

The Interface Experience: Forty Years of Personal Computing

On View April 3–July 19, 2015



Commodore
Business Machines.
Commodore 64 with
1702 monitor and
1541 disk drive, 1982.

Bard
Graduate
Center: Decorative
Arts, Design
History, Material
Culture ■ Gallery

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...the most profound technologies are those that disappear. They weave themselves into the fabric of everyday life until they are indistinguishable from it.

— Mark Weiser, “The Computer for the 21st Century,” 1991

Computer technology presents ever expanding opportunities to try new things and with each novel experience we attain a glimpse of the future. Through tactile and interactive displays that encourage visitors to explore their relationship with technology, *The Interface Experience: Forty Years of Personal Computing*, on view in Bard Graduate Center’s Focus Gallery from April 3 through July 19, 2015, surveys the history of the last four decades of personal computing and raises questions about how our interactions with these devices have influenced our lives.

Exhibition

Over the last forty years computing technology has come to define an era marked by the ascendance of the personal computer—a device that has enabled ordinary individuals to access a tool that had been exclusive to research laboratories and corporate technology centers. During this time, a blur of technological advances in both hardware and software has reached the market, as computers have gotten smaller, faster, more powerful, and more complex. In fact, these rapid changes have so dramatically affected our lives that we seem to have lost perspective on how our interactions with these machines have come to define our everyday life experiences. To counter this, *The Interface Experience* offers visitors an opportunity to explore the history of the personal computer and its influence in our lives through unique hands-on experiences.



Microsoft Corporation. Microsoft Kinect (First Generation), 2010.



Palm Inc. PalmPilot Professional with stylus, 1997.

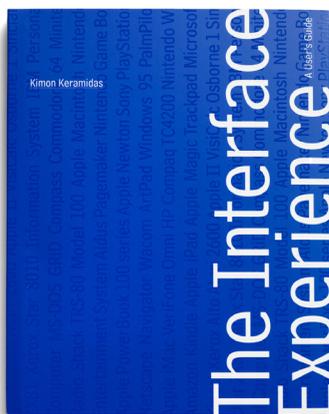
A computer is more than merely an assemblage of plastic, metal, and glass. *The Interface Experience* presents an opportunity to gain an understanding of how the design of hardware, software, and user interface work in concert to impact our experiences of these machines. To this end, the five computers central to the exhibition—the Commodore 64 (1982), Macintosh Plus (1986), PalmPilot Professional (1997), iPad 2 (2010), and Microsoft Kinect (2010)—are fully functional. Through software developed especially for the exhibition and installed on each device, visitors are able to experience the distinctive characteristics of each computer and consider its place in history.

In addition, an innovative staging of the objects and a robust web platform featuring company and product histories, as well as historical print and video advertising for the objects on display (available at www.interface-experience.org) promise to make *The Interface Experience* simultaneously evocative, interactive, and informative for anyone who has ever used a computer. The Focus Gallery will also provide a depository for visitors to drop off their small electronic devices, such as phones, handheld computers, and other small items, for responsible recycling, in order to call attention to the growing electronic waste stream.

The exhibition was curated by Kimon Keramidas, assistant professor and director of the Digital Media Lab at Bard Graduate Center. In preparation for the exhibition, he offered “The Interface Design Experience Tutorial” in the fall 2014 semester. Students contributed substantively to the project through their participation in the tutorial and as faculty assistants.

Publication

A fully-illustrated book by curator Kimon Keramidas accompanies the exhibition. *The Interface Experience: A User's Guide* surveys some of the landmarks in the history of personal computing, provides a close reading of the five computers central to the exhibition—the Commodore 64 (1982), Macintosh Plus (1986), PalmPilot Professional (1997), iPad 2 (2010), and Microsoft Kinect (2010)—and addresses how to effectively present these devices in an exhibition setting. The book's design—its spiral-binding, tabs, and iconographic and technical drawings—is meant to draw out interesting parallels between computing as a new medium and the old media materials that have supported and instructed their use. Reminiscent of early computer user manuals, this book is a one-of-a-kind tour of modern computing technology. It will be available in the Gallery and online at store.bgc.bard.edu.



Focus Gallery

The Focus Gallery presents small-scale exhibitions as part of an academically innovative project that also includes graduate seminars, public programming, and publications both in print and online. Envisaged as a laboratory, the Focus Gallery promotes experimentation in display, interpretation, and the use of digital media and reflects Bard Graduate Center's commitment to exhibitions as integral to scholarly activity.

Gallery Programs

Lectures, gallery talks, and conversations are offered in conjunction with the exhibition. For more information, please call 212-501-3011 or e-mail programs@bgc.bard.edu.

Exhibition Tours

Group exhibition tours for adult and school groups are offered Tuesday through Friday between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m. and Thursday until 7 p.m. Reservations are required for all groups. To schedule a tour, please call 212-501-3013 or e-mail tours@bgc.bard.edu.

Bard Graduate Center Gallery is located in New York City at 18 West 86th Street, between Central Park West and Columbus Avenue. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Sunday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Thursday from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. Suggested admission is \$7 general, \$5 seniors.

About Bard Graduate Center

Bard Graduate Center is a graduate research institute in New York City. Our Gallery exhibitions and publications, MA and PhD programs, and research initiatives explore new ways of thinking about decorative arts, design history, and material culture. Founded in 1993, it is an academic unit of Bard College.

For information about Bard Graduate Center and upcoming exhibitions, please visit bgc.bard.edu. For press information and images, please e-mail barnhart@bgc.bard.edu or call 212-501-3074.



GRiD Systems Corporation. GRiD Compass 1109 portable computer, 1983.