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The Art Of Video Games: From Pac-Man To Mass Effect



Synopsis

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. *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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Customer Reviews

This is the companion book for the exhibition of the same name, held at the American Art Museum from 16 March 2012 to 30 September 2012. The book title is quite broad, and maybe ambiguous. This isn't an art book with pretty pictures or concept art of video games. Rather, it's about the evolution of video game graphics, the artistry of making video games. All explained in a brief and simplified manner. Since this is an exhibition companion book, it's not surprising it's not that technical. I get the idea that the target audience are probably exhibition goers first and then gamers. I enjoy the sense of nostalgia from looking at the old games I used to play. As with any list that ranks games, there's always the surprise element when you see games you've never seen before. From the text, you get some brief insight into how the games came to be. I've several issues with the book though. The first is the selection criteria. Author Melissinos selected an initial group of 240 games based on criteria that included visual effects, use of technologies and how world events and popular culture influenced the games. Then, voters online were invited to choose the most popular games. Finally, 80 games are picked. In general, I don't expect the gamers to know anything about how the graphics were created, nor the technologies used in the game making. The public voting element goes against the selection criteria. At times, it's difficult to tell whether the games are included because they are innovative or just fan favourites. There are peculiar inclusions as well as omissions. A search online for bestseller lists will yield results for fan favourites instantly.

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