What is Computer Graphics?

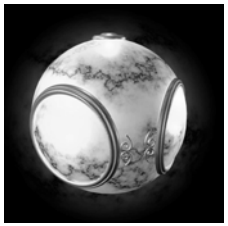
- Objectives
  - We explore what computer graphics is about and survey some application areas
  - We start with a historical introduction

Computer Graphics

- *Computer graphics* deals with all aspects of creating images with a computer
  - Hardware
  - Software
  - Applications

Example

- Where did this image come from?

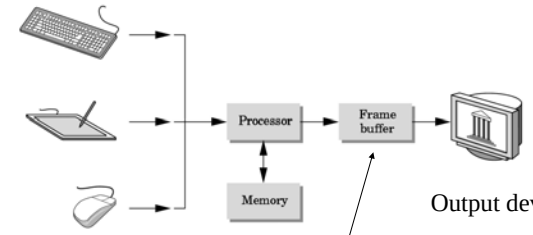


- What hardware/software did we need to produce it?

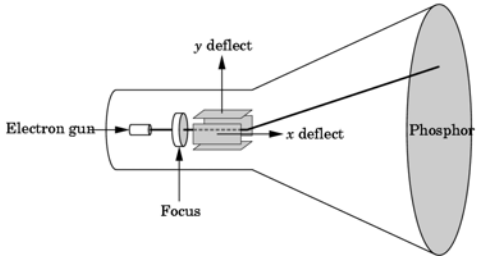
Preliminary Answer

- **Application**: The object is an artist's rendition of the sun for an animation to be shown in a domed environment (planetarium)
- **Software**: Maya for modeling and rendering but Maya is built on top of OpenGL
- **Hardware**: PC with graphics card for modeling and rendering

Basic Graphics System



CRT



Can be used either as a line-drawing device (calligraphic) or to display contents of frame buffer (raster mode)

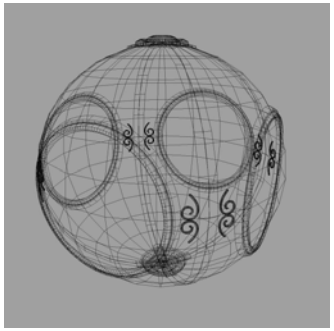
Computer Graphics: 1950-1960

- Computer graphics goes back to the earliest days of computing
  - Strip charts
  - Pen plotters
  - Simple displays using A/D converters to go from computer to calligraphic CRT
- Cost of refresh for CRT too high
  - Computers slow, expensive, unreliable

Computer Graphics: 1960-1970

- *Wireframe* graphics
  - Draw only lines
- Sketchpad
- Display Processors
- Storage tube

wireframe representation of sun object

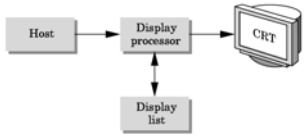


Sketchpad

- Ivan Sutherland's PhD thesis at MIT
  - Recognized the potential of man-machine interaction
  - Loop
    - Display something
    - User moves light pen
    - Computer generates new display
  - Sutherland also created many of the now common algorithms for computer graphics

Display Processor

- Rather than have the host computer try to refresh display use a special purpose computer called a *display processor* (DPU)



- Graphics stored in display list (display file) on display processor
- Host *compiles* display list and sends to DPU

Direct View Storage Tube

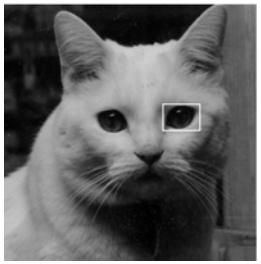
- Created by Tektronix
  - Did not require constant refresh
  - Standard interface to computers
    - Allowed for standard software
    - Plot3D in Fortran
  - Relatively inexpensive
    - Opened door to use of computer graphics for CAD community

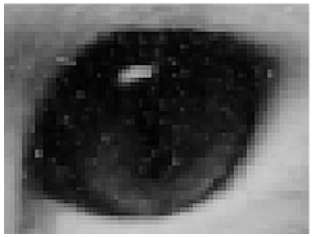
Computer Graphics: 1970-1980

- Raster Graphics
- Beginning of graphics standards
  - IFIPS
    - GKS: European effort
      - Becomes ISO 2D standard
    - Core: North American effort
      - 3D but fails to become ISO standard
- Workstations and PCs

Raster Graphics

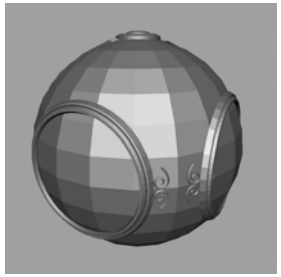
- Image produced as an array (the *raster*) of picture elements (*pixels*) in the *frame buffer*





Raster Graphics

- Allows us to go from lines and wire frame images to filled polygons

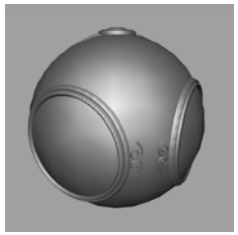


PCs and Workstations

- Although we no longer make the distinction between workstations and PCs, historically they evolved from different roots
  - Early workstations characterized by
    - Networked connection: client-server model
    - High-level of interactivity
  - Early PCs included frame buffer as part of user memory
    - Easy to change contents and create images

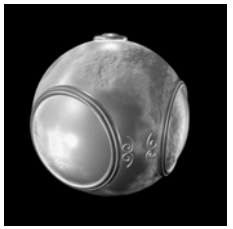
Computer Graphics: 1980-1990

Realism comes to computer graphics



smooth shading

environment mapping



bump mapping

Computer Graphics: 1980-1990

- Special purpose hardware
  - Silicon Graphics geometry engine
    - VLSI implementation of graphics pipeline
- Industry-based standards
  - PHIGS
  - RenderMan
- Networked graphics: X Window System
- Human-Computer Interface (HCI)

Computer Graphics: 1990-2000

- OpenGL API
- Completely computer-generated feature-length movies (Toy Story) are successful
- New hardware capabilities
  - Texture mapping
  - Blending
  - Accumulation, stencil buffers

Computer Graphics: 2000-

- Photorealism
- Graphics cards for PCs dominate market
  - Nvidia, ATI, 3DLabs
- Game boxes and game players determine direction of market
- Computer graphics routine in movie industry: Maya, Lightwave
- Programmable pipelines