

# bernard jacobson gallery

Harold Cohen

Colour Rules

9<sup>th</sup> July – 15<sup>th</sup> August 2008

'Art is one of the ways the individual has of bringing beliefs under scrutiny and under the authority of this or her intelligence'. - Harold Cohen, 'Off the Shelf', 1986

Harold Cohen's original and illustrious career spans half a century and has been the subject of major exhibitions across the world. Aside from his 1983 Tate exhibition, the Bernard Jacobson Gallery show, timed to coincide with the artist's 80th birthday, will be his first gallery showing in the UK since his departure to California in 1968.

Structured after organic growth patterns and yet possessing of a strikingly synthetic colour scheme Harold Cohen's latest works present an intriguing fusion between nature and artifice, the organic and the mechanised, the visual and the conceptual, which cuts to the core of their production process.

The works represent the most recent stage of a project in evolution since 1972, when Harold Cohen seemingly abandoned his distinguished painting career, in favour of computer programming. Since then, Cohen has channelled all his artistic efforts into writing 'AARON', a computer programme capable of autonomously generating original imagery. The genesis of the concept can be traced back to Cohen's enduring analytical approach as well as the wider historical evolution of the computer over the latter half of the 20th century. In his paintings for the British Pavilion of the 1966 Venice Biennale, for example, Cohen was already following a set of pre-established rules governing the generation of new material. The following year Cohen took up a one-year professorship at the University of California, San Diego and found himself increasingly drawn to the rapidly advancing field of Artificial Intelligence that was establishing a home there. By 1972, Cohen was still in San Diego and ready to begin work on his own art-generating programme.

Cohen began by establishing a set of 'cognitive primitives' relating to the perceptual processes involved in the act of image making. From these foundation principles Cohen has continued to furnish AARON with an ever-increasing knowledge base of the external world

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and the function of such knowledge in image making. From child-like scribbles, through sparse line drawings of figures integrated into garden scenes, to the vibrantly coloured, botanically inspired works which AARON is now producing, Cohen has watched over and guided the programme's development as a master might a gifted student. What has remained critical to the process throughout is AARON's autonomy in the generation of imagery. In this respect Cohen's work stands apart from that of many others who have used computers as tools within their practice; for in its working practice AARON represents, 'an autonomous intelligent entity', reacting to what it has already created according to a set of predefined rules, which direct its actions; producing work under the guidance, yet beyond the predictions, of its master and programmer.

The works AARON is now producing teeter on the edge between abstraction and representation; allowing colour to function as the primary organising principle, whilst maintaining a link to the external world. The results are highly sophisticated and constantly inventive essays in colour harmony, which confound the viewer with their fearless originality and give weight to Cohen's contention that it is the high quality of the products not mere conceptual intrigue that gives his art significance. Harold Cohen will be available for conversation at the gallery in the days prior to the opening.