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ARTcade: A Canadian Game Studies Association Symposium Vignette

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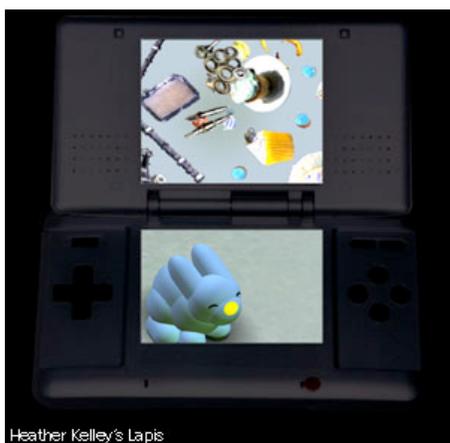
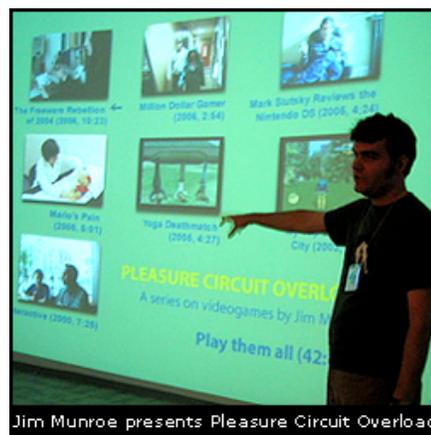
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ARTcade: A Canadian Game Studies Association Symposium Vignette

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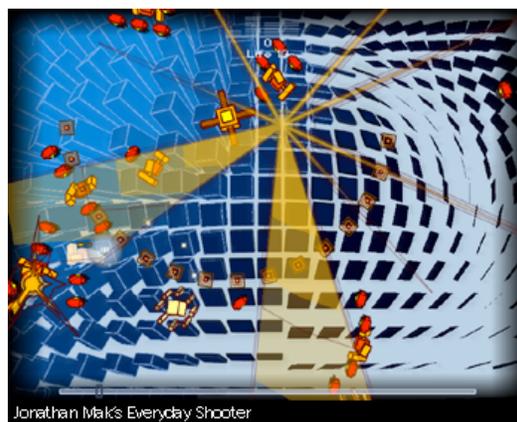
The 2006 Canadian Game Studies Association Symposium, to enrich its scholarly program, featured a number of arts-specific events designed to bridge the gap between academic research and the artistic production of “game art,” as well as to support the emerging game art community. These included a Canadian “Artcade,” a game artist panel and an informal artists “meet-up.” There were three original goals for this work: a) to discuss and explore digital games as art and the role of artists and the art community in pushing the boundaries of game forms, contexts and theory; b) to showcase Canadian game art examples; and c) to demonstrate the breadth of theoretical and artistic practice in reference to these works as well as the broader Canadian games community.



The artists showcasing work at CGSA presented game art in the context of what might be termed “contemporary art” rather than exclusive visual design practice: these artists are not videogame production artists in the design sense in which ‘art’ refers to the audio and visual assets used in game design. Rather, they are producing, within an artistic framework, works designed to challenge conventional notions of game making, and to engage the audience with innovative ideas and/or novel perceptual and conceptual experiences. These works further dislodge notions of art as exclusively visual—another common misunderstanding about game art.

Because game art is necessarily an embodied experience, simply writing about, or providing images of, Canadian game art is not enough. To experience most of this art, individuals encounter it in the context of a festival or exhibition (these being few and far between), and even within that environment the audience has a mandate to interact or to see the works performed. For those less familiar with the history of Western 20th century art, these works sparked an opportunity to contextualize modern interactive gaming within the games of the Dada and Surrealist movements, and the interactive and participatory works of movements such as Fluxus and Happenings.

The diversity of forms presented at the “Artcade” included full games as diverse as *Everyday Shooter* and *Arteroids*, game mods (*CuteXdoom*), a game constructed through a participatory



workshop (*The Dollhouse*), a gameboy prototype (*Lapis*), an installation (*Mario Battle No. 1*), two performances (*Pass or Fail* and *Ms. PacMondrian Trance, Dance, Séance*), and a film/machinima series screening (*Pleasure Circuit Overload*). Large-scale work from Lynne Hughes and Joe MacKay was also presented as documentation.

What is a “Canadian game art”? For the sake of the practical selection of invitees to the event, a viral process was used, where initial contacts were asked to spread word of the event and to suggest additional participants. The selection criteria were defined in the broadest possible way—people either originally from or currently residing in Canada, producing or having had produced artwork exploring and/or addressing digital games in an intellectually and aesthetically significant way. Whether every work or artist is in fact seen as a “game artist” (either to themselves or by others) is incidental to facilitating discussion surrounding these works, and, ideally, building relationships that scaffold a vibrant Canadian game art scene.



Overall, these events were an attempt to bring digital game artists and researchers together, and to encourage dialog and collaboration between these two groups. There is frequent talk of (and debate surrounding) collaboration with industry within the academic community, and no doubt this is attractive: not only on a financial and resource level, but also for its elusive promise of reaching a mass audience (no doubt a myth, but a tempting fantasy to be sure). However, research collaboration with the contemporary arts world might also prove fruitful: providing access to skilled and creative talent that may be more ideologically receptive to new game ideas. Such collaboration, while perhaps not as conducive to mainstream audience exposure, might additionally serve to expand the intellectual, social and cultural space of gaming in this country—introducing new and potentially powerful images into the social imagination of game culture—and further suggest new audiences and genres. The process of creating a legitimate, diverse, and expressive form of digital game art here in Canada is an active process: and one in which artists, researchers and industry producers all need to take part.



Work featured in the CGSA Arcade, and/or performed/screened at the Arcade opening, included:

- Prize Budget for Boys (*Calderoids* and *PacMondrian* (web versions of original arcade cabinets), plus *Ms. PacMondrian Trance, Dance Séance Performance*)
- Maia Engeli (*The Dollhouse*)
- Jim Monroe (*Pleasure Circuit Overload* screening)
- Sean Arden (*Pass or Fail* performance)
- Heather Kelley (*Lapis*)
- Lynn Hughes (*CUBiD* video documentation)
- Barry Smylie (*Treasure Planet*)
- Jim Andrews (*Arteroids*)
- Jonathan Mak (*Everyday Shooter*)
- Myfanwy Ashmore (*Mario Battle No. 1*)
- Joe MacKay (documentation of works)
- Yumi-co (*CuteXdoom*)