

BSU

Honors Program

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GAME  N

Design

April 25, 2017

Bemidji State University

Honors Program

Department of Technology, Art & Design

GAME ON

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Artist Statement

Looking back at my childhood, many of the fondest memories I have stem from my time spent playing video games. Even at a young age I can remember challenging my dad to a game of *Mario Kart*, or trying my hardest to best my parents' records in *Star Fox*, and so playing video games became a pastime that my whole family could enjoy. As I grew older, I began to look at video games as more than just a source of entertainment. With each new game came a new environment; a new world; a new way to play. Rather than simply “playing to win” as I had in the past, I instead took the time to pause and truly appreciate all that the game had to offer. From the barren streets of a forgotten city, to the vast expanse of an alien world, I started to see each game as a culmination of creative expression—a work of art.

GAME ON showcases my passion for video games through digital illustration and photography. Each poster pays homage to a different video game franchise while also drawing inspiration from either Japanese manga or American comic books. In doing so I hope to bridge the gap between two distinct art styles and two distinct cultures. The photography explores the artistry within video games themselves. Taken as screenshots in the “Theater Mode” of *Halo 5: Guardians*, each image portrays a different take on the beauty and complexity that can be achieved through in-game environments and scenery.

It is my hope that, through this exhibition, people will come to appreciate the time and effort that went into making this artwork—and these games—a reality. So what are you waiting for? Grab some Doritos and Mountain Dew, because it's GAME ON!

Research Process

From humble beginnings in the 1980s to worldwide renown in the present day, video games have staked their claim in modern society. Improvements in graphics and visual processing have allowed video games to push the boundaries of what could only have been described as dreams just decades ago, leading to their respect by many as both entertainment and—more recently—an art form. Yet, as history has shown, society is often hesitant to accept new art forms, and so when people such as Roger Ebert (movie critic and author of a blog article entitled "Video games can never be art") denied video games this recognition, the heated debate began (Murphy). This is where I come in.

To effectively showcase the artistic value present within video games, my thesis exhibition, "GAME ON," is comprised of various forms of digital media, including digital paintings and in-game photography. Each piece is a visual representation of a particular video game franchise, and highlights the conceptual phase of video game design as my main source of inspiration. Each work also acts as a representation of the cultural similarities and differences between the United States and Japan regarding artistic style and direction due, in part, to each country's extensive influence on video game design. To better represent the influence of cultural nuances within video games, the works that I have created pay homage to both Japanese manga and American comic books. In doing so, I hope to bridge the gap between two distinct forms of popular entertainment media while also providing a relevant example of the ways in which particular cultures—and artistic styles by extension—can elevate the artistic value of video games in the public eye.

The exhibition features in-game photography and four digital paintings; each drawing inspiration from either Japanese or American culture in the style of manga and comics. Both

styles possess striking qualities that relate to the craft and creativity present in the conceptual phase of video game design. Every game has its beginning...and I feel as though concept art expresses the artistic influence found in video games, just as manga and comic books have done in printed media. It is during this conceptual phase of the design that ideas become reality, and imagination gives way to creative direction. Ultimately, this phase of video game design carries the greatest influence over how the final game—from characters and objects to environments and architecture—will look and feel, and the emotional impact it will have on the person playing it. To better-display the importance of concept creation and development, I have also chosen to include time-lapse recordings for each of the digital paintings in my exhibition, allowing me to show my process from start to finish in hopes that people will be able to see just how much time and effort truly went into making this project a reality.

When drawing from manga and comic books as sources of inspiration, it seemed only natural to seek out individuals who have influenced the evolution of both mediums. To convey a better representation of the progression of each art form, as well as to provide a connection between the past and the present, I have chosen to base the inspirations for my work off two mangaka (manga artists) and two comic book artists whose work has become synonymous with the mediums themselves, and has become a source of renown to which artists aspire to.

Known by many as the “Father of Manga,” Japanese mangaka Osamu Tezuka made a name for himself in the 1950s with the release of his most well-known work, *Astro Boy*, featuring the large eyes and animated features that eventually became commonplace throughout the manga industry (*Zagzouga*). Nearly 50 years later, a mangaka by the name of Masashi Kishimoto created *Naruto*, one of the most popular and recognized manga to date. Through *Naruto*, Kishimoto crafted a thoroughly engaging story that not only showcased his skills of

incorporating action and tone into each panel, but also his ability to create a character that could serve as a cultural connection between countries a world apart (Garrison, 2014). Osamu Tezuka and Masashi Kishimoto have proven through their story-telling and sense of vision that manga can relate to people on a personal level. It tells a story through its characters and stunning imagery, something I took to heart with each of the works in my exhibition.

Across the Pacific, shortly after Osamu Tezuka had published his famed *Astro Boy*, American comic book artist, Jack Kirby, was making history of his own. Collaborating with Stan Lee, Kirby helped to co-create some of Marvel's mainstay properties, including the Fantastic Four, Thor, and the Hulk. He also worked with Joe Simon in creating "America's Hero," Captain America. With his "distinct narrative drawing" and "bold abstraction," Jack Kirby introduced a new take on comic book superheroes, making him one of the most influential artists in comic history (Hatfield, 2011). Fast forward a few decades and America is introduced to one of the most influential comic artists of the present day—Todd McFarlane. Widely known as the creator of the popular comic anti-hero *Spawn*, McFarlane became recognized for his unique stylistic approach, as well as the many dark undertones featured in his work. Todd McFarlane also had a hand in working with Stan Lee on several Spider Man comics, providing the inspiration for the web-slinger's newest villain, Venom. Taking cues from Jack Kirby and Todd McFarlane, I hope to bring a sense of distinction and style to my work by pushing the boundaries and defying what is to be expected.

I am optimistic that with the success of GAME ON, the public—both gamers and non-gamers alike—shall acquire newfound appreciation for the creative ingenuity and passion put into some of today's blockbuster games, and I hope that by providing a glimpse into the

conceptual design of video games and relevant media such as manga and comic books, people might view these games as sources of creative and cultural expression—as works of art.

Creative Process

GAME ON represents the culmination of nearly a year of research, dedication, and time spent developing the digital artwork—in addition to the time-lapse footage—featured in the exhibition. It all began last summer. Once I had developed a sound thesis proposal, I then dedicated time during the summer of 2016 to familiarizing myself with the art of digital painting. It was my first time working with a Wacom tablet, which allows you to create complex digital artwork using a stylus rather than a mouse. Fortunately, the act of using the tablet came easily to me, and I did not find myself suffering from a steep learning curve. Once used to the tablet, I began creating various works of digital art throughout the summer to further hone my skills. I started the first of my four digital paintings in August of 2016, and made it my goal to spend roughly two hours a day working on each piece. Due to time constraints and mounting work for other school-related projects, work on the paintings slowed around late September of 2016, until I managed to refocus my efforts later that December.

While working on each of the digital paintings, I used a software called *OBS Studio* to record my screen during each work session. As I neared the end of my thesis project, I compiled the video files for each work and combined them into one file with a video editing software called *Adobe Premiere*. Using *Premiere*, I sped-up the raw footage and exported the file to *Windows Movie Maker*, where I added title slides and other visual effects.

To create each of the six screenshots featured in the exhibition, I spent roughly eight hours setting up shots within an Xbox One game called *Halo 5: Guardians*. The game allows players to utilize its proprietary “Forge Mode” to build and customize their own in-game

structures and environments. For each screenshot, I customized my player (Spartan) to better-suit the environment. I then placed objects and other scene elements into each environment for added effect, and positioned myself in various locations, and poses, to compose the perfect shot. From there, I went into “Theater Mode”—a separate game mode which allows players to view saved gameplay through a free-roaming camera. To take a shot, I simply went into my saved footage from each environment and positioned my camera in such a way as to capture the breathtaking size and scope the virtual landscape.

Each piece of digital artwork was printed and framed for display in Bemidji State University’s GALLERY X, with the time-lapse footage displayed on four TVs (one for each of the four digital paintings). The exhibition ran from April 6 to April 19, 2017—serving as the final step in making my thesis a reality.

















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