The Art of Video Games: From Pac-Man to Mass Effect

By Chris Melissinos, Patrick O'Rourke

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In the forty years since the first Magnavox Odyssey pixel winked on in 1972, the home video game industry has undergone a mind-blowing evolution. Fueled by unprecedented advances in technology, boundless imaginations, and an insatiable addiction to fantastic new worlds of play, the video game has gone supernova, rocketing two generations of fans into an ever-expanding universe where art, culture, reality, and emotion collide.

As a testament to the cultural impact of the game industry's mega morph, the Smithsonian American Art Museum, with curator and author Chris Melissinos, conceived the forthcoming exhibition, The Art of Video Games, which will run from March 16 to September 30, 2012.* Welcome Books will release the companion book this March.

Melissinos presents video games as not just mere play, but richly textured emotional and social experiences that have crossed the boundary into culture and art.

Along with a team of game developers, designers, and journalists, Melissinos chose a pool of 240 games across five different eras to represent the diversity of the game world. Criteria included visual effects, creative use of technologies, and how world events and popular culture manifested in the games. The museum then invited the public to go online to help choose the games. More than 3.7 million votes (from 175 countries) later, the eighty winners featured in The Art of Video Games exhibition and book were selected.

From the Space Invaders of the seventies to sophisticated contemporary epics BioShock and Uncharted 2, Melissinos examines each of the winning games, providing a behind-the-scenes look at their development and innovation, and commentary on the relevance of each in the history of video games.

Over 100 composite images, created by Patrick O'Rourke, and drawn directly from the games themselves, illustrate the evolution of video games as an artistic medium, both technologically and creatively.

Additionally, The Art of Video Games includes fascinating interviews with influential artists and designers–from pioneers such as Nolan Bushnell to contemporary innovators including Warren Spector, Tim Schafer and Robin Hunicke.

The foreword was written by Elizabeth Broun, director of the Smithsonian American Art Museum and Mike Mika, noted game preservationist and prolific developer, contributed the introduction the introduction.

*After Washington D.C., the exhibition travels to several cities across the United States, including Boca Raton (Museum of Art), Seattle (EMP Museum), Yonkers, NY (Hudson River Museum) and Flint, MI (Flint Institute of Arts). For the latest confirmed dates and venues, please visit the The Art of Video Games exhibition page at http://americanart.si.edu/taovg

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Editorial Review

Review
This is a lushly illustrated coffee-table book that offers readers full-page, color photographs and succinct summaries of video games, descriptions of their significance, and interviews with many of their creators. Slick and gorgeous, the book offers an important permanent, widely distributable, inexpensive complement to the exhibition. – Ian Bogost, **American Journal of Play**, Fall 2012

If Ready Player One was a fictional love song to video games, The Art of Video Games is the visual poem to gaming—simply a beautiful book filled with gaming nostalgia, inspired innovation and flat-out fun…Every gamer needs to have The Art of Video Games just like every English major needs to have the collected works of Shakespeare. – J. Jay Franco, Bookrastination, 3/9/12

This book belongs on the shelf of every highbrow gaming geek, but it's also an important read for anyone interested in media studies or human expression. I want to hand this book to every naysayer who sees games as nothing more than cheap, violent, meaningless entertainment. With its engaging pictures, rich interviews, and neatly bundled history lessons, The Art of Video Games makes a solid case not just for the validity of games as an art form, but for its rightful place as one of the defining storytelling mediums of our time. – Becky Chambers, Themarysue.com, 3/16/12

I heartily recommend The Art of Video Games, not only to every gamer, but also to anyone interested in technology, and especially to those who feel games are harmful and childish…it's a fascinating journey through time, showing how this incredible industry has become one of the most lucrative and fastest growing in the world. When next your parents ask why you play video games, just give them a copy of this book and I'm sure they'll apologize for ever questioning your love for this truly special and important medium. – Benjy Ikimi, Avault.com, 3/16/12.

The Art of Video Games: From Pac-Man to Mass Effect is a worthy companion piece to the Smithsonian American Art Museum's exhibit. Melissinos and O'Rourke do an excellent job of laying a foundation for any reader to educate themselves on video games and their place as a modern artform. Video game enthusiasts have a lot to enjoy here, too. Besides the first-rate production values, it is a lovingly crafted narrative of the industry's evolution from its most rudimentary beginnings to the multi-billion dollar cultural powerhouse it is today. Any fan of video games will enjoy the opportunity to pick this book up from the coffee table, flip to a random page, and immediately begin to "remember when…" – Paul Marzagalli, NAVGTR (National Academy of Video Game Testers and Reviewers), appeared in Eclipse Magazine, 3/16/12

Filled with illuminating insights and insider perspectives, these interviews will speak volumes to teens considering careers in the video game industry. In addition to YA readers, the book may also be of interest to educators looking to examine media trends, or launch a classroom discussion about viewing video games as an art form. – Joy Fleishhacker, School Library Journal, 3/21/12.

Designed for us short attention span readers, the well-paced, large format, $40 hardback from Welcome Books features big image screen grabs and short blocks of history and insight on 80 noteworthy games, arranged historically and by console format eras….Also rallying for the cause are short essays in the book from industry innovators like "father of Atari" Nolan Bushnell - who "knows for a fact"that gaming doesn't

just keeps you sharp, but "delays the onset of Alzheimer's." So go do something artful and important - buy the book, visit the exhibit and go play a video game! – Jonathan Takiff, The Philadelphia Inquirer/Daily News/philly.com, 3/15/12. Widely syndicated.

In Chris Melissinos and Patrick O'Rourke's book The Art of Video Games: From Pac-Man to Mass Effect — the accompanying book to the Smithsonian exhibit of the same name on display starting in March 2012 – the authors offer a compelling read, intriguing to both the gaming nerd and pretentious art student in me, that reads like a warm meet-and-greet without being too casual or too stuffy… the full-page screen-shots will have any reader enthralled…They have the capacity to capture us, for an instant, and draw us into an experience that is more than simply wasting time — that is potentially transformative. – Kaitlin Tremblay, MediumDifficulty.com, 3/27/12.

You cant' go wrong with this book. It makes fo a fun read and you might learn something…coffee table worthy…fascinating…it screams "I'm smart, I like to play video games and I appreciate ART!" – Classic Game Room: Retro Video Games Book Club, video book review on YouTube Channel (201,000+ subscribers), 4/2/12. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uIyV87h6x9I

…the book is a really great piece for retro video game lovers. It mixes art with nostalgia as it caries you though the different ages of gaming, showcasing classic video games in stunning layouts, drawing attention to the creative and cultural impact, all in one very classy, and affordable package. – D.S. Cohen, About.com: Classic Video Games, April 1, 2012

The Art of Video Games exhibit was base on the book written by Chris Melissinos and Patrick O'Rourke. The book is amazing. I highly recommend it to any gamer or fan of games. – Fan, RPGMachine86, 4/4/12

In the end, The Art of Video Games puts in a very admirable effort. They get the list (in my humble opinion) mostly right, and they fill out a lot of interesting history about each game, often from the perspective of the developer themselves. The interviews are top-notch, giving two full pages of insight into the past of your favorite developers, how they make their games, and what they were thinking when they did so. Want to know just what Ron Gilbert was thinking when he made Maniac Mansion (also not on this list) or Monkey Island? Here is your chance. – Ron Burke,

About the Author
Chris Melissinos, former Chief Gaming Officer and Chief Evangelist for Sun Microsystems and founder of Past Pixels (www.pastpixels.com), is the curator for The Art of Video Games exhibition, which runs from March 16 to September 30, 2012, at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, D.C.

Melissinos has been an active member of the video game development community for more than a decade and is best known for his role in web-based video game technology development, video game preservation, virtual world application, and lectures on the future of games and computer technology in society and education. An avid collector, he maintains a large personal collection of video game consoles, computers, and artifacts that span the 40 year history of the video game industry.

He is a frequent speaker at game and technology conferences such as the Game Developers Conference, E3, Consumer Electronics Show (CES), Penny Arcade Expo, and JavaOne, and lectures at universities and computer industry events across the globe.

Patrick O'Rourke and Chris Melissinos were connected by a passion for all things video games while co-workers at Sun Microsystems in the late 1990s. The friendship grew as careers diverged bringing O'Rourke

to Los Angeles to produce photo shoots for Smashbox Studios. Now a freelance graphic designer, photographer, and video editor, O'Rourke continues his gaming ways and likes to deliver angry lectures on game strategy to pets and friends, both real and imagined, while maintaining his status as a frequent industry show attendee.

Mike Mika is Chief Creative Officer for Other Ocean Interactive. He has been developing games for nearly twenty years, running the gamut from engineer and designer to animator and writer. Most of his career was spent at Foundation 9 where he was Studio Head for Backbone Entertainment - running day-to-day operations as well as spearheading creative and business development. Mika helped launch mobile game developer ngmoco:) with some of the industry's top talent, and is a prominent figure in the preservation of videogame history. He's professionally shipped games for every platform since the Game Boy, and still enjoys writing games in his spare time. In total, he's been involved in more than one hundred games during his prolific career.

preface
the resonance of games as art
Chris Melissinos

The Christmas of 1980 would ultimately chart the trajectory for my future career. It was a year that a device of untold mystery and excitement was gifted to me: the Commodore VIC-20. This amazing little device was able to transport me to worlds beyond my dreams; worlds that I could create, control, and type into existence. What the VIC-20 gave me can be reduced to a single word: power.

Learning to program that little machine, with its severely limited canvas, opened up a fascinating world and a growing love for science, storytelling, and art. Art. It is a term that brings up a range of images, from the stark, marble-encrusted halls of old museums to a student studying late at night in the daunting pursuit of an art history degree. I believe that my definition of art is more serviceable. When the viewer is able to understand the artist's intent in a work and finds something in it that resonates with him or her on a personal level, art is achieved. If it elicits an emotion—from disdain to delight—it can be viewed as art.

The short yet extremely prolific forty-year history of the video games industry has offered the world some of the most personal and most globally connecting experiences in human history. Of course, many games never aspire to be anything more than an adrenaline pump, where high scores rule and the loosest of stories are employed to hold the game together. But there are also a wealth of examples of games that force players into uncomfortable moral quandaries, make statements about the act of war, and profoundly affect the player using music, environments, and whimsical details. Some games can make you cry, others can make you smile. The common thread throughout a majority of games, regardless of their intents, is that they are an amalgam of art disciplines whose sum is typically greater than its parts. This defines a new medium that is beyond traditional definitions used in the fine art world.

I find this fascinating and truly inspiring. Computer games came into existence as a way for computer scientists to demonstrate the capabilities of archaic systems that marked the dawn of the information age. Over time these systems grew in complexity, and as they became more powerful, the potential to create deeper and richer experiences opened up to designers and artists. From "fill in the gaps" and text-based adventures that engage a player's imagination to deeply narrative games like Heavy Rain that pulls the player in as the story unravels, video games have a unique ability to connect with the player—and an unrivaled set of resources to do so. Combining fundamental elements—image, sound, story, and interaction—no other medium comes close to offering the audience so many points of connection.

It is precisely their interactivity that provides video games the potential to become a superior storytelling medium. I say potential because video games are still in adolescence. The advantage that books, movies, and television have over video games is with time only. Like all other forms of media, hindsight will tease inspired works from the digital past, and these will serve as the cornerstones of great works yet to be created. No doubt that some of those games are collected here.

As a denizen of the "Bit Baby" era, I realize that video games have had more of a profound impact on my development than any other form of media. Our children are being born into a world in which the digital and physical collide, and video games are the expressive voice of that collision. This trend will continue to change the way society at large views video games, which one day will be held in the same regard as painting, movies, writing, and music.

Opening in March 2012, The Art of Video Games exhibition at the Smithsonian American Art Museum is yet another example of the attention this medium is starting to receive. Together with the museum and an advisory group of game developers, designers, pioneers, and journalists, we selected a group of 240 games in four different genres to represent the best of the industry. The criteria used for selection included visual effects, creative use of new technologies, and how world events and popular culture influenced the game. The museum created a website and invited the public to help select the games for the exhibition, and almost four million votes across 175 countries narrowed the list to the eighty games you'll read about here.

Using the cultural lens of an art museum, viewers will be left to determine whether the materials on display are indeed worthy of the title "art." A majority of visitors will most likely encounter a game that transports them back to their childhoods and tugs at their emotions, or they may learn about an artistic or design intent in a game that they never knew before. My hope is that people will leave the exhibition—and finish this book—with an understanding that video games are so much more than what they first thought.

They may even be art.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Margaret Chambers:

What do you in relation to book? It is not important together with you? Or just adding material when you require something to explain what yours problem? How about your time? Or are you busy man or woman? If you don't have spare time to try and do others business, it is make you feel bored faster. And you have free time? What did you do? Everyone has many questions above. They have to answer that question due to the fact just their can do which. It said that about reserve. Book is familiar in each person. Yes, it is proper. Because start from on kindergarten until university need that The Art of Video Games: From Pac-Man to Mass Effect to read.

Christine Scott:

The Art of Video Games: From Pac-Man to Mass Effect can be one of your beginning books that are good idea. Many of us recommend that straight away because this guide has good vocabulary that could increase your knowledge in vocabulary, easy to understand, bit entertaining however delivering the information. The writer giving his/her effort to get every word into joy arrangement in writing The Art of Video Games: From

Pac-Man to Mass Effect yet doesn't forget the main place, giving the reader the hottest in addition to based confirm resource info that maybe you can be certainly one of it. This great information could drawn you into completely new stage of crucial thinking.

Ruth Jones:

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Bertha Boone:

What is your hobby? Have you heard that will question when you got pupils? We believe that that problem was given by teacher to their students. Many kinds of hobby, Everybody has different hobby. And you know that little person similar to reading or as studying become their hobby. You must know that reading is very important in addition to book as to be the issue. Book is important thing to provide you knowledge, except your own teacher or lecturer. You will find good news or update in relation to something by book. Amount types of books that can you decide to try be your object. One of them is The Art of Video Games: From Pac-Man to Mass Effect.

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