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# DIY Video Game Exhibit Asks "Do You Feel Lucky, Punk?"

By Nicole Finkbiner

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Get your game on: Think you can create your own video game? So does Lee Tusman.

More often than not, we tend to think about video games in terms of classic vs. contemporary—Tetris vs. Halo, Atari vs. Wii. What many people may not realize is that there's actually two separate factions of the gaming world: mainstream and indie.

Due to increased access to basic game-making software, anyone with a computer and a few hours to kill can create their own video game these days—no prior computer programming experience necessary. As a result, there are indie developers all over the globe churning out fun and innovative games and distributing them online for free. This month, Little Berlin is giving locals a proper introduction to the alt-gaming world, having transformed its Kensington gallery space into a mini arcade. *Punk Arcade* features seven DIY games that, while unique as far as their individual visual aesthetics, complexity, genres and styles of play, were all made in a short amount of time by an individual or small group without traditional programming know-how.

"We looked for games that were fun to play, quick to learn and that loosely fit our definition of punk

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games," explains local installation artist and Little Berlin curatorial member Lee Tusman, who conceived the exhibit with the help of his friend, fellow artist and DIY gaming virtuoso Sarah Brin.

*Punk Arcade* games have been uploaded onto old computers, either donated by the University of the Arts or hoarded by Tusman. The archaic monitors are propped up inside cabinets constructed entirely out of cardboard with spray-painted details, and instead of controllers, players use old keyboards.

"This is like a normal installation for me," laughs Tusman, who spent several 12-hour days bringing the wonderfully makeshift show to life.

Although hesitant to pick a favorite, the 30-year-old Philly native notes that the *Punk Arcade* game he had the hardest time prying himself away from was the least punk of them all: *Huggin' Bear* by Lindsay Grace, in which players must place well-timed hugs on a stuffed teddy bear—with a special controller inside its belly—in order to leap over various obstacles. The better the hug, the higher you leap. (It's not as easy as it sounds.)

Even cuter: *Sissy's Magical PonyCorn Adventure*, a choose-your-own-adventure-style game created by 5-year-old Cassie Creighton from Toronto, with the help of her father. In addition to providing the voice of the main character, all of the visuals are her actual crayon drawings.

There is only one legitimate arcade console in the exhibit that Tusman found at a local thrift store and had rewired for the politically motivated, two-player game *Keep Me Occupied*, created by Anna Anthropy during Occupy Oakland's move-in day. Rather than competing against one another, the players have to work together to ascend through a building, and after 60 seconds, each leave a ghost of themselves behind to occupy the last gate touched, holding it open for future players.

"There's a really sweet story about how the arcade was built and got pushed through the streets of Oakland by all kinds of helpful strangers," Brin says.

Should anyone suddenly feel inspired to make a game of their own, Tusman will be leading a free workshop on Sat., Oct. 20. open to artists and gaming enthusiasts alike. All you need to bring is a laptop and a few clever ideas. It just so happens that most of the games featured in the exhibit were created during similar indie game jams across the country.

While this is the first manifestation of Punk Arcade, next month it'll become a traveling exhibit when Brin, 26, recreates it in her hometown of L.A. with GlitchLab, a multipurpose arts organization dedicated to showcasing artist-made and experimental games, for which she serves as creative director.

"I think these new game-making tools and their ubiquity are worth noting and celebrating as a movement," she says. "It's easy for that stuff to get lost in the jumble of the Internet."

Through Oct. 27. *Arcade Days: Saturdays, noon-5pm. Workshop: Sat., Oct. 20, 2-4pm. Free. Little Berlin, 2430 Coral St. littleberlin.org*



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