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1. Introduction

Ever since new digital technologies began to emerge many decades ago, artists have been among the first to experiment with these new mediums. Digital technologies are used both as tools for more traditional art and as a medium for new art. The use of digital technologies in art have opened new doors to what is possible to create and it has also become a way to combine many types of art forms and interactivity in to one art piece. Interactivity especially, have become an essential core in digital art that have been used to break rules and ideas of what we consider an artwork. As with art and all types of mediums, some pieces are art and some are not. Not all paintings are considered art, neither are all installations or performances. The same goes with digital art. Some digital pieces can be considered art while others are not. One field of digital production that lately been greatly discussed weather it may be art or not are video games. And this is the field I aim to study further in this paper.

1.1. Method

The idea of claiming that video games are a type of art is rather new. For many developers and artists that have worked with video games for decades the idea of looking at video games as art have long been a fact, but in more established art circles the idea have not been brought up until quite recently, and it is just in these last few years that exhibits of video games at art museums have become a reality. My aim for this paper is to study the idea of video games as art and I will do so by looking closer at two exhibits at art museums where video games have been collected by the museum and exhibited as art. The exhibits I will be studying are: “The Art of Video Games” that was produced by the Smithsonian American Art Museum in 2012, and the 2013 “Applied Design” exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. The “Applied Design” exhibit include more items and installations then the video games, but I will focus my study on the video game section of the exhibit. The curators of both these exhibits have vocally claimed that video games are art and I will use interviews with them as well as critics and developers, to get a better idea whether video games can be considered art.

As this is a rather limited study I will focus on these two exhibits, the ideas behind them and the reactions to them. I will bring some context to the exhibition study by including short summaries on digital art and video games, but there will not be room for much theory. I will leave the theoretical approach to the idea of video games as art to a future and more extensive study on the subject.
2. Digital Art

Even though digital technologies have gotten its main breakthrough these past decades, many techniques began to develop already 60-70 years ago. Artists have always been among the first to experiment with new types of technologies and mediums and it was no different in the case of digital technologies. Artistic experiments using digital technologies were initially referred to as computer art, but later called multimedia art. These days, however, they are generally referred to as digital art.¹

The development of digital art has always been closely connected to the developments in technology and science, but it did not only evolve based on technological improvements, digital art also had strong connections to artistic streams such as Dada, Fluxus and conceptual art.² During the 70s and 80s, digital art developed further and began to incorporate more interactive elements, making the audience participants in the artwork. Later in the 90s digital art became more frequently exhibited in art museums and galleries and at about the same time digital art began to break ground on the Internet, available anytime to anyone, anywhere.³

Digital art is generally divided up in two different fields: art where digital technologies have been used as a tool to produce more traditional types of art, such as photography, print, sculpture and music, and art where the digital technologies serve as a medium.⁴ In art where digital technologies have been used as a tool the extent of the digital impact can vary a lot. In some cases the fact that digital technologies have been used in the production of a piece will never be noticeable for the viewer and in other cases the artist have let characteristics of the digital medium be part of the piece.⁵ In digital art where digital technologies are used as an artistic medium, the art exists exclusively as a digital art piece. It is produced, stored and presented in digital form.⁶ The various forms that this type of digital art may take are for example installation, video and animation, Internet and software art, virtual reality and musical environments.⁷

2.1. Interactive Digital Art

On some level, all art can be considered interactive. Art have since its beginning created a dialog between the artist and the viewer, but when it comes to interactive art the art piece itself is created within this dialog. Interactive art is not always collaborative but it does in general make the audience participate in the art creation, as the art piece’s structure is dynamic and customizable. The interactivity of interactive art is not merely there for its own sake, but it serves as a way for the audience to discover the meaning behind the art piece and the message it aims to convey. Interactive art have contributed to a new way of consuming art, it has shifted the focus from fact to event and from message to becoming part of a dialog. But interactive art should not only be looked upon as an event, it is both event and object, as Roberto Simanowski phrases it:

It provides a space for experiences, but also a message to be understood. The fact that an interactive artwork needs its audience’s participation to be completed does not mean that it merely receives its meaning from this participation.

This new mixed nature of digital art, that is both object made up by the use of various types of media and storytelling and an event in the interaction, make it hard to categorize, something that in many cases also seem to be a point emphasized by digital artists and something they strive for.

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10 Chee-Onn Wong; Keechul Jung; Joonsung Yoon ”Interactive Art: The Art that Communicates” Leonardo Vol 42 No 2, p 180.
3. Introduction to Video Games

When digital technologies began to appear some 60-70 years ago. Computer and video games followed shortly after and they became a way for computer scientists to show what the systems and hardware they invented were capable of creating. During the 70s the first video games adapted for the home market began to emerge and by the early 80s the use of personal computers and video game consoles had exploded and were sold by the millions. In the early 80s arcades also began to flourish and offered a different video game experience oppose to the video game consoles available for home use. By the mid 80s it seemed as if the personal computers were taking over and consoles were loosing ground, but when Nintendo released its first console in 1985 in the US, consoles were back and with them new types of more advanced video games that had more complex storytelling and graphics. By the 90s both personal computers and game consoles offered a huge variety of games. Technologies such as improved graphics and greater storage space made it possible for developers to use higher resolution artwork, longer and more complex storytelling, realistic voices and more intricate music compositions. By the late 90s, new technologies made it possible to develop 3D gaming and along with that began the transition from 2D to 3D games. New game consoles that were better suited for 3D gaming, like the Sony Playstation and the Microsoft XBOX, launched during this time, and are still around today, though in updated versions.

As with other art and media, video games can be divided in to different genres. Though there are many subgenres, Chris Melissinos focus on four main genres. The first one is Target, the oldest type of video game that derive from target shooting but that also can take forms such as pinball. The basic idea of this genre is “the more you hit, the greater your score”. A second genre is Adventure, it has a greater base in storytelling and encourage exploration. Action is a third genre. Storytelling is generally important in the action genre too, but so is speed and skill. The third genre is Tactics, these games deal with strategy, planning and structured logic. To create a context to these tactics, storytelling is also an important part of this genre.

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4. A study of the art of video games

As mentioned earlier in this paper, digital art covers a wide spectrum of art genres and styles. Video games are digital to be sure, but are they art?

4.1. Craft of Creation

The base of digital art is code, and that is also the case with video games. Many developers in the video game field have a wider background than pure programming or engineering, they have backgrounds in film, music and art and combine these backgrounds with their technological knowledge. To be able to make any judgment on whether video games may be art or not, it is important to take a look at the development process and the way developers work in the creation of video games.

As many developers interviewed for the “the Art of Video Games” exhibit recall, in the early days of game development there was a lot of engineering. The technology was limited and just to make the most basic effects it took a lot of intense work. But these technological limitations also contributed to a focus on the narrative and storytelling in the games. As the graphics were rough it was important to present a good story with the game to make it more interesting to play. Building games from scratch where there was nothing to build upon involved tedious work like entering every pixel of every frame of the entire game by hand, based on sketches on graph paper, as developer Mike Mika recalls:

To me, the images we painted on our television screens were beyond compare. They had meaning, and looking back at them now, I see an evolution. While our first works drew heavily from pop culture influences – comics, movies, and music – our later works became more original. [---] Much of the knowledge we acquired came from taking apart other artist’s work, changing it, learning from it, and then playing it.

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As technology developed it became easier to realize ideas in video games and developers could bring in a wider spectrum of inspiration in to the games. The games became more multifaceted and could include a more complex mix of multimedia, storytelling and interaction. Inspiration from movies, art, music, drama and real life experiences became easier to incorporate in to the games to enhance the experience and the message in the games. These new developments made it easier to use the medium as a way of expression, as developer Warren Spector states:

Video games are a serious medium of expression. The creators of these games – speaking not just for myself but for all my friends and colleagues – we think about the creative process the same way that a filmmaker does, in the same way that a novelist does, in the same way that a musician or a painter does.

As with most types of media or art productions, it is often a very personal process. It is not just a matter of story or a matter of media or mechanics. It is a matter of creating an experience, and perhaps that is also why many of the interviewed game developers without a doubt saw their works as pieces of art. Developer Don Daglow notes that considering the amount of work and passion behind each game, there are very few games that were created only out of an opportunity to make money.

4.2. Video games as Art

Can video games be art? Many video game artists and developers have been seeing it as art all along. Other people in the video game field do not care whether it be called art or not, it is not a priority of theirs. The art community have just recently begun to warm up to the idea of video games as art, and some influential people in the modern art field such as MoMA Senior curator Paola Antonelli clearly states that video games ARE art.

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Digital art overall have not been part of the art world for very long and various types of digital art are constantly under debate whether they are art or not. The often considered strength of digital art – its mix of various types of media, story telling and interactivity – have also often been the part of digital art that critics have debated the most. As Roberto Simanowski declares in his book *Digital Art and Meaning*:

> ONCE UPON A TIME, visual art was simple: it originated with an artist’s conception and craft, which the viewer acknowledged and then strove to understand while standing before the object.\(^\text{32}\)

He continues to say that when abstract art emerged, even though the art pieces looked significantly different to the previous art, it was still a matter of a static art piece that had been created by an artist and contained a meaning for the viewer. This however changed with interactive art, where the viewer became part of the artwork itself instead of just viewing it.\(^\text{33}\)

Video games share a lot of ideas and structures with for example interactive art, such as user participation and role-playing. They also share a lot of characteristics with animation and Internet and software art.\(^\text{34}\) Video games have long been disregarded within the art community for being games, but there have been several examples of established artists using the video game medium to create art pieces such as Natalie Bookchin’s pieces *The Intruder*, an online game based on Jorge Luis Borge’s short story *The Intruder*, and *Metapet*, an online game that focuses on resource management and where the player assumes the role of a manager for a biotech company.

One commercial video game that the 2008 Thames & Hudson *Digital Art* book bring up as an example of a game that is widely considered to be an art piece is Will Wright’s *The Sims*, a non-violent, community based game where the player assign characters personalities, relationships, skills and appearances and build their own community as well as interact with other player’s communities.\(^\text{35}\) The fact that a book on digital art, that was last revised in 2008 include a sub-chapter on gaming is quite interesting and can perhaps be seen as a prediction of what was to come.


4.3. Video Games at Art Museums

Video game exhibits in art museum do not have a very long history. It was not until a few years ago that art museums first began to acquire video games in to their collections, and later putting them on display in exhibits. I will here look closer at two exhibits at established art institutions that have exhibited video games.

4.3.1. "The Art of Video Games" at Smithsonian American Art Museum 2012

"The Art of Video Games" was produced by the Smithsonian American Art Museum and was on display at the museum from March 16th 2012 through September 30th 2012, since then it has been travelling throughout the USA, and will continue as a travelling exhibit until January 2016.

It was originally developer Chris Melissinos that pitched the idea to the Smithsonian American Art Museum and together with the museum he created an advisory group made up by game developers, designers, pioneers and journalists. Chris Melissinos himself was assigned the position of curator of the exhibit. The advisory group selected some 240 games in four different genres based on criterion such as visual effects, creative use of new technologies and how world events and pop-culture influenced the games. Once the 240 games were selected, the public was invited to vote for their various favorites through a website, this resulted in some 4 million votes from 175 different countries and a final selection of 80 games that were displayed in the exhibition.  

The exhibition was only focused on video games and presenting them in a way where the visitors were to form their own opinions in the end whether they would consider video games to be art or not. The exhibition was divided by eras and genres, and there was also a focus on the development of mechanics within the games.

4.3.2. “Applied Design” at The Museum of Modern Art, NY 2013

In 2012 the Museum of Modern Art in New York City acquired 14 video games in to their collection, with the intent of collecting even more games in the future and displaying some of the games in exhibit. The games acquired in 2012 were: Pac-Man (1980), Tetris (1984),

Another World (1991), Myst (1993), SimCity 2000 (1994), vib-ribbon (1999), The Sims (2000), EVE Online (2003), Katamari Demacy (2004), Dwarf Fortress (2006), fLOw (2006), Portal (2007), Passage (2008) and Canabalt (2009)\textsuperscript{39}. The selection was based on criterion such as visual quality, aesthetic experience, elegance of code and the design of the player’s behavior.\textsuperscript{40} The selection also included various types of games, from arcade games to Massively Multiplayer Online Games (MMOGs).\textsuperscript{41}

On March 2\textsuperscript{nd} 2013 the exhibit “Applied Design”, curated by MoMA Senior Curator Paola Antonelli, opened its doors showing a vast variation of items such as product design and inventions, but the exhibit also included video games. Of the 14 games on display in the exhibit, half of them are playable to the visitors and the rest of the games were made available through interactive demonstrations, to better communicate the more extensive nature of that game.\textsuperscript{42} To the greatest extent possible, the original games were to be playable within the exhibit, but in some cases where the original cartridges were in fragile shape, the exhibit instead offered emulated games.\textsuperscript{43}

4.4. Reactions to the exhibits

The reactions to the exhibits were very mixed. Overall the gaming community was positive to the fact that video games were exhibited at established art institutions, but many art critics were not as positive and the debate regarding whether video games may be considered Art stirred up along with the openings of the exhibits.

4.4.1. Reactions to ”The Art of Video Games”.

Though “the Art of Video Games” did stir up the debate on whether video games could be considered art, it also created a debate within the gaming community. Though many were thrilled to see video games exhibited as art at an established art museum,\textsuperscript{44} many in the gaming community were disappointed in how the games were exhibited. Curator Chris

\textsuperscript{40} Paola Antonelli, Video Games: 14 in the Collection, for Starters, INSIDE/OUT MoMA Blog 2012-11-29 (url: http://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2012/11/29/video-games-14-in-the-collection-for-starters )
\textsuperscript{41} Teshia Treuhaft, Tetris is Fine Art: MoMA’s Paola Antonelli-Curated ’Applied Design’ Exhibition, Core77 2013-04-23 (url: http://www.core77.com/blog/exhibitions/tetris_is_fine_art_momas_paola_antonelli-curated_applied_design_exhibition_24627.asp)
Melissinos had created an exhibit that mainly focused on the evolution of video games and the mechanics, craft and art behind them. Though a large part of his claim that video games are art was based in the interactivity of the medium, many in the gaming community were disappointed that there were hardly any playable games on display. To show the interaction of the games the exhibit instead depended on video footage of gameplay. A lot of this video footage, critics noted, were of poor quality and did not show the complexities of the games, in turn they found that the exhibit made them think that video games did not fit in well at the art museum.

4.4.2. Reactions to “Applied Design”

Even though MoMA was not the first art museum in the US to acquire and exhibit video games, and even though their collection and display of video games were a lot smaller then the "the Art of Video Games” exhibit, it still seems to have gained more attention then the earlier exhibit. Art critics such as Jonathan Jones of the Guardian seemed frustrated by the fact that video games would be on display next to fine art pieces such as Ma Jolie by Picasso and Starry Night by Vincent van Gogh. And the debate regarding video games as art resulted in numerous articles, referring to the MoMA exhibit, in papers such as the New York Times and The Guardian.

The exhibit also resulted in reactions from the gaming community. As in the case of “the Art of Video Games” critique included lack of interactivity, as many games displayed were not available for gameplay. They also reacted to that the “Applied Design” exhibit overall largely focused on function, and that in that context the video games were not clearly emphasized as art. Though visitors from the gaming community thought the displays were “naked” and lacked contextual items such as gaming consoles, packaging and concept art,
curator Paola Antonelli defended the approach by clarifying that the museum wished to emphasise the experience and interaction of the games.  

4.5. Debate regarding Video Games as Art.

As the art exhibits on video games came on display, the debate did not only cover direct reactions to the exhibits, but it also rekindled the debate whether video games could be considered art overall. Many art critics were very critical in their stance against video games as art. As the Guardian columnist Jonathan Jones expressed in his blog:

There needs to be a word for the overly serious and reverent praise of digital games by individuals or institutions who are almost certainly too old, too intellectual and too dignified to really be playing at this stuff. Gamecrashing? Gamebollocks? Spiellustfaken?  

He continues his article Sorry MoMA, video games are not art by discussing the role of the artist. He recalls a meeting with an aesthetician that defended video games as art on the bases of their interactive dimension and their liberation of shared authorship, but Jones himself do not agree with this and instead argues that an art piece is one person's reaction to life, that it is an act of personal imagination. Video Games, however, do not, according to Jones, have an artist - the player cannot claim to impose any personal vision on the piece and the creator has ceded that responsibility. If the art piece do not have an author or artist, it cannot be art.

Acclaimed movie critic Roger Ebert also remain convinced that by principle video games can not be art. He discusses this further in his article Video Games can never be Art. His main issue with dubbing video games as art is not the role of the artist but the fact that video games are games, and games are not art - games are games. He believes that many types of media and performances can be art, such as books, dance and film, but these are experiences in

54 Jonathan Jones, Sorry MoMA, video games are not art, The Guardian 2012-11-30 (url: http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2012/nov/30/moma-video-games-art)
56 Jonathan Jones, Sorry MoMA, video games are not art, The Guardian 2012-11-30 (url: http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2012/nov/30/moma-video-games-art)
57 Roger Ebert, Video Games can never be Art, Roger Ebert’s Journal 2010-04-16 (url: http://www.rogerebert.com/rogers-journal/video-games-can-never-be-art)
58 Roger Ebert, Video Games can never be Art, Roger Ebert’s Journal 2010-04-16 (url: http://www.rogerebert.com/rogers-journal/video-games-can-never-be-art)
themselves, not something with points and rules, something that you can win. But he also clarifies that not all paintings are art, not all films are art, in the end it is a matter of taste.\textsuperscript{59}

Brian Moriarty of The Guardian agrees on that video games are not art in his article \textit{A designer's take: MoMA is wrong to pretend video games are art}, but at the same time he finds the reasoning of Jones and Ebert troublesome. He writes:

Nevertheless, I find myself becoming cross and irritable when I read the particular objection expressed in Jonathan Jones' recent Guardian editorial (also found in Mr Ebert's writings), where he states that games cannot be art simply because they appear to abrogate the authority of the artist. This argument brushes aside nearly a century of vital artwork exploring the conventional boundaries between artist, exhibitor and spectator.\textsuperscript{60}

Instead Moriarty’s issue with calling video games art is more based in theory. He claims that nowhere in the past 2500 years worth of art philosophy is there any support for that a medium like video games could be classified as art. He brings theorist Schopenhauer in to his argument, stating that in his writings he would classify game playing as a form of “excitement”, the opposite of \textit{sublime} art.\textsuperscript{61}

Developer and ”the Art of Video Games” exhibition curator Chris Melissinos also brings up Roger Ebert’s ideas regarding video games in an interview with \textit{EP (Electric Playground) Daily}. Though he says he respects Ebert’s opinion, he also adds that art is subjective and that ones definition of art often is a personal definition. His own definition of art he states as follows:

I believe that [if] you are able to observe the work of an artist and understand their intent while also finding personal connection or resonance with that message, then art has been achieved. By every measure, videogames hold up to that definition.\textsuperscript{62}

He describes video games as an amalgam of traditional art. Within the video game one can find illustration, composition, painting, orchestration, narrative and other types of artistic

\textsuperscript{59} Roger Ebert, \textit{Video Games can never be Art}, Roger Ebert’s Journal 2010-04-16 (url: http://www.rogerebert.com/rogers-journal/video-games-can-never-be-art )

\textsuperscript{60} Brian Moriarty, \textit{A designer's take: MoMA is wrong to pretend video games are art}, The Guardian 2013-03-07 (url: http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2013/mar/07/designer-says-moma-wrong-on-video-games-art )

\textsuperscript{61} Brian Moriarty, \textit{A designer's take: MoMA is wrong to pretend video games are art}, The Guardian 2013-03-07 (url: http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2013/mar/07/designer-says-moma-wrong-on-video-games-art )

expression, and combining these expression together in to a game make the mix greater then the sum of its parts. He adds:

It isn’t any one art discipline; it’s many art disciplines that creates this new art form. 

But it is not just a matter of the various types of art one can find within the video game, Melissinos also discusses three voices in video games that together turn it in to an art piece. The first voice is that of the author or artist who have a story and message they want to convey, may it be a single person or an entire team. The second voice is that of the game itself, the mechanics and how one is able to interact with the game. The third voice is that of the player, that guides his was way through the game based on his own ideas, emotions and priorities. Melissinos state that it is through the playing of the game that art emerges.

He continues to discuss the role of video games in today’s world. Today, developers and artists in the game industry does not always need to limit themselves the way they had to in earlier game development as today’s digital technologies are so advanced. The previous strive for better mechanics and realism is now being turned in to a strive to create games with greater artistic intent.

While Melissinos is passionate about declaring video games as art, others in the gaming field are not as enthusiastic. Just like Melissinos, Fred Dutton mentions in his article Has the Art World Finally Fallen for Video Games? that there is no set definition of art, and because of that he finds it meaningless to discuss whether games may be art when we don’t even know what art is. Dutton also get support on this statement from Digital Art and Meaning author Roberto Simanowski who writes:

Nobody can really say what comprises art today, and everybody know that judgments about quality of an alleged example of art are hardly objective.

66 Fred Dutton, Has the Art World Finally Fallen for Video Games?, Eurogamer 2012-03-29 (url: http://www.eurogamer.net/articles/2012-03-26-has-the-art-world-finally-fallen-for-video-games )
5. Discussion

The amount of definitions of art I have read for this paper are staggering and one thing I noticed is that the same definition easily can be used to both declare video games as art and strip them off the same label. Many art critics seem to think that the gaming industry craves to be able to label its productions art, but going through interviews and texts by game developers they are either already sure it is art and don’t need any art critics to tell them so, or they are indifferent to the debate overall.

A lot of the critique brought up against video games as art definitely present some valid concerns. One major issue many critics has with video games as art is the interactive side of them, but if one is to disregard interactivity as a mean for expression in an art piece, one is also disregarding decades worth of interactive installations, and a lot of digital art overall.

Brian Moriarty does criticize his colleagues for disregarding interactive art, but he himself cites 19th century theory that claims that art is supposed to be sublime, and that games are just pure excitement. A lot of art before as well as after the 19th century does not fall under the category of sublime art, and today, especially since the introduction of interactive art, excitement does not mean that an art piece cannot be art.

Another issue raised by critic Brian Moriarty of the Guardian in his article is a concern about the commercial side of the gaming industry. That the commercial side of the industry may choke whatever artistic intent the developers may initially have had.68 But the fact still remains that many art forms such as music and film also have a very commercial side to them. And it is interesting to see cases where established artists like Natalie Bookchin develop art pieces using the video game medium in collaboration with art institutions, and how these pieces are more easily accepted by the established art world.

But when it comes to the critics, it is quite evident that many of them have had very little contact with video games and seem to be quite unfamiliar with the process and idea behind them. Author Roberto Simanowski brings this issue up in his book Digital Art and Meaning. He argues that critics of digital art need to be more familiar with the medium at hand. Just like many art critics are very familiar with painting techniques, materials and historical context,

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68 Brian Moriarty, A designer's take: MoMA is wrong to pretend video games are art, The Guardian 2013-03-07 (url: http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2013/mar/07/designer-says-moma-wrong-on-video-games-art)
critics debating digital art should perhaps to some extent be expected to be familiar with the base of digital art – its code. ⁶⁹

As mentioned in the introduction, when it comes to all artistic mediums, some productions may be considered art and some may not. I believe that if video games would be considered art it would not mean that all video games would be considered art. Just as with painting, where a vast minority of the paintings in the world are considered art, only a minority of video games may be considered art or artistic. The debate going on today seem to be very two sided, where either video games are art or they are not. I think there are clear examples of incredibly artistic video games but there are also clear examples of video games that are not as artistic. Some games may be more commercialized while other spring from a genuinely artistic approach to the medium.

Based on this study, the words and ideas of developers, curators and critics, I would say that defining video games as art simply depends on the game. The artistic intent, the message, the craft and the interactivity and experience that the players become part of. The museum of Modern Art based its selection on criterion such as visual quality, aesthetic experience, elegance of code and the design of the player’s behavior, and I find that to be a rather useful tool when looking at video games and perhaps even interactive digital art overall.

So to finalize this study and answer my initial question for this paper: I would say that video games are art and not art at the same time.

6. Summary

In this paper I studied the issue of whether video games can be considered an art form. Digital technologies have been around for some 60-70 years, and games began to be developed as a way to show the capacity of the systems and hardware that scientists were creating. Parallel to the development of digital technologies, digital art emerged as a means for artistic expression within the new medium. Digital technologies were used both as tools for more traditional artistic expression and as a medium for new art. Digital Art developed in to a wide variety of genres including installation, software art, virtual reality and animation. One of the strongest points of the digital medium was its ability to mix various types of media and interaction in to the same art piece. A lot of digital art have been debated over the years and just recently the debate of whether some digital art is art or not have also come to include video games.

Museums such as the Smithsonian American Art Museum and the Museum of Modern Art in New York have been among the first art museums to acquire video games in to their collections and put them on display in exhibits. The reaction to these exhibits have been quite mixed where the gaming community overall have been positive to having games on display at art museums. Many art critics, however, have not been as optimistic, and the debate following the opening of the exhibits included numerous articles refusing to dub video games art.

What comes across, however, looking closer at the work, craft, and ideas that goes in to video games, is that not only are a lot of the people developing video games artistically schooled, they also consider the artistic dimensions of the game thoroughly. Many critics disregard video games on the basis of its interactivity, that one can not tell who the artist is, or based on the fact that it is a game, but if one is to disregard interactivity in art one will exclude a lot of interactive art from the art definition. The fact that video games are games is not necessarily something preventing it from being art. A game of chess may be elegant, but it is still a game, it is not art. But video games do contain artistic material, ideas and expression, and therefore the fact that they are games should not be a sole reason not to be able to call them art.

When it comes down to it, most people have their own definition of what art is, and for some video games fit that definition and for some they don’t. But the debate do not need to be black and white. As with all types of artistic mediums, from paintings to performance, some pieces may be considered art and some may not. Video games can be art and not art at the same time.
References

Printed Material


Internet Material


Dutton, Fred “Has the Art World Finally Fallen for Video Games?” *Eurogamer* 2012-03-29 (2013-04-19) url: http://www.eurogamer.net/articles/2012-03-26-has-the-art-world-finally-fallen-for-video-games


Appendix 1

Exhibition Images

“The Art of Video games” at Smithsonian American Art Museum

(image from cnet.com)

(image from techhive.com)
”Applied Design” at MoMA, NYC

Sim City (Image from mashable.com)

Pac-Man Installation (Image from mashable.com)
Tetris (Image from mashable.com)
Appendix 2

Transcribed Interviews

Interview 1. Chris Melissinos, Curator ”The Art of Video Games”
CM: In games there are three voices. There is the voice of the creator. There is the voice of the game. And there is the voice of the player. And that is what separates video games apart from any other expressive form of media that we have today.

CM: We are invited by the artist to inject our own morality, our own worldview, our own experiences into the game as we play it. And what comes out is wholly different for everybody that experiences it.

CM: And that’s why it’s important: because there is no other medium that affords the world this incredible opportunity. I want everybody that comes to this exhibition and experiences the materials and the work that’s gone into this to understand that video games are more than what they thought they were when they came in.

CM: So, the exhibition is actually broken up into three distinct areas. The first area is, of course, listening to the artists, the designers, the programmers, the musicians talk about their craft, talk about the meaning. Tim Schafer and Warren Spector and Nolan Bushnell: people that were pioneers in storytelling. So you get some background into what you’re about to experience.

CM: So moving from there, we’ve chosen five playable games, one game that represents each of the five major eras. These are games that allow people to experience games that propelled those eras forward, that created mechanics and storytelling, opportunities that then other games built upon.

CM: And, finally, you arrive at a place where you're actually able to see spread out before you the 40-year history of these games and these systems that acted as touch points within each of those generations. As you’re experiencing the materials, you’re actually able to see the evolution of the art, the evolution of the storytelling, the evolution of meaning of these games, but hear the echoes of the mechanics of these games all the way back to the beginning.
CM: Given the era in which certain games were made, the technology isn’t present for the entire story, the entire narrative to emerge, but there just wasn’t space or power in which to do so.

CM: You may see Pitfall! on the Atari VCS at the beginning of that part of the exhibition and see Uncharted 2 at the end of that exhibition and understand that their origin of mechanics are the same. That’s what people are going to be able to experience the creative process, the mechanics that allowed things to move forward, and the evolution of the form over time.

CM: So, you know, as people leave this exhibition after experiencing all these things, my greatest hope is that they go home, re-experience these games in a completely different light. And they use them to find connection that may have been missing within their own lives.

CM: Games are so much more than just code that runs inside of a computer. You are looking at the output of passion, of love, of art from the people who create these games.

Source: http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=t-l0Bs3wsgo

Interview 2. Paola Antonelli, Curator “Applied Design”

PA: We’re amongst the first museums of Art to acquire video games within a collection of Art.

PA: We have games like Tetris, like Pac-Man. I believe that this is just the beginning.

PA: I’m quite sure that in the future we’ll move to apps, we’ll move to other forms of software. The new warehouse in the collection of digital kind of warehouse.

PA: People who believe that video games do not belong in art museums are in a dramatic minority. They also sound so out of space and out of time, as if they didn’t know what is happening. Are video games Art? I believe they are.

PA: And I’m perfectly happy with them being great design, I don’t need for them to be art, but I believe they are, and it’s just a matter of time before the whole world believes that.

Source: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-21661690