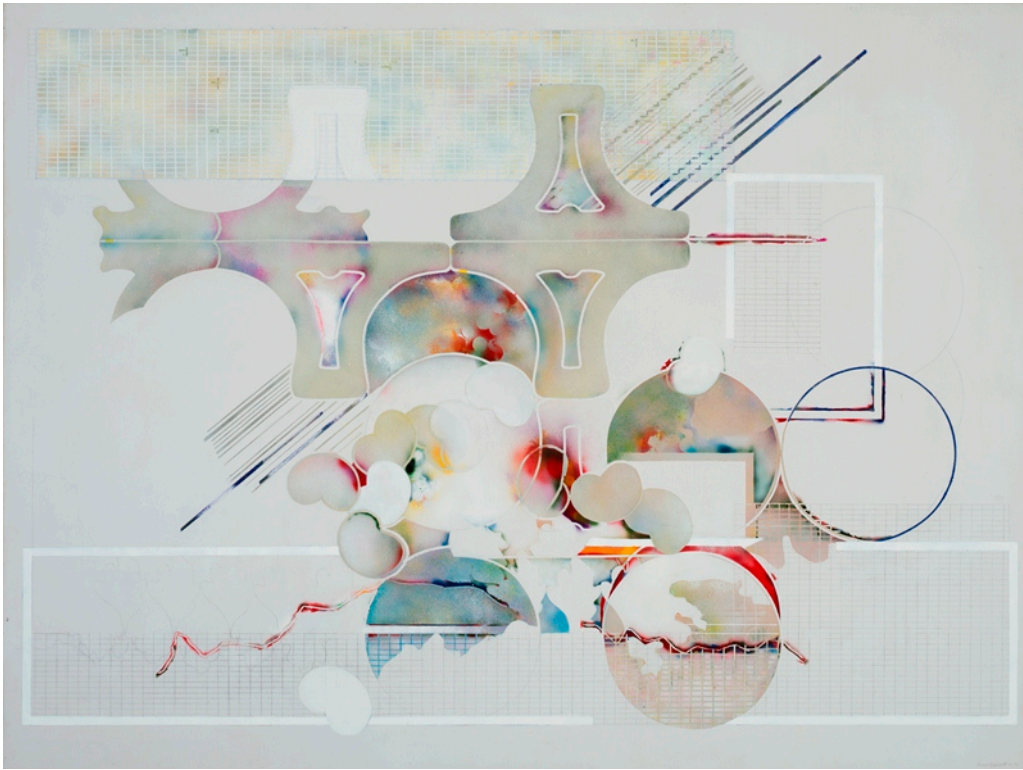


SAN JOSE MUSEUM OF ART

**NEW EXHIBITION AT SAN JOSÉ MUSEUM OF ART LOOKS AT BAY AREA ARTIST'S
TRANSITION FROM PAINTER TO PIONEER OF COMPUTER & NET-BASED ART**

**Sonya Rapoport: *biorhythm* reveals how Rapoport anticipated artificial intelligence
through the intertwining of personal data and computers**



For Immediate Release

San José, California (February 1, 2020) – Among the first women to earn an MA in Painting from UC Berkeley in 1949, Sonya Rapoport (b. 1923, Brookline, MA; d. 2015, Berkeley, CA) was always a step ahead of her time. Charting her transition from modernist painter to ground-breaking conceptual artist, *Sonya Rapoport: biorhythm*, on view February 7 through July 5, 2020, provides an in-depth look at the artist's output from 1974–83, a pivotal decade that marked a major shift in her work from abstract painting to the incorporation of emerging computer technologies.

The first solo museum show since the artist's passing in 2015, *biorhythm* highlights Rapoport's growing fascination with formal and conceptual elements of computer-collected and analyzed personal data, from her large-scale painting in the Museum's permanent collection, *Beginning* (1974) to geological survey-chart drawings and continuous-feed computer paper works on loan from the Sonya Rapoport Legacy Trust. *Biorhythm* will also bring together collages, artist books, documentation, and ephemera from Rapoport's multi-part performance of the same name, *Biorhythm* (1980–84), which explored participatory interaction with computers. To mark the

opening celebration of the show on February 7, 2020—a free Facebook First Friday program—SJMA will re-present a contemporary iteration of this interactive performance, the first time it has been restaged since it was originally presented at WORKS/San José in 1983. A participation space within the exhibition will also offer viewers an opportunity to experiment with Rapoport's prophetic methodology of characterizing oneself through a series of technological computations. Individual answers to a short self-assessment generate a collection of data points that each participant can illustrate through stencils of abstract data visualizations. Described by the artist as an attempt at “quantifying qualitative information,” visitors ultimately create a twenty-first century self-portrait inspired by her own computer-generated, chart-like work *A 20th century Portrait* (1982).

“*Sonya Rapoport: biorhythm* demonstrates SJMA's historical commitment to showcasing pioneering women artists,” says S. Sayre Batton, Oshman Executive Director of San José Museum of Art. “Opening during our fiftieth anniversary year, *biorhythm* follows a year of exhibitions by female artists: *Undersoul: Jay DeFeo*; *Screen Acts: Women in Film and Video*; *Catherine Wagner: Paradox Observed*; *Rina Banerjee: Make me a Summary of the World*; and *Beta Space: Pae White*. Rapoport broached many of our contemporary questions regarding the automated collection and use of personal data decades ago. That inquiry is especially relevant now and we are eager to take up the conversation.”

Rapoport's prolific career was fueled by a fascination with the linkages between coded systems and the self that was particularly ahead of her time and explored in her early work through symbolic abstractions appropriated from disciplines such as anatomy, botany, and medical imagery. Her interest in computers was sparked in the mid-1970s, when she discovered discarded computer printouts in the Math Department at UC Berkeley and began incorporating them in her work. Fascinated, she took a programming class in 1977, which allowed her to analyze details gathered from her immediate surroundings, like the arrangement of objects on her dresser or her shoe collection. The incorporation of personal data into graph-like drawings—as well as information gathered through collaborations with scientists at Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory, or with anthropologist Dorothy Washburn—marked a turning point in Rapoport's career. A selection of these drawings from the late 1970s highlights how her visual mappings moved away from abstract representations to reflect more personal, political, and social issues.

In the 1980s, the artist began tracking personal data into plots and collages through interactive computer-assisted performances—another innovative strategy that became crucial to the evolution of net art in the following decades. The multiyear performance piece *Biorhythm* (1980–84) relied on collected and analyzed personal data through both self-assessment and technology-based calculating. Using then-popular “biorhythm” computers to measure users' emotional, physical, and intellectual states and comparing the data to personal accounts, Rapoport charted the correlation between computed and personal assessment. The third phase of the project, perceptively titled *The Computer Says I Feel...* (1984) deployed this data as fuel for an imagined future in which individuals consult computers to assess their feelings. Rapoport's critical yet playful anticipation of the intertwining of personal data and computers in the 1980s is almost uncanny. Today, myriad digital applications provide weather reports based on one's exact location, individual daily horoscopes, and endless personalized content pushed out through computers and smart phones.

By comparing computer-generated biorhythms with psychological analysis, Rapoport shrewdly questions the impulse that cultural theorist

Jeanne Randolph described with this turn of phrase: our primary assumption about technology is that it works.

“It’s thrilling to present Rapoport’s work, an artist who worked with modest materials to explore technology,” Kathryn Wade, assistant curator, “and to have this opportunity to show new research on Rapoport’s art and process. She was at the forefront of new media art practices and her keen interest in the quantified-self—and its perils—merits particular consideration today. It’s exciting that SJMA will position her visionary work here in Silicon Valley.”

Organized by Kathryn Wade, assistant curator, with gratitude to the Sonya Rapoport Legacy Trust

About Sonya Rapoport

Sonya Rapoport (1923–2015, born Brookline, Massachusetts; lived and worked in Berkeley) received an MA in painting from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1949. She had her first major solo exhibition in 1963 at the Legion of Honor, San Francisco. The subject of late-career retrospective exhibitions at Kala Art Institute, Berkeley (2011); Mills College Art Museum, Oakland (2012); and Fresno Art Museum (2013), her work can be found in the Bay Area public collections of the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive; Mills College Art Museum; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; and San José Museum of Art. A leader among artists using emerging computer technologies in the 1970s, Rapoport was a frequent contributor to *Leonardo*, an art, science and technology journal published by the MIT Press.

RELATED EVENTS AND PUBLIC PROGRAMS

***Sonya Rapoport: biorhythm* Opening Celebration**

Facebook First Fridays

Friday, Feb 7 | 5–10pm

biorhythm performance, 7pm

Free admission; RSVP required.

SAN JOSÉ MUSEUM OF ART

SJMA is located at 110 South Market Street in downtown San José, California. The Museum is open Tuesday through Sunday, 11am to 5pm and until 8pm or later on the third Thursday of each month. As of Friday, February 1, 2019, SJMA is also free to all on the first Friday of each month from 5–10pm. Admission is \$10 for adults, \$8 for seniors, and free to members, college students, youth and children ages 17 and under, and school teachers (with valid ID). For more information, call 408.271.6840 or visit SanJoseMuseumofArt.org.

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Press Images

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Image Credit

Sonya Rapoport, *Koch II*, 1973–75. Spray acrylic and graphite on canvas; 72 x 96 inches. Estate of Sonya Rapoport.