

# Describing a Collaborative, Interdisciplinary Undergraduate Course on Generative Art: Past Practice and Ideas for the Future

**Craig Jackson**

*Department of Mathematics and Computer Science  
Ohio Wesleyan University, Delaware, OH, USA  
e-mail: chjackso@owu.edu*

**Jeff Nilan**

*Department of Fine Arts  
Ohio Wesleyan University, Delaware, Ohio, USA  
e-mail: janilan@owu.edu*

---



Craig Jackson (left), Jeff Nilan (right)

## **Abstract**

In this poster we present the ideas underlying a recent course offered at Ohio Wesleyan University in Spring 2020 on generative art. This course was a collaborative effort between two professors: a mathematician who studies complex systems such as the Earth's climate, and an artist who works in photography, book arts, and textiles.

Starting with a definition of generative art as "art in which the artist deliberately cedes control over some significant aspect of their work to an external agent" we worked with 12 undergraduate students to create generative art across a

range of two dimensional media, both digital and physical.

We took particular inspiration from the sketchbook drawings of Annie Albers, motion-tracked bug drawings by Harvey Moon, models of so-called self-organizing systems like traffic flow, the combinatorial art of German collective Troika, the averaged images of Jason Salavon, and the generative processes that shape the Earth's landscape.

The original intention for our course was to utilize both computation as well as a variety of photo and textile processes to produce generative physical artefacts. The advent of the covid pandemic, however, and our institution's subsequent move to virtual instruction, led us to shift our focus to production of work that was more compatible with screen-based display.

Our aim here is to share our ideas with other educators interested in teaching courses on generative art, as well as to gather new ideas from current practitioners and theorists to further refine our course for future in-person offerings.