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The background picture is from WARPITOUT—Veeder's own face jazzed up with the help of ZGRASS, an advanced graphics language. Inset, Veeder and her tools.

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CHICAGO COMPUTER ARTIST ACCELERATES TO WARP SPEED

Just south of the loop, south of the La Salle Street banks, south of the Michigan Avenue hotels, south of the State Street department stores, lives an epic host of poor, underprivileged Chicagoans. Computer artist Jane Veeder is on the leading edge of a new age in electronic expression, yet she lives in the slums on South Halsted Street in a split-level studio apartment.

In that apartment, Veeder and her fellow artist Phil Morton have an impressive array of computer gadgetry, including a Datamax UV-1 Graphics Computer, a Sandin Image Processor, and assorted video equipment. CRT buses shake the building when they roar up Halsted just outside the front door, but they have little effect on the concentration of Veeder and Morton.

Veeder's latest creation, *WARPITOUT*, made an impressive debut at the SIGGRAPH '82 Art Show in Boston this summer. Held annually for the last nine years by the Association for Computing Machinery's Special Interest Group on Computer Graphics, SIGGRAPH is the Academy Awards for computer artists.

In Veeder's own words, *WARPITOUT* is an "interactive computer graphics installation, supporting real-time color graphic processing of a digitized (facial) image of the current player using a menu-driven selection of drawing and processing programs, housed in a video-game cabinet."

Veeder's manifesto further explains the genesis of this computer game cum computer art program: "I had developed a number of generalized real-time computer graphics process program tools that I loved to play with. Some I had adapted into animation se-

quences, streamlined and stripped of their interactivity; others were still too slow for one-way performance. The recent development of our digitizer offered a wonderful opportunity to present these interactive programs in a menu-driven context for playing with everyone's favorite image ... themselves."

Burned into eprom and housed in a video-game cabinet, *WARPITOUT* allows the user/player to be Lon Chaney, Salvadore Dali, and Vincent Van Gogh with a digitized image of your own face. It was a big hit at SIGGRAPH, but it raised many questions as to its status as a true work of art.

"Is it art? That's the first question. Let's go on to the next one," Veeder offers. How about an artistic video game? "With *WARPITOUT*, I'm using the universal appeal of your own face as a pretext to indulge in computer graphics more directly than you get to do with a commercial video game, where you're interacting with a finished product in restricted ways. ZGRASS makes possible an artist-integrated project such as *WARPITOUT*, as contrasted to the corporate-designed videogames accomplished by teams working in fragmentary and specialized roles."

All this talk of video games and video game technology is not coincidental. Veeder uses a system that was developed in her neighborhood; video game behemoth Bally is based in Chicago. She has just smartly adapted the technology to other, more personal uses.

A more traditional work of art is *Montana*, a three-minute color videotape complete with stereo sound. Every year Veeder

takes a trip into the western mountains, and *Montana* is an attempt to capture her "love [of] the physical world out there and its attendant information aura."

Montana features a number of forms (mountain, hawk, buffalo, earth, Sears Tower, video camera, and more) made all very simple (in the way the Japanese mean it). Veeder took these simple forms and developed the visual relationships with a fluid program of her own design. The program enables her to draw with any of a collection of "snaps" (screen sections stored as arrays) and tools to make lines, boxes, and other shapes. She worked on the piece for a long time, producing a dynamic, arresting audiovisual experience.

Veeder and her partner Phil Morton are only two of many computer artists living and working in the Chicago area. Tom DeFanti and Dan Sandin of the University of Illinois at Chicago Circle have been very influential, mainly through their own development of new graphics technology. "I'm standing on a whole bunch of people's shoulders," says Veeder.

Veeder came from the world of video synthesis, which she feels is quite wonderful but akin to sex. "It's not too interesting for those watching." She supports herself by doing outside consulting work in the Chicago area, mainly instructing people how to use the ZGRASS language. She also says she's extremely addicted to real-time computer graphics.

"I am almost completely uninterested in still images other than photos for promotion or documentation. Real-time graphic performance resulting in a dynamic visual process is my priority and the motivation for my continuing growth as a programmer."

Living in a slum or not, Veeder is making history in computer art.