

PUSH PLAY

Curated by Melissa Feldman

ICI



INDEPENDENT CURATORS INTERNATIONAL

Push Play

“No vital periods ever began from a theory. What’s first is a game, a struggle, a journey.”

– Guy Debord

Seeking the initial moment described by Debord, *Push Play* brings together works modeled on games and play by an international array of artists. Whether their works derive from the playground, the video arcade, the casino, or the rec room, in reinventing games the artists in *Push Play* aim to create experiences that reflect on social, political and cultural realities.

Collectively the works in *Push Play* explore interactivity, an expansive topic in both current art and exhibition-making with the migration of participatory and live art forms into the heretofore foreign territory of the gallery or museum. Every work in this exhibition is intended to be handled and played.

Art-making tied to game playing has historically attracted artists of the avant-garde, most famously Marcel Duchamp, chess master and father of conceptual art. Games were intrinsic to the work of the World War I-addled Dadaists and Surrealists—the inventors of “automatic” or preconscious drawing and exquisite corpse, the collaborative drawing game. These chance-based techniques were intended to free the artistic imagination and stand in defiance of bourgeois values. In the 1960s and 70s, the countercultural, anti-war Fluxus group of artists and the Bay Area-based New Games Foundation took on capitalism and corporate culture through games promoting cooperative, non-competitive play. The latter sponsored massive public games in city parks, while the former was known for its portable, inexpensive game boxes containing playful pieces that were easily mailed to Fluxus’s global festivals and performances.

Inspired by these predecessors, the artists in *Push Play* aim to inform or persuade you by doing as opposed to just looking. Push play, toss the dice, or draw a card and make the first move towards political awareness, a changed mindset, or new decision-making strategies around contemporary issues.

– Melissa E. Feldman

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Cory Arcangel

Composition #7

2010

Gateway desktop computer, Gateway power supply, Gateway mouse, Gateway keyboard and the guitar controller

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist and Team

Gallery



Arcangel (b. 1978, Buffalo, NY) was one of the first artists to break the barrier between fine and digital art with large-scale installations using hacked old-school video games such as Super Mario Brothers.

Composition #7 highlights the artist's beginnings as a classical guitarist at the prestigious Oberlin Conservatory of Music and his longstanding interest in electronic music. In this piece the rock soundtrack and title of the computer game "Frets on Fire" has been replaced with that of a 1960s score by La Monte Young, a minimalist composer associated with Fluxus. Young, in turn, may have taken the title from one of the first purely abstract paintings ever made, the eponymous 1913 work by Wassily Kandinsky, a Russian painter inspired by music as the ultimate abstract form of expression.

Composition #7 premiered at the TriBeCa loft/performance space of Yoko Ono—who, like Archangel, started out as a musician. These historical connections to the avant-garde are born out in works in which competitiveness is subverted by the inevitability of failure, a Zen experience or, in this case, the easy win.

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Patrick Bernier and Olive Martin

L'Échiqueté (Checkered Chess) 2012

Painted iron, weaved cotton mat,
fabric and cardboard box, a printed A4
rule.

Boxed set: 60 x 60 cm cotton chess
matt; painted iron chess piece, each 3
x 8.5 cm; 32 x 43 x 11 cm box.

(Exhibition copy)

Courtesy of Patrick Bernier and Olive
Martin



L'Échiqueté or “Checkered Chess” joins the legions of chess variants, such as the 1944 version created by the father of Surrealism, the French poet André Breton, which used glasses of red and white wine as the chess pieces.

In Bernier and Martin’s (b. 1971, Paris; b. 1972, Liege, Belgium) version, captured pieces turn half black and half white and get assigned sides by its capturer. Effectively a symbol of the double agent, the game was inspired by Bernier’s family history. His grandfather, who was French Caribbean, served as an administrator in Nigeria, a French African colony. The accompanying archival photograph, from a celebration of army Independence Day in Niamey in 1961, shows Bernier’s grandfather (far left) with the first Nigerian president (center) and a French general in white. The artists liken the protagonists’ ceremonial appearance in a public square to carefully placed chess pieces.

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Ruth Catlow

Rethinking War Games

2003

Internet video game

Courtesy of the artist

Pawns Join Forces!
to defend world peace



An online game of 3 player,
pacifist chess

Chess Players

Under what conditions could
the pawns in this game win?



answers on an email

Activist and media artist Catlow (b. 1968, London) reworks the game of chess to draw parallels between the pawns and the idea of power to the people rooted in the 1960s counterculture movement. The distribution of power in *Rethinking Wargames* is meant to prompt viewers/players to question the purpose of their own competitive tendencies. Catlow is also co-founder of Furtherfield online community for art, technology and social change. "Rethinking Wargames is a participative net art project which calls for 'pawns to join forces to defend world peace.' It uses the game of chess to find strategies that challenge existing power structures and their concomitant war machineries." - Ruth Catlow

Mary Flanagan

Mapscotch: BOMBSCOTCH

2013

Tape or chalk

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist



Artist and professor of digital humanities at Dartmouth College, as well as the author of the seminal book *Critical Play: Radical Game Design*, Mary Flanagan (b. 1969, Milwaukee) is interested in how digital technologies and games can be instruments for social critique. *BOMBSCOTCH* is one of several hopscotch boards the artist has designed that uses the format to navigate socio-political issues.

Using data from the US most virulent attacks in the 20th and 21st Century, *BOMBSCOTCH* provides a performative and meditative space for considering the scale of various US offensives.

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Futurefarmers

SeeSaw

2002

Plywood with fabric

14 x 1 x 42 in

Courtesy of the artists



Founded in 1995 by Amy Franceschini (b. 1970, Patterson, CA), Futurefarmers is a multi-disciplinary collective comprised of artists, designers, programmers, farmers, chefs, and engineers. Their room-sized or outdoor site-related works, such as a traveling bingo game about poverty around the world, encourage participants to question social, cultural, and environmental systems and norms. “*SeeSaw* can be used meditatively by two people. A direct line between two bodies- strangers, lovers, a generational span...Up to 14 people have balanced on the see saw. Enter at own risk.” – Futurefarmers

Ryan Gander

Parallel Blackjack

2010

Deck of cards; custom tabletop

divider; table and 3 chairs

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist and ICI



Gander's (b. 1976, Chester, U.K.) conceptual practice hinges on transmuting familiar objects and experiences into propositional, experimental ones. *Parallel Blackjack's* cards are printed on both sides, with different denominations on each side. Players sit facing each other with the cards held up between them in the mirrored holder and the dealer sits to the west. The card your opponent is dealt—because the back of that card becomes part of your hand—as well as the opportunity to flip cards, compounds the odds of the game.

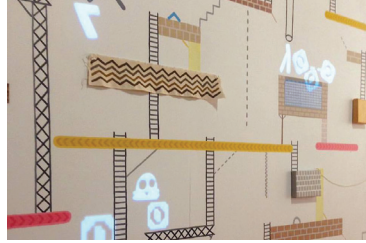
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Cable Griffith and Brent Watanabe

while(){};
2017

acrylic paint, stretched canvas, framed panel, contact paper, drywall tape, string, custom computer application, digital projection

Courtesy of the artists and G. Gibson Gallery



Created especially for the presentation of *Push Play* at the Hedreen Gallery, *while (){};* merges video games with environmental painting in a mediation on the endless, pointless cycle of human consumption. Your ghost-like icon's pursuit of cups of coffee, cherries, and love only results in dissatisfaction and waste (cursing and defecating, respectively). So does the game itself in which players never win or lose.

The multi-media imagery of the game-- which is projected onto a wall painting that incorporates swatches of fabric, string, and small canvases --references the pixelated texture blocks and shorthand imagery of classic games like Super Mario Brothers and the shallow scaffolding of Donkey Kong. Seattle-based Griffith (b. 1975, New York, NY) and Watanabe (b. 1970, Seattle) have collaborated on "playable paintings" in the past, but also maintain individual art practices.

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Allan McCollum and Matt Mullican

Your Fate

2004

Set of 25 Dice and booklet

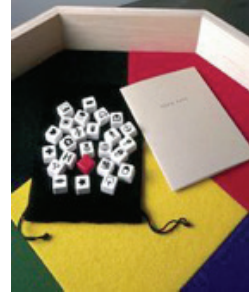
Wood game board with felt inserts

24 x 24 x 37 in

(Exhibition Copy)

Courtesy of the artists, Christine

Burgin and ICI



Your Fate is the first and only collaboration between Allan McCollum (b. 1944, Los Angeles) and Matt Mullican (b. 1951, Santa Monica, CA), two artists associated with the advent of postmodernism and its scrutiny of corporate and consumer culture. The symbols on the dice come from Mullican's cosmology of pictograms that is the basis of his work, as well as his interest in divination systems.

Mullican states: "Allan and I have been interested in psychic phenomena for as long as we have known each other."

McCollum states: "When he suggested we collaborate on a project, it occurred to me that we might utilize my more materialist inclination to invent some sort of 'finished product' that could help one repeatedly rework one's worldview as a matter of course: an oracle, or a divination tool."

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Paul Noble

Doley

1996

Boxed game, posters

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist



Like much of the Paul Noble's work (b. 1963, Northumberland, U.K.), *Doley* combines autobiography with a comicbook-like sense of theatricality and dark humor. Players choose from one of its anti-heroic game characters, such as "Oblivious" or "Burnt Out" and wear props associated with their character's persona. With all its characters on the dole – the British term for collecting unemployment – *Doley* parodies Monopoly (1933), an enduring symbol of American capitalism. (Ironically, Monopoly was invented by an unemployed repairman and his friend, a part-time dog walker.) As stated in the game rules, "*Doley* cannot be won, but if the players follow the rules desperation may be avoided."

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Pedro Reyes

Sanatorium: Citileaks

2011-present

Digital printed poster, bottles and corks, paper, pen, string, bucket filled with water

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist



Pedro Reyes (b. 1972, Mexico City) employs participatory techniques to experiment with ways to address societal issues from urban stress to military disarmament. The use of ordinary, non-art materials such as buckets and bed sheets and common experiences such as psychotherapy and game playing underscore the connection real world problems. *Citileaks* is an exercise in community-building through ritual confession and trust, free of governance or oversight, and exemplifies the artist's interest in promoting both individual agency and "power to the people."

Feather Fun

2012

Poster, white sheet and black feather

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist



According to Reyes, "You don't just look at the object . . . It is necessary for people to put the piece into action for the aesthetic experience to be complete." The participatory work *Feather Fun* and *Citileaks*, also on view, exemplify this idea. In the recent series entitled *Disarm* (2013), Reyes continues to explore the transformation of objects and human behavior, this time reconfiguring confiscated firearms into musical instruments.

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Jason Rohrer

Passage

2007

PC or Mac ipad video game

Courtesy of the artist



Jason Rohrer (American, b. 1977) has emerged as one of the most prominent independent game designers whose works, all free and available for download, expand the nature of video games beyond the commercial hijinks of big industry. *Passage* is a poetic, quasi-autobiographical work about life and all the choices one has to make along the way. Rohrer also composes the music accompanying his work.

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David Shrigley

Your Parents, You, Your Wee Sister and The Social Services

2001

Poster pen on wooden bats, ping
pong balls

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist and Hamilton
Corporate Finance Ltd.



A tragicomic sense of playfulness drives David Shrigley's (b. 1968, Macclesfield, UK) diverse oeuvre ranging from drawings, photographs, and books to large-scale sculpture. A constant feature is Shrigley's childlike graphics and handwritten wit. The subject is the human condition in all its existential and socio-economic frailty. Here Shrigley portrays the plight of the children (the balls) being bounced between their down-n-out parents (small paddle) and the governmental social services (large paddle) as a game of ping pong.

Erik Svedäng

Blueberry Garden

2009

PC Computer game

Courtesy of Erik Svedäng



Svedang's (b. 1986, Uppsala, Sweden) *Blueberry Garden* is an experimental game about curiosity and exploration, unlike conventional, violent games. The low-fi game is also a response to the hyper-realistic style that dominates the industry. It won first prize at the 2009 Independent Games Festival in San Francisco.

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Yoko Ono

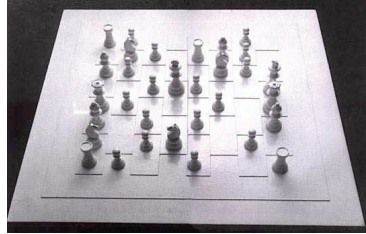
Play It By Trust

1966/2013

17.5 x 17.5 in board game, set of
wooden chess pieces

(Exhibition Copy)

Courtesy of the artist



This work is a version of Yoko Ono's *All White Chess Set* from the 1960s, when she (b. 1933, Tokyo) was involved with the Fluxus movement as one of its founding members as well as an anti-war activist. The work is a symbol of peace and a metaphor for the futility of war. At the same time, it represents the anti-rationalist stance of Fluxus and the counter-culture revolution as a whole. Fluxus was a loosely affiliated group of international artists, writers, and musicians who worked outside the traditional cultural venues and artistic forms, which they found elitist and tainted by commercialism. One of their artistic mainstays were the so-called "game boxes" featuring physical and conceptual sets of activities that turned viewers into players and makers. In her work across media including film and performance, Ono shows a preference for the color white, which she explains "does not interfere with your thoughts."

Once the game commences and the pieces intermingle, it becomes difficult to know who controls which piece and thus, the idea of competition flounders. 'Ideally', Ono has said, 'this leads to a shared understanding of (our) mutual concerns and a new relationship based on empathy rather than opposition. Peace is then attained on a small scale.'



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