. This year the number swelled to 18. They came to get first hand experience of computers and to learn what the technology has to offer.

One of the companies sponsoring the course, Commodore, supplied a range of Amiga 2000 and 500 hardware and software. Other suppliers loaned Silicon Graphics workstations, colour printers, video digitisers and still video cameras.

Participants were also able to use the IBM minicomputers and sundry PCs at Regency College's advanced technology education centre (ATEC).

The manager of ATEC, Mr Pat Tucker, was one of five tutors on the course. Last year there were just two tutors.

He said the aim of the course was to promote a technology awareness, not give comprehensive skills training.

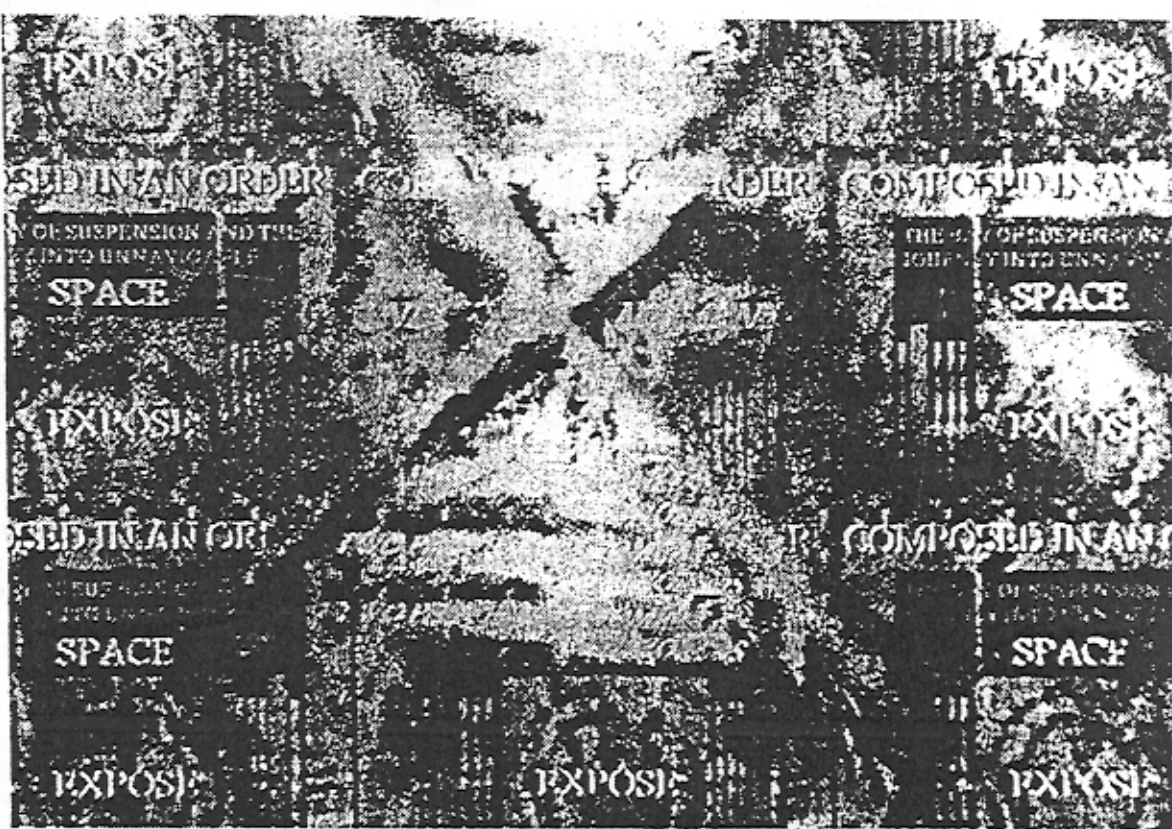
"We would like to make people aware of the facilities and what they can be used for," he said.

Other tutors included creative director of the advanced computer graphics centre at Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Mr Paul Brown; and a leading textile designer, Ms Rhonda O'Meara.

But what did the artists make of it all? For some, it was the opportunity to add a new dimension to their art. For others it was a tantalising glimpse of the future.

All were impressed. A Victorian textile worker, Rose Marie Szulc, was so impressed with the Amiga 2000 that she vowed to buy one.

A NSW artist who used the Amiga to good effect in furthering her art was Lynne Roberts-Goodwin. She scanned images into the Amiga, manipulated them, then added text.



Artist Lynne Roberts-Goodwin's Spaces of Dissension, a Silicon Graphics image using scanned Amiga prints

The files were then moved to a Silicon Graphics workstation to get a higher quality output. This was pure computer art, and some may find its way into her exhibitions.

Quality of output was a big consideration. While most artists on the course appreciated the Amiga's low cost and ease of use, they would rather the high quality output of the professional workstations, each one costing as much as a room of Amigas.

There were other limitations too, limitations not even the most powerful computers could overcome.

A Queensland artist working on large-scale outdoor installations, Ms Wendy Mills, spent her time getting to grips with an Amiga running Deluxe Paint.

She used the program to create hard copy of scenes she visualised. Starting with photographs digitised into the computer, she manipulated the images to produce surreal visions of what she would like to create.

"But a lot of my work could only exist in a computer at this point in time," she said.

Ms Szulc struck similar problems. She works with textiles and found herself using the Amiga to work with images digitised into the system.

The images were manipu-

lated with a view to creating fabric patterns which were then superimposed onto images of her body to see what they would look like as garments.

However, Ms Szulc was frustrated to find that there was no way to get the images from computer to cloth.

"Still, I think it is worthwhile just to get a handle on the new technology. Someday there will be the application I want," she said.

One person who approached the course with a definite goal in mind was the head of the photographic department at the North Adelaide School of Art, Mr Rodney Harris.

Photographic

He explored whether the Amigas could be used as a storage medium for his department, and how they could be applied to the photographic process.

"I want to see what it can do as far as image grabbing and manipulation," he said.

At first he used a video camera to input still images, using SuperPic to manipulate them and a colour printer to get hard copy. It was not quite what he was after.

"You do not get exactly what's on screen," he said. "That's frustrating."

But towards the end of the

course, Melbourne-based Blue Marble Technologies loaned the students a Tainron Fotovix 2X digitiser.

This innovative device captures all or part of a 35mm transparency or negative. It has a six-times zoom lens, aperture control and the means to alter the colour balance and image intensity.

"It was at least twice as good as I expected," Mr Harris said.

At the end of the course, Mr Harris had seen enough to convince him that the Amiga had plenty to offer.

"We want to get a suite of 2000s," he said, adding that the plan was to video still images, then manipulate them using the computer.

Another advanced technology the students had access to was one of the first Canon Ion still video cameras in the country.

Images captured with the camera could be loaded into the computer for storage, manipulation and display.

To Mr Harris, this represented a quantum leap in the art of photography.

"If you can learn to manipulate images with the computer, that's good," he said.

"You can plan a total finished piece and, using a computer, see what it looks like."