

Works of Game: On the Aesthetics of Games and Art (Playful Thinking)

By John Sharp

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Games and art have intersected at least since the early twentieth century, as can be seen in the Surrealists' use of Exquisite Corpse and other games, Duchamp's obsession with Chess, and Fluxus event scores and boxes -- to name just a few examples. Over the past fifteen years, the synthesis of art and games has clouded for both artists and gamemakers. Contemporary art has drawn on the tool set of videogames, but has not considered them a cultural form with its own conceptual, formal, and experiential affordances. For their part, game developers and players focus on the innate properties of games and the experiences they provide, giving little attention to what it means to create and evaluate fine art. In *Works of Game*, John Sharp bridges this gap, offering a formal aesthetics of games that encompasses the commonalities and the differences between games and art.

Sharp describes three communities of practice and offers case studies for each. "Game Art," which includes such artists as Julian Oliver, Cory Arcangel, and JODI (Joan Heemskerk and Dirk Paesmans) treats videogames as a form of popular culture from which can be borrowed subject matter, tools, and processes. "Artgames," created by gamemakers including Jason Rohrer, Brenda Romero, and Jonathan Blow, explore territory usually occupied by poetry, painting, literature, or film. Finally, "Artists' Games" -- with artists including Blast Theory, Mary Flanagan, and the collaboration of Nathalie Pozzi and Eric Zimmerman -- represents a more synthetic conception of games as an artistic medium. The work of these gamemakers, Sharp suggests, shows that it is possible to create game-based artworks that satisfy the aesthetic and critical values of both the contemporary art and game communities.

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Editorial Review

Review

John Sharp's *Works of Game* is a foundational book for those studying or practicing game design within the domain of fine arts. Historically informative and theoretically insightful, the book provides a strong foundation for understanding the diverse ways in which fine artists have embraced games as their expressive medium of choice, as well as the cultural movements within which they have done so.

(Celia Pearce, Cofounder of IndieCade; Associate Professor of Game Design, Northeastern University)

With *Works of Game*, John Sharp has written the fundamental reference for understanding the relation between game design and artistic practice. This book challenges our notions of the arts and games, and proposes new ways of thinking about and understanding game design as an artistic practice. For game designers, game scholars, and artists, *Works of Game* is a must-read.

(Miguel Sicart, Associate Professor, Center for Computer Games Research, IT University of Copenhagen; author of *Play Matters*)

This book will be of great value to all contemporary creative practitioners, whether they consider themselves artists, game designers, or some combination of the two. Not only does the book provide a strong overview of contemporary projects that walk the line between art-works and game-works, it also constructs a highly useful set of diagnostic terms that will aid us in understanding hybrid projects in the years to come.

(Ted Purves, Associate Professor of Social Practice, California College of the Arts; coeditor of *What We Want Is Free: Critical Exchanges in Recent Art*, second edition)

Rather than asking the naive, popular question -- can games be art? -- John Sharp answers a more interesting one: where do games and the art world meet, and what do they talk about when they do?

(Ian Bogost, Ivan Allen College Distinguished Chair in Media Studies and Professor of Interactive Computing, Georgia Institute of Technology)

Overall, the book is a compelling text for both academics and game culture aficionados who are interested in concepts of game design and contemporary art.

(*ARLIS NA Reviews*)

About the Author

John Sharp is Associate Professor of Games and Learning at Parsons the New School for Design and a member of the game design collective Local No. 12.

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