

# Symbol '24: Icons for Society: Past, Present & Future

An exploration of 40 years of Symbol Culture

19/20 September 2024

A virtual conference supported by the British Academy and The Wellcome Trust, organised by The Symbol Group

## Abstract

*2024 sees the 40th anniversary of Susan Kare's designs for Apple Macintosh's groundbreaking screen icons and 42 years since Scott Fahlman introduced his joke markers made from punctuation (Emoticons). Few could have predicted how much a part of our everyday life that emojis, emoticons, and icons would become. It is hard to fully comprehend the far-reaching extent to which they are now used to facilitate communication in areas such as science, healthcare and medicine. This two-day conference will bring together academics, researchers, historians and design practitioners working across a wide range of industries to present research and applications showing how icons are used to communicate within their areas of expertise, and debate the future of icons on screen, in print and in the environment. A key consideration will be to identify and share good practice in information design, AR/VR, AI/UX and fine art to best serve our wide audiences.*

## Day 1, 19 September 2024

### Session 1 Icons for Society – Past, Present and Future

Chair: Jason Forrest

**Conference begins 10am European Time, Welcome by Martin, session introduced by Jason**

**10.10 Nigel Holmes** British/American graphic designer, information designer, author, and theorist  
Presentation: **Introduction to symbol culture**

**10.30 Jason Forrest** Associate Partner and Director, Data Visualization Lab at McKinsey & Company  
Presentation: **Isotype and graphic language**

**10.50 Dr Wibo Bakker** Independent researcher pictogram history  
Presentation: **Almanac to Smartphone: half a millennium of symbol systems facilitating information access**

*15 minute panel discussion*

**11.15 Dr María del Mar Navarro** Associate Professor, The Design School at Herberger Institute for Design  
Presentation: **Expanding Horizons: The Intersection of the 'Atlas of Society and Economy' and 'Seis Años de Gobierno al Servicio de México'**

**11.35 Dr Sue Perks** Independent writer, researcher and designer  
Presentation: **Thoughts on universal language in Henry Dreyfuss's *Symbol Sourcebook***

**11.55 Dr Emily M Orr** Associate Curator and Acting Head, Product Design and Decorative Arts, Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum  
Presentation: **Our Search for Symbols at Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum**

**12.15 Dr Olivier Morin** CNRS researcher, Institut Jean Nicod (PSLUniversity, Paris).  
Presentation: **On the Puzzle of Ideography**

*15 minute panel discussion followed by 1 hour break*

## **Day 1, 19 September 2024**

### **Session 2 Icons in Healthcare**

Chair: Dr Karel van der Waarde

**1.30 Session introduced by Karel**

**1.40 Dr Karel van der Waarde**, researcher, educator and designer of medical testing information  
Presentation: **Icons and information about medicines**

**2.00 Shuhan He**, MD dual-board certified physician with expertise in Emergency Medicine and Clinical Informatics, Assistant Professor at Harvard Medical School in the Department of Emergency Medicine and Lab of Computer Science, Department of Internal Medicine

Co-authors: **Deborah Lai, BA, CEO, Act Now Coalition** and **Dr Kendrick Davis PhD** health sciences associate clinical professor of psychiatry and neuroscience at UC Riverside  
Presentation: **Emoji for the medical community**

**2.20 Prof Mandar Rane** Professor of Communication Design at the IDC School of Design, IIT Bombay, India  
Presentation: **Exploring the role of healthcare pictograms in the context of people living with ALS**

*15 minute panel discussion*

**3.05 Sibylle Schlaich** co-founder of Moniteurs  
Presentation: **Accessibility, identity and innovation in way-finding**

**3.25 Paul Mijksenaar** Information designer, publicist and emeritus professor Visual Information Design, Delft University. Founder of Bureau Mijksenaar (Amsterdam, New York)  
Presentation: **Too many symbols? Limitations, misunderstandings and challenges**

*15 minute panel discussion to close Day 1*

## **Day 2, 20 September 2024**

### **Session 1 Icons for Society now**

Chair: Rodrigo Ramirez

**Conference begins 10am European Time, Welcome by Martin, session introduced by Rodrigo**

**10.10 Prof Scott E Fahlman** Computer scientist and Professor Emeritus at Carnegie Mellon University's Language Technologies Institute and Computer Science Department  
Presentation: **The Birth, Evolution and Spread of the Emoticon**

**10.30 Prof Daniel Utz** professor in the Communication Design programme at the HfG Schwäbisch Gmünd  
Presentation: **Beyond Unicode – Emoji and other signs**

*15 minute panel discussion*

**11.05 Marina Zurkow** American visual artist based working with media technology, animation and video.

Presentation: **Climate communication: how to face the doom we ignore**

**11.25 Jennifer 8. Lee** Member of Unicode Emoji Subcommittee; Emojination; and co-creator of Writing Atlas

Presentation: **How Emoji Do (and Don't) Mirror Our World**

**11.45 Rodrigo Ramirez** Associate Professor at the School of Design, UC Chile (Diseño UC), researcher at the Chilean National Research Center for Integrated Disaster Management, CIGIDEN and design leader for Guemil Icons project

Presentation: **Symbols + Narratives for Activating Emergencies**

*15 minute panel discussion followed by 1 hour break*

## **Day 2, 20 September 2024**

### **Session 2 The Future of Communication through Icons**

Chair: Dr Wibo Bakker

**1.00 Session introduced by Wibo**

**1.10 Xu Bing** artist

Presentation: **Thinking and Creating Way Outside the Box: Xu Bing, China's Most Contemporary Artist**

**1.30 Edgar Walthert** Type designer and author of *Annex of Universal Languages*

**Maxim Weirich** exhibition designer, curator and artistic researcher

Presentation: **Society of Signs – An Assembly of Visual Language**

**1.50 Juli Gudehus** artist Icon Spell a global language by collaborative intelligence

Presentation: **Icon Spell – boosting a global visual language by collaborative intelligence**

*15 minute panel discussion*

**2.25 Loïc Marleix** Design Brouhaha French freelance designer specializing in systems architecture, interfaces, semiotics, and the study of glyphs.

Presentation: **The rediscovery of the Lovers Communication Language**

**2.45 Cesco Reale** Scientific Communicator and founder of KomuniKON

**Laura Meloni** Linguist at KomuniKON

**Aiman Amine** Visual Identity Designer and Chief Graphic Designer at KomuniKON

**Julie Blanchard** Graphic Designer at KomuniKON, PhD student in Ludic Communication (Universités Lorraine et Montpellier)

Presentation: **IKON, language of icons: linguistic, graphic guidelines and ludic communication**

**3.05 Dr Haytham Nawar** practicing artist and designer and scholar in the fields of art and design

Presentation: **Generative Pictographic Language**

*3.25 panel discussion followed by plenary session*