

Rochester Beacon

Rochester Beacon | (<https://rochesterbeacon.com/2024/04/19/experiencing-the-art-of-video-games/>)

CULTURE

Experiencing the art of video games

By JACOB SCHERMERHORN | April 19, 2024

An event at Visual Studies Workshop aims to break past the perception that video games are used purely for entertainment or commercialization and instead explore their place in the art world.

“People will ask me, ‘Oh, you deal with video games’ and be thinking of Mario or Pokemon or Zelda,” says Nilson Carroll, assistant curator and preservation specialist at VSW. “But no, those are not the types of games we’re talking about. We’re describing ourselves as underground or punk, really outsiders.”

On April 25, VSW will host [Hardware and Software](https://www.vsw.org/vsw-salon/salon-spring-2024/april-25-hardware-and-software-by-barnyardia/), part of its Salon Spring event series, with arcade games and live performances from Barnyardia, an experimental games collective.

The interactive installation will feature a dozen games focused on subversive or silly game mechanics as well as alt-controllers. For example, “Scrapeboard” uses a skateboard as a controller for “Dance Dance Revolution”-style play and “Playzine” cooks chicken nuggets as a player advances in the game.

Carroll first became aware of Blake Andrews and Frank DeMarco, who comprise Barnyardia, through his interest in niche online gaming communities. Coming from a self-described “underground, queer, punk” art movement himself, there was a lot of intersectionality with the experimental games space.

“Blake is someone I’ve admired who has been at the core of this very niche online games community for a long time. The work is very playful and sometimes edgy while also being vulnerable and sometimes sad,” says Carroll. “So, then learning about (the Barnyardia collective), it was always my dream to do a show with them.”

At the event, Andrews and DeMarco will offer commentary as they play the games they created.

Carroll hopes the event will push people to consider how interactivity changes experiences with art. Interacting with a game causes people to pay more attention and directly react to the art on screen.

A previous VSW event on games featured [“Growing my Grandpa!”](https://pantagruel.itch.io/growing-my-grandpa) Carroll recalls one attendee who spent the entire night playing that one game, which is a point-and-click experimental game with horror elements that takes about an hour to complete, because they were so fascinated by the experience.

“They played through the whole game and saw everything in the game and got like the secret ending. When they were leaving they told me, ‘This is amazing, this was the greatest experience in my life, my mind is racing,’” says Carroll.



“Someone could have that type of relationship with a painting, that’s not out of line or anything. But I think there’s something about the interaction where folks will have these visceral, bodily reactions,” he says. “Playable video games can also be a form of performance by the visitor. They’re sort of enacting the artwork.”

Events like this can also empower people by showing that the barrier to entry for this type of art is lower than some might think. Carroll likes to point out that, similar to many people in the experimental games space, Andrews and DeMarco do not have extensive computer science or coding experience.

Game programming languages, supportive online communities, and open marketplaces such as [Itch.io](http://itch.io) (<http://itch.io>) make it easier to participate. Carroll, who wanted to work at Nintendo as a child, has been able to [create games](https://nilson.itch.io/) (<https://nilson.itch.io/>).

“It can be empowering to see something impactful like that and think, ‘Oh, I could make something like that too,’” he says. “In Rochester, there’s so much energy around games. RIT has this big games education program and the Strong Museum is all about games now. I think taking it to a smaller accessible area of games for art or games by artists is something that’s not really being done, though.

“In the history of VSW, it began by thinking of photography as art and in different and experimental ways,” Carroll adds. “So, I think this concept of digital art and games is following in those forward-thinking footsteps.”

[Jacob Schermerhorn](mailto:%20jacob.schermerhorn@rochesterbeacon.com) (<mailto:%20jacob.schermerhorn@rochesterbeacon.com>) is a Rochester Beacon contributing writer and data journalist. The Beacon welcomes comments and letters from readers who adhere to our [comment policy](https://rochesterbeacon.com/comment-policy/) (<https://rochesterbeacon.com/comment-policy/>) including use of their full, real name. Submissions to the [Letters page](https://rochesterbeacon.com/letters/) (<https://rochesterbeacon.com/letters/>) should be sent to Letters@RochesterBeacon.com (<mailto:Letters@RochesterBeacon.com>).

Share this:

 (<https://rochesterbeacon.com/2024/04/19/experiencing-the-art-of-video-games/?share=twitter&nb=1>)

 (<https://rochesterbeacon.com/2024/04/19/experiencing-the-art-of-video-games/?share=facebook&nb=1>)

 (<https://rochesterbeacon.com/2024/04/19/experiencing-the-art-of-video-games/?share=linkedin&nb=1>)

Related

Area arts organizations receive NEA grants

(<https://rochesterbeacon.com/2024/05/29/...arts-organizations-receive-nea-grants/>)

May 29, 2024
In "Culture"

Connecting through art

(<https://rochesterbeacon.com/2019/08/15/c...through-art/>)

August 15, 2019
In "Community"

Mara Ahmed to screen newest film

(<https://rochesterbeacon.com/2024/04/26/...ahmed-to-screen-newest-film/>)

April 26, 2024
In "Culture"

