

PETSCII – A Character Set and a Creative Platform

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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



What is PETSCII? pt. 2

- A set of symbols ranging from textual characters to semographics, 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

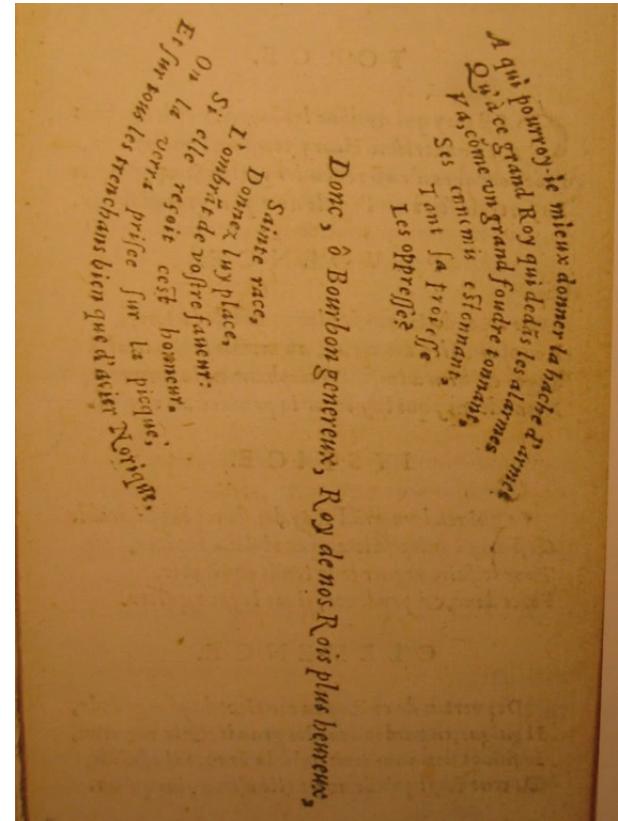
What is PETSCII? pt. 3



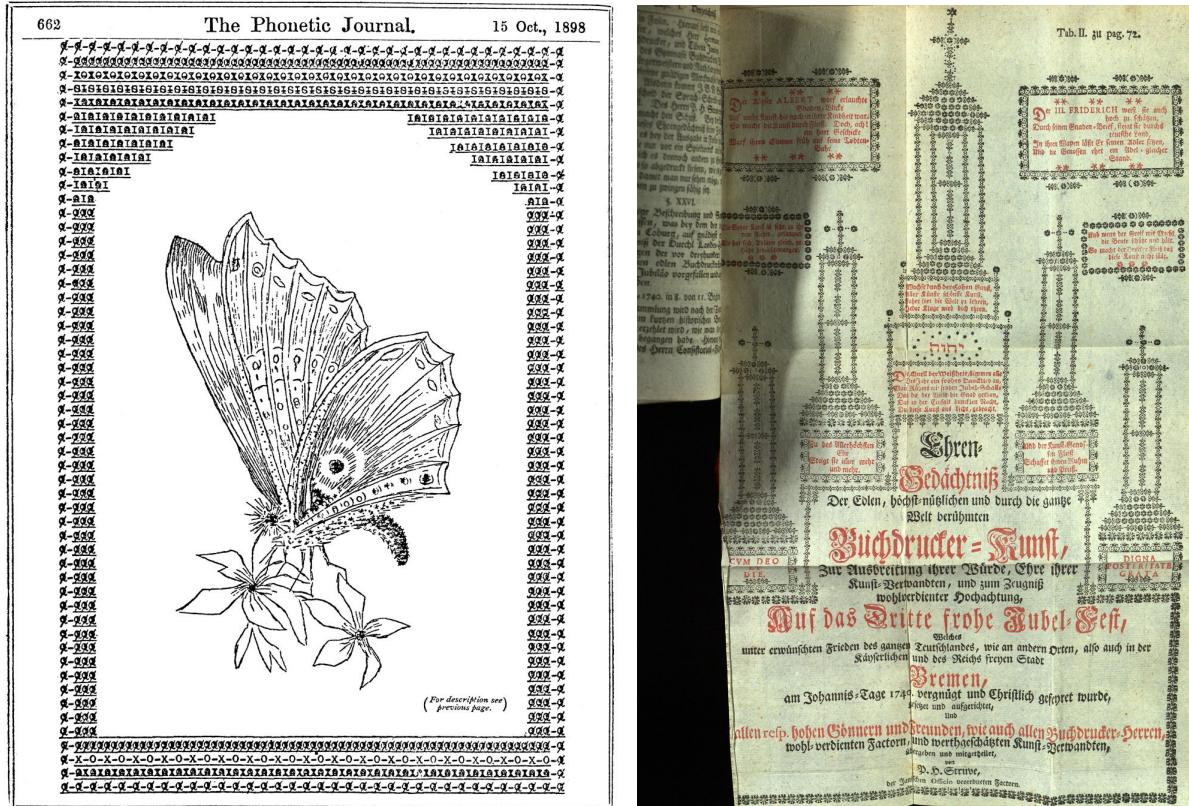
The history of character art



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

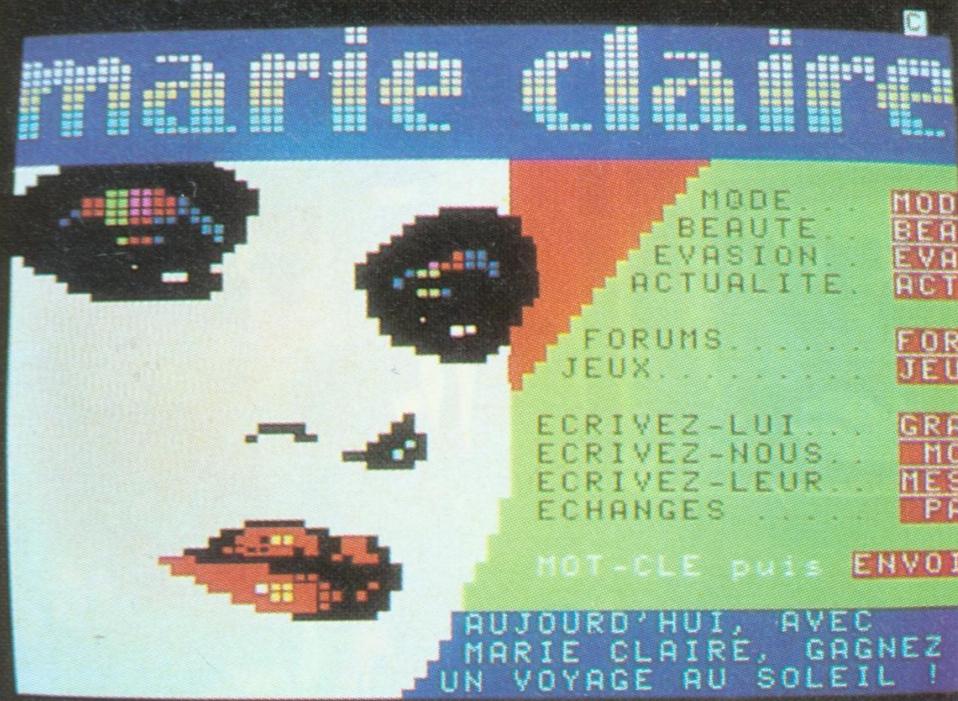


The history of character art



Typewriter art by Floria Stacey 1898.
Copperplate engravings by Christian Gessner, 1740.

The history of character art



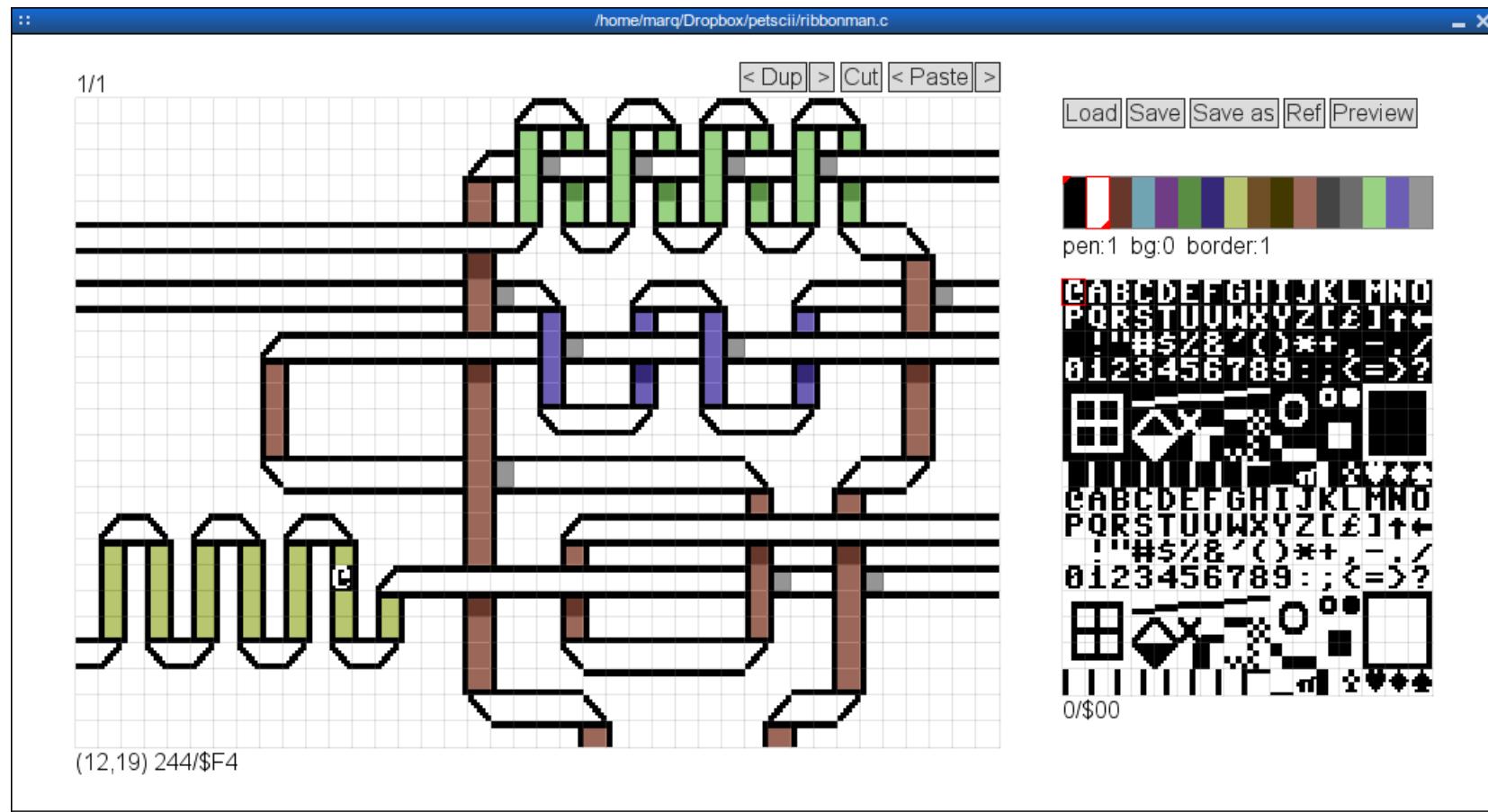
Minitel magazine, early 1980s.

Park Avenue teletext soap, late 1980s.

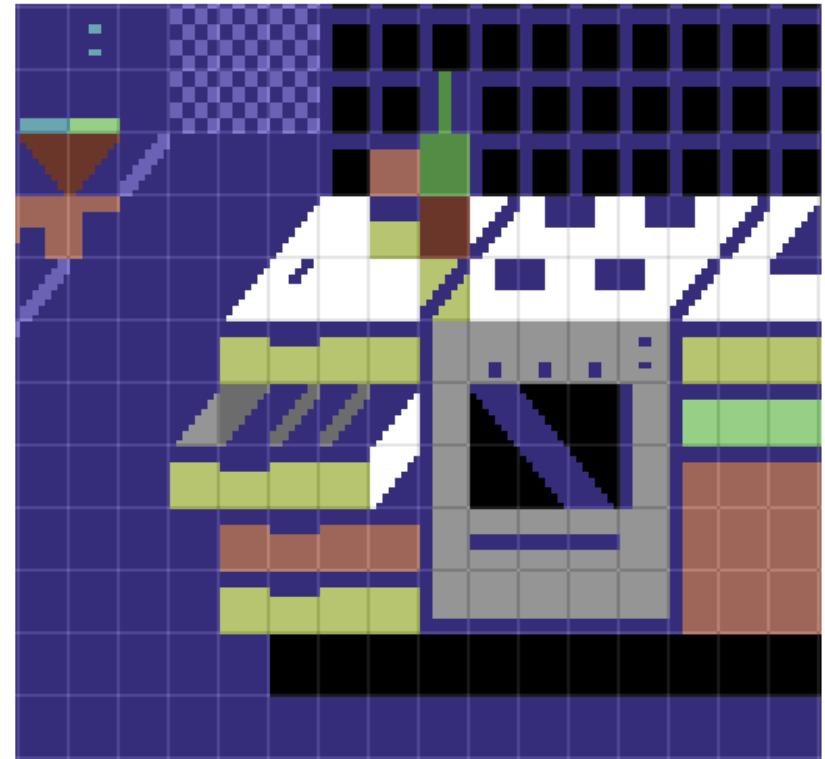
Our projects

- 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

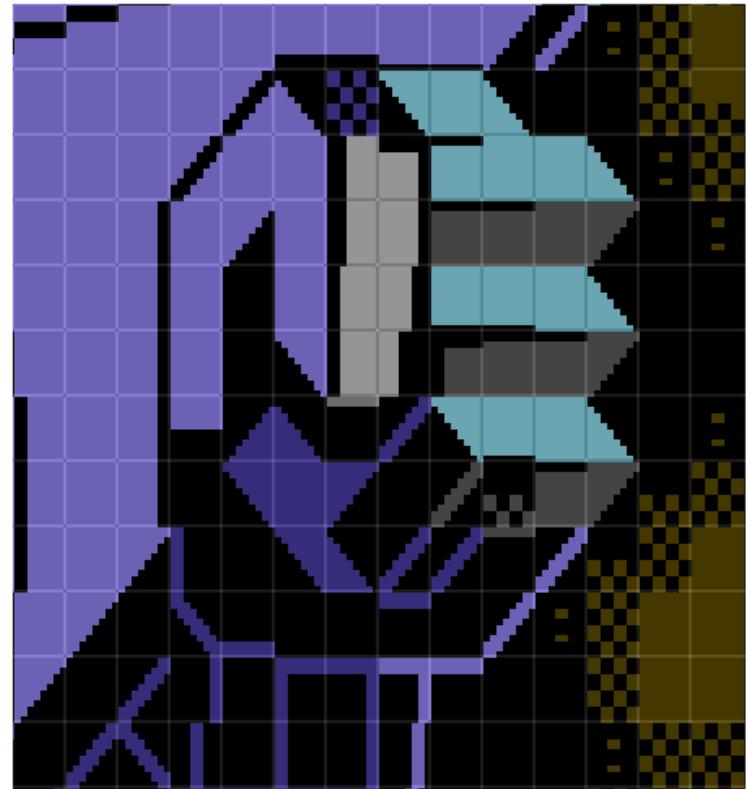
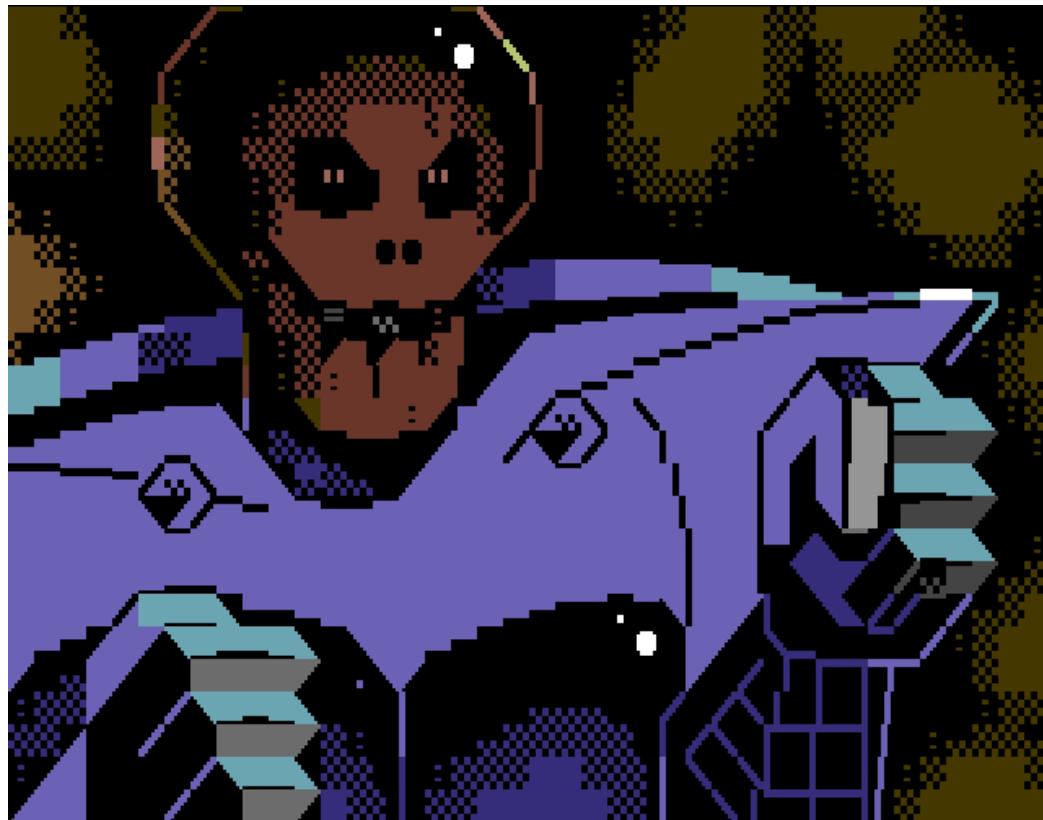


Example works



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/>