

Speculative Futures Student Contest: A new partnership between ISEA2024 and DAC ACM SIGGRAPH

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Abstract

This talk examines a first time collaboration between two key organizations: Digital Arts Committee ACM SIGGRAPH and ISEA, via a co-sponsored student exhibition. [The International Symposium on Electronic Art \(ISEA 2024\)](#) and [the ACM SIGGRAPH Digital Arts Committee](#) are sponsoring the *Speculative Futures* International Student Competition. Connecting with this year's ISEA theme, EveryWhen, the Speculative Futures Exhibition seeks to challenge and expand our understanding of the creative and research processes of knowing about ourselves and the world around us.

Keywords

Speculative Futures, Student Contest, Digital Arts Committee ACM SIGGRAPH

Introduction

ISEA 2024 and DAC ACM SIGGRAPH have partnered together to reach out to students and engage the next generation of international artists and scholars. Inviting contributions from around the world, we asked students to create a digital image, illustration, video, animation, or film that imaginatively explores and interprets the broad theme of Speculative Futures. What might a Speculative Future look, feel and appear like? Would such vision align with science fiction, or promote new planetary futures? Will the aesthetics of the future reveal a blissful utopia, dystopian apocalypse, or something else? We proposed to students that digital art can serve as a reflection of a unique vision of the future, whether it's a world filled with technological wonders or a cautionary tale of potential pitfalls.

Engaging the next generation

Through our call, we aimed to encourage a diverse array of creative approaches that align with the multifaceted nature

of Speculative Futures in digital art, encompassing commentary, alternative realities, and speculative design. This exhibition is a space to unleash creativity, unlock shared visions, and give students the chance to exhibit on multiple platforms (both in real life and online). The Speculative Futures competition offered students a unique opportunity to exhibit their work on both national and international stages. Entries were judged by international jurors based on creativity, concept, originality, execution, and adherence to the theme. We called for students from all countries to join us in envisioning the uncharted territories of tomorrow! The main website of Speculative Futures Student Contest can be found here:

come. <https://dac.siggraph.org/speculative-futures-artists/>

The curatorial proposal for Speculative Futures considered artwork as a means to comment on pressing social, political, and environmental issues. Art can be a powerful medium for highlighting the consequences of certain trends or policies and provoking critical thinking about the future. Digital artwork can serve as a thought-provoking commentary on the potential impacts of various choices and scenarios. Highlighting social, cultural, gender, and economic inclusion, this contest attracted 96 students from every continent on earth, and we are extremely proud of the broad response to our call. In a world facing alarming ecological decline, the rise of yet-to-be-understood emerging technologies, and an increasingly polarized online environment, thoughts of the future can be daunting. However, Speculative Futures embraces this challenge, exploring a diverse array of emerging student perspectives. The exhibition comprises twenty meticulously curated digital artworks across various mediums, including film, image, illustration,



Figure 1, Bianca Shonee Arroyo, 'The Pond' Award Winner. **Link:** <https://shonee.space/The-Pond-2023>

animation, and moving image, to explore future possibilities from the hopeful to the dystopian. Aligned with the prestigious ISEA24 in Brisbane and SIGGRAPH 2024 in Denver, both of which highlight the latest advancements in electronic art and technology, Speculative Futures emphasizes the experimental use of digital media in contemporary art. The student demographic, often termed 'digital natives,' plays a crucial role in this narrative. Their engagement with generative AI, speculative design, and virtual reality drives the exhibition's intent to provoke new thoughts and provide pertinent social and ecological commentary.

The current student population, politically and environmentally engaged, presents a fascinating case study. This generation faces an uncertain future, evidenced by rising levels of climate anxiety, or more aptly, 'climate empathy,' which can range from constructive environmental activism

to debilitating psychological overwhelm. Additionally, the emergence of technologies like generative AI further complicates this scenario, posing significant challenges to global economic and societal stability.

In this context, Speculative Futures asks a profound question: what future will humanity inherit? The exhibition not only seeks to envision potential outcomes but also to inspire a reflective dialogue on our collective trajectory in an ever-evolving world. We hope to continue this important partnership in the future with other ISEA host cities and DAC ACM SIGGRAPH.

Acknowledgements

The curators and organizers of the Speculative Futures Context thank their host organizations, ISEA and DAC ACM SIGGRAPH, for the kind support.