A close-up, slightly blurred photograph of a white computer keyboard. The keys are visible, with labels for '3 RED', '4 CYN', 'R', 'Y', 'D', 'F', 'G', 'H', 'V', and 'B'. The text 'PETSCII – A Character Set and a Creative Platform' is overlaid in red.

PETSCII – A Character Set and a Creative Platform

Markku Reunanen, Anders Carlsson &
Tero Heikkinen


Outline

- What is this “PETSCII”?
 - A bit about character art
 - Our projects with examples
 - Conclusion
 - Further reading
-

What is PETSCII?

- Technically speaking...
 - An ASCII variant used on 8-bit Commodore computers, most notably
 - PET (1977)
 - VIC-20 (1980)
 - C-64 (1982)
 - C16 and Plus/4 (1984)
 - “PET Standard Code of Information Interchange”
-

Commodore 64 startup screen

The image shows a screenshot of the Commodore 64 startup screen. It features a blue background with a light blue border. The text is displayed in a monospaced font, with the first line being a separator. The second line shows the system's RAM status, and the third line indicates the amount of free BASIC memory. The screen is ready for user input, as indicated by the cursor on the fourth line.

```
**** COMMODORE 64 BASIC V2 ****  
64K RAM SYSTEM  38911 BASIC BYTES FREE  
READY.  
█
```

What is PETSCII? pt. 2

- A set of symbols ranging from textual characters to semigraphics, such as lines and blocks
 - A recognizable graphical style (cf. “fakescii”)
 - A minimalistic form of grid-based art
 - Platform for creative experimentation and display of skill
-

What is PETSCII? pt. 3

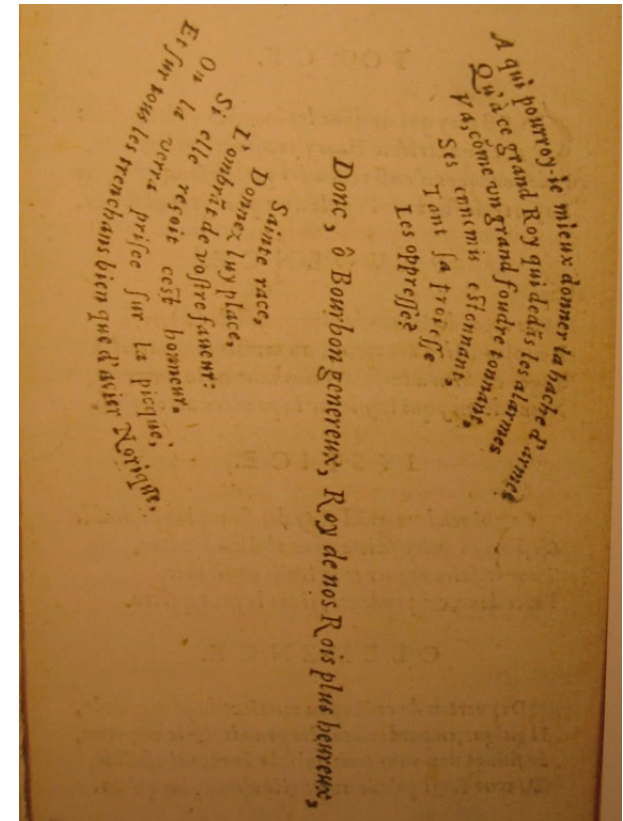


The history of character art



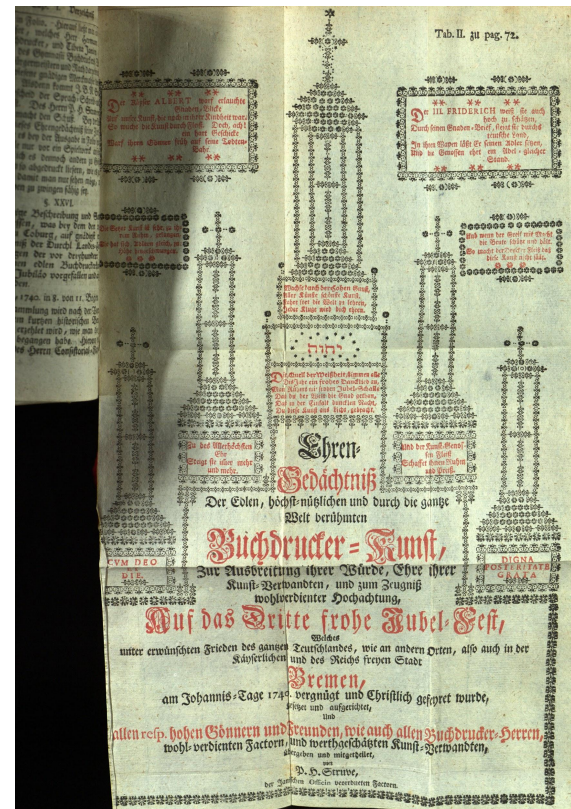
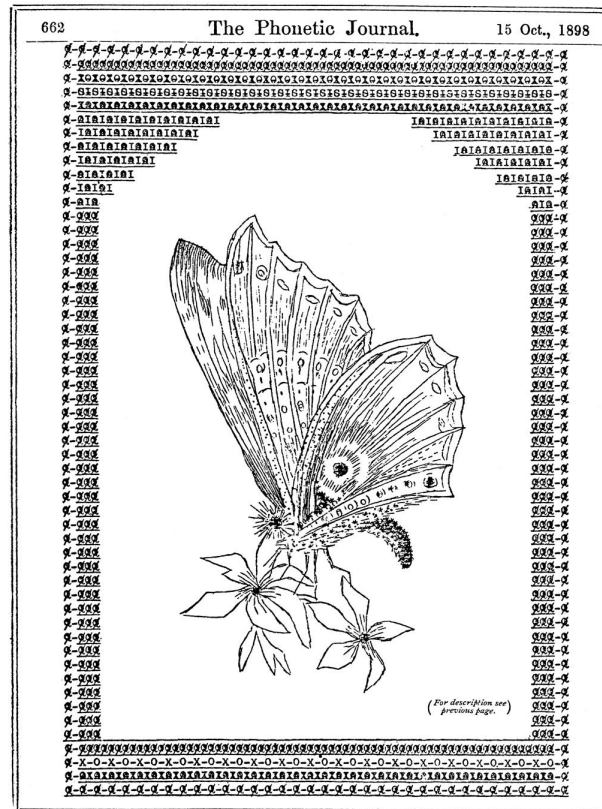
South Coast Peru Paracas Early Horizon 1400-400 B.C.

© David Black



Peruvian weaving ca. 1400–400 BC.
Axe by Simmias of Rhodes, 325 BC.

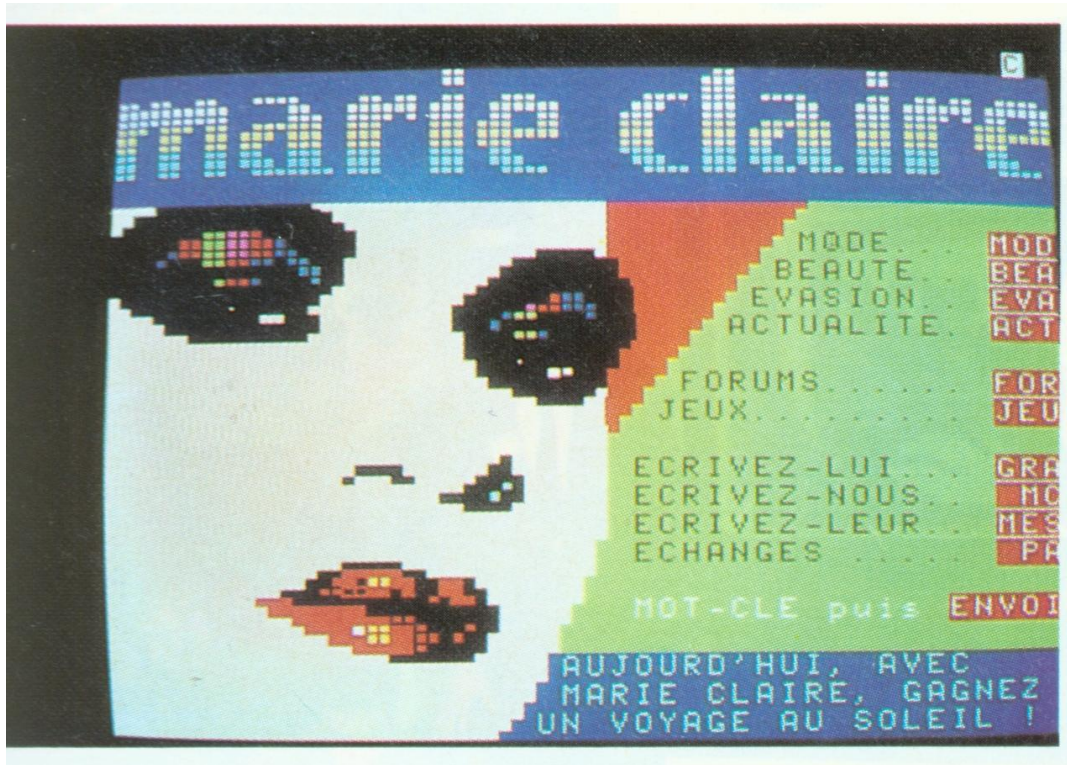
The history of character art



Typewriter art by Floria Stacey 1898.

Copperplate engravings by Christian Gessner, 1740.

The history of character art



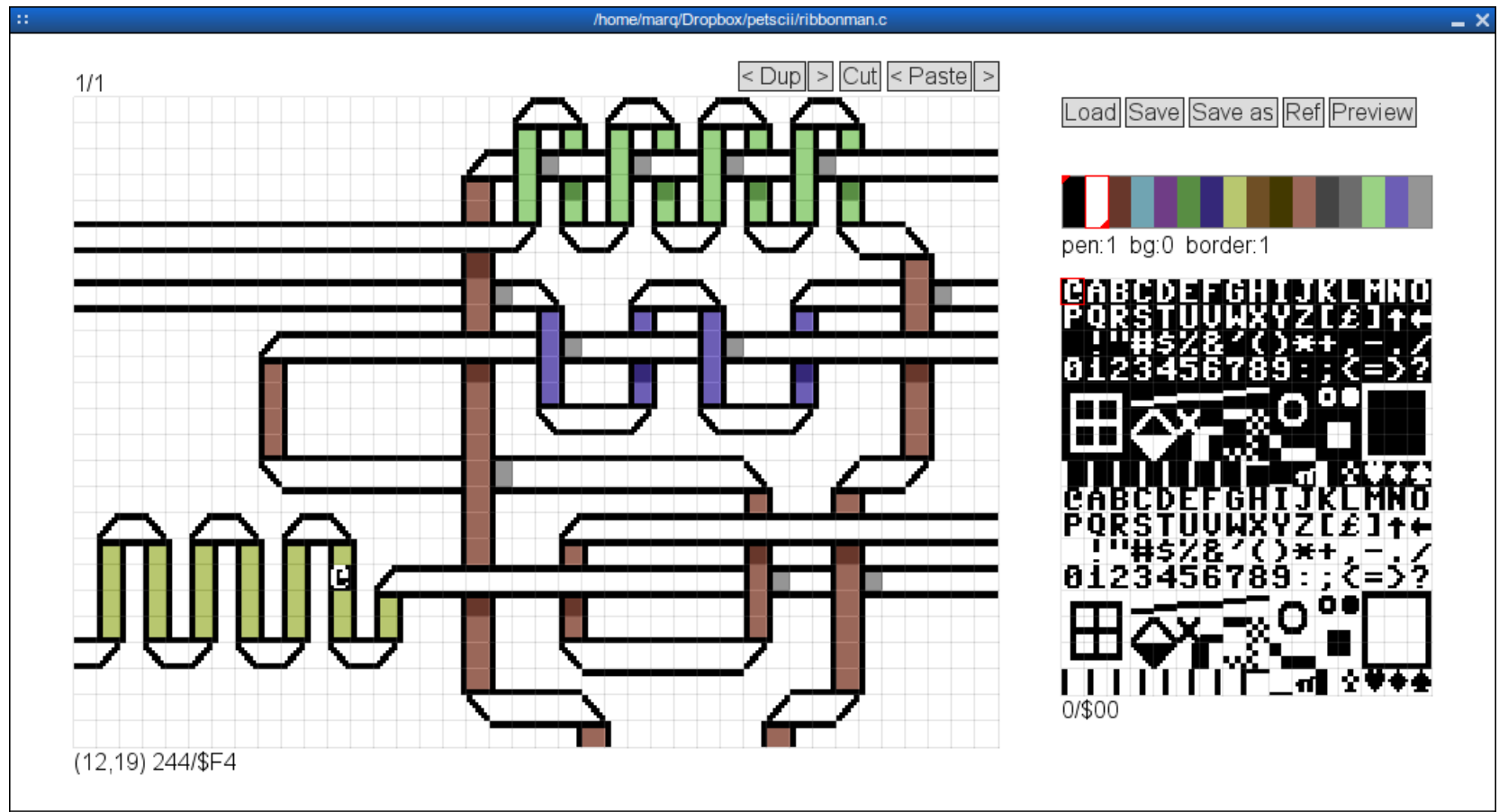
Minitel magazine, early 1980s.

Park Avenue teletext soap, late 1980s.

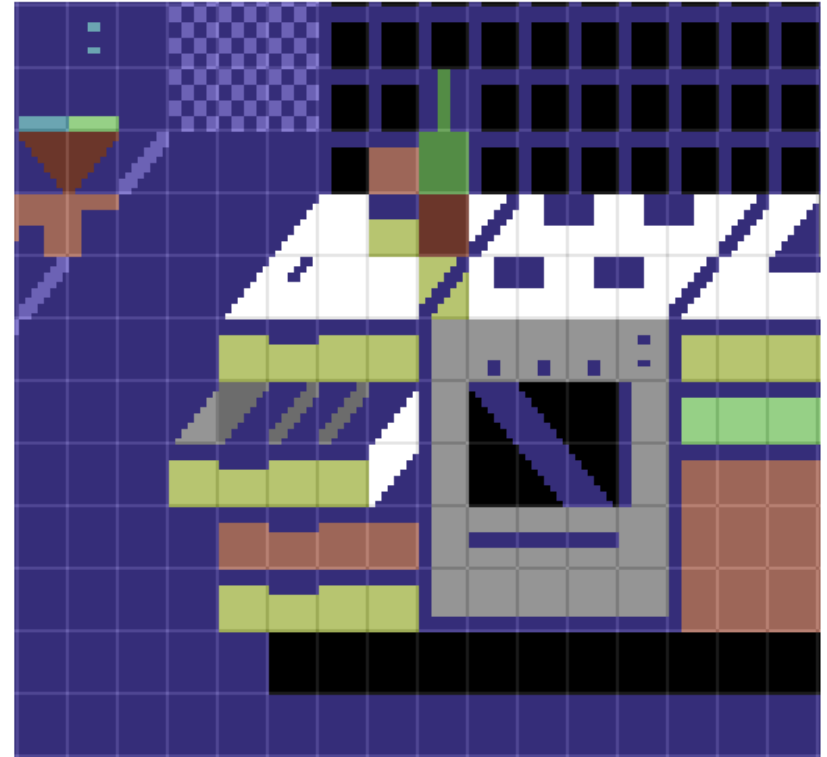
Our projects

- PETSCII (Markku & Tero)
 - A full-blown PETSCII art editor
 - Written in Processing, open source
 - Used by tens of artists, hundreds of works
 - Could have done with a flashier name!
 - Various Goto80-projects
 - Audiovisual works & performances in PETSCII
 - Character art archive: t3xtm0.de
 - Collaborations with Raquel Meyers
 - First hand experiences on both implementation and creative use
-

The editor

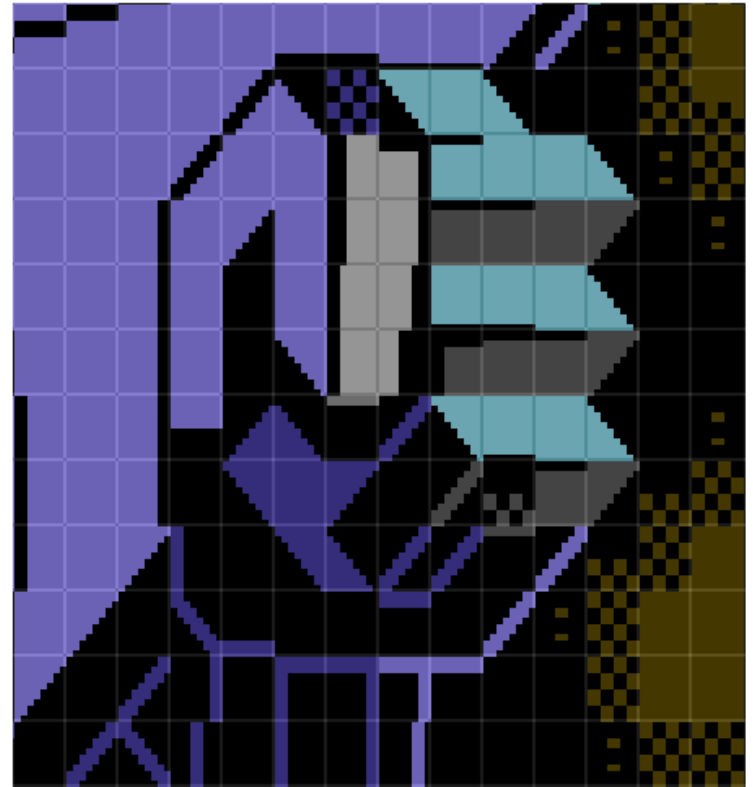
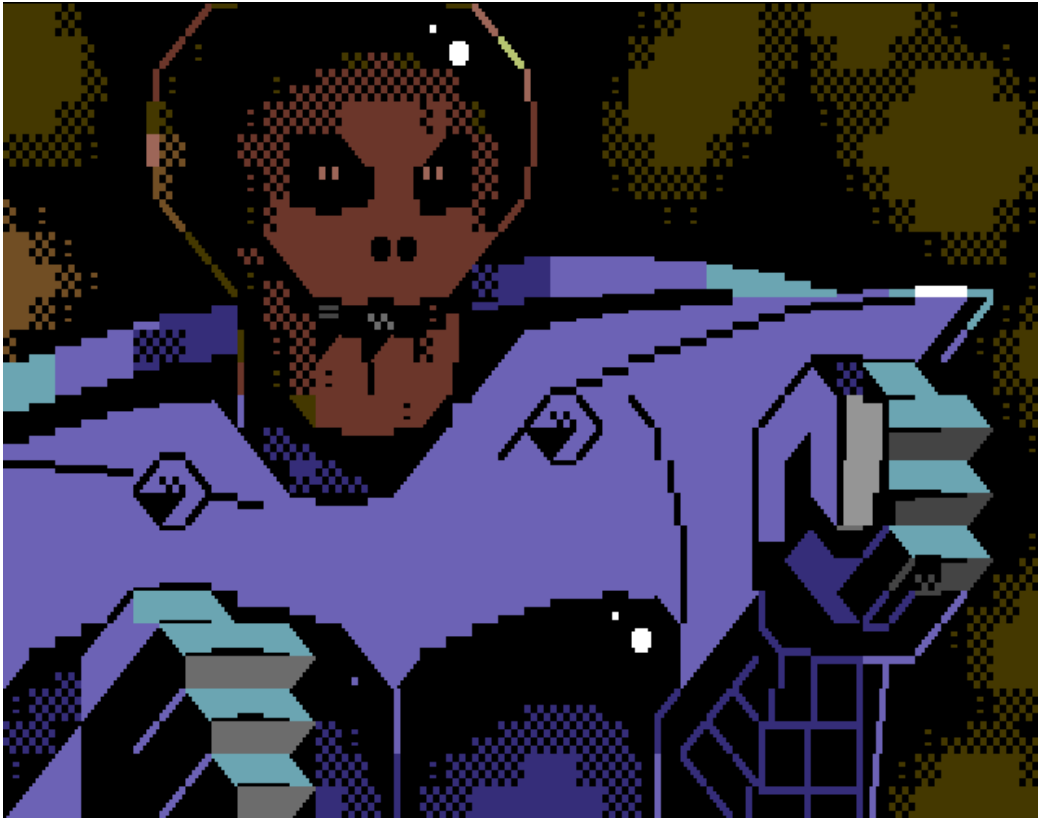


Example works



The character set is clearly visible and the character grid forms the basis of the image.

Example works



Here the image is more comparable to pixel graphics,
“technical show off”

Goto80 & Raquel Meyers live



Goto80 & Raquel Meyers live

- Animations typed by hand
 - Char-by-char animation, not frame-by-frame
 - “Written animations” recorded
 - No undo command
 - Music typed by hand
 - Starts with nothing prepared
 - Types all sounds and notes live in front of audience
 - Mixing music interface with graphics
 - Literal text blends with figurative text
-

Goto80 & Raquel Meyers live

- Preliminary findings
 - Two C64-screens usually mix so that the PETSCII grids align perfectly
 - Time-consuming to create, difficult to perform with precision
 - Hard to time graphical events and long loading times of new graphics
-

Goto80 & Raquel Meyers live

- Preliminary findings
 - In club settings, pre-made audiovisual presentations such as *Dansa In* usually work best
 - In gallery settings, technique and concept is appreciated
 - Transparent teletext works well as foreground to PETSCII graphics – fusing two kinds of text art
-

Conclusion

- PETSCII still in active use (38 years!)
 - Demos, pictures, animations
 - Authoring tools developed by enthusiasts
 - Culturally embedded practice
 - Well in line with the demoscene's "doing the impossible" ethic
 - (Not just) nostalgia
 - A low-threshold entry point to retro art and experimentation
-

Further reading

- Leonard J. Paul (2013), *Text-Mode and the Live PETSCII Animations of Raquel Meyers*
 - Michael A. Hardagon (2011), *Like City Lights, Receding: ANSI Artwork and the Digital Underground, 1985–2000*
 - Nick Montfort et al. (2012), *10 PRINT CHR\$(205.5+RND(1)); : GOTO 10*
 - Raquel Meyers (2014), *The Yeti Sound Machine*
 - <http://t3xtm0.de/>
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