
Workshop

GAMES OF PIET HEIN & TRIBUTE TO MARTIN GARDNER

Bjarne Toft

The University of Southern Denmark

The workshop will exhibit some of the mathematical games of the Danish poet and designer Piet Hein, in particular SOMA and HEX, and material related to them. The games are remarkable because of their simplicity of rules, in contrast to their difficulty of play. They can be enjoyed at many different levels and by all ages.

The games were made famous worldwide by Piet Hein's friend Martin Gardner, who wrote about them in his Scientific American column. Martin Gardner occupies a special place in twentieth-century mathematics, inspiring young and old, amateurs and professionals, to think about mathematical problems and have fun. His writings are culturally broad, clear and contagious. He made recreational mathematics a respectable discipline and argued for its use in education. His close friend, Persi Diaconis, wrote about him: Warning: Martin Gardner has turned dozens of innocent youngsters into math professors and thousands of math professors into innocent youngsters. The workshop will pay tribute to Martin Gardner in the centennial year of his birth.