

The film “Hummingbird” anticipates the future, when computers will have the ability to think for themselves. The film begins with empty space and the idea that the computer has intelligence and is capable of drawing a hummingbird—a science fiction notion with its implications for the future. The drawing ensues and a representation of a hummingbird appears at a steady, measured pace before our eyes.

An artist's hand does not make the line segments. Instead, some invisible force is in charge, one that eventually fragments the drawing into moving line segments, which become increasingly chaotic and abstracted. Movement is achieved through distortion, much like a child twisting and rotating a paper hummingbird. The child knows it cannot flap its wings, but let's pretend it can. Then the hummingbird gradually collapses into a single line, only to reappear and move in an opposite direction.

The computer has a perfect memory and can make exact copies of everything. After several more explorations and variations, the watching intelligence decides "time is up" and slowly erases the hummingbird, returning to empty space.

...

Contributed by #CharlesCsuri for #ThinkingMachines, now on view.

...

Charles Csuri. “Hummingbird.” 1968. 16mm film transferred to video (black and white), 12 min. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase, 1969. © 2017 Charles Csuri