
Video Games as Art

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Overview

Art is defined as the expression or application of human creative skill and imagination (Oxford, 2016). We often describe literature, music, and movies as art, but video games often receive a bad rap for being too violent or simply a waste of time. Why is this form of expression worth less than others? Having played several video games recently with unique narratives and unbelievable art styles, I've felt more emotion from some of them than I have experienced with "traditional" forms of art. Video games have the ability to stretch the limits of our imagination; they can take us to unique worlds and introduce us to characters that we see ourselves in. Through this PechaKucha presentation I want to share some of the incredible experiences I've had playing video games and show them as art.

This presentation is not focused on gamers, but mostly geared toward those that don't understand why we play video games or see any value in them. This presentation will teach my audience why video games should be considered art by comparing them to traditional forms of art. Even if you're someone that will never play video games, I want you to at least respect them and understand why others may be passionate about this form of creation.

I created this presentation in Adobe Captivate because it's slide based and allows for easy narration as the slides play in front of me. I did not use any of Captivate's templates for my slides; instead I opted for my own creative approach. The majority of slides were created from personal photos and screenshots that I took in video games. Captivate allowed the final product to be exported as a movie so it could be uploaded to YouTube.

Design Decisions

Design Decision #1

While organizing this presentation, my main focus was on story telling. As Duarte (2010) explains, presentations should have a clear beginning, middle, and end. The events in the middle should constantly unfold to help pull the audience in (p. 36). In a TED (2014) talk also given by Reynolds, he was in agreement, adding that a solid structure should be put in place to make the audience care about what is being said. I kept this in mind as I developed my presentation and particularly focused on unfolding new information at several points as the presentation went on. At slides 5 and 6, for example, I first showed a traditional piece of art and then followed up with a video game screenshot. I wanted my audience to think that maybe video games can have the same artistic qualities as traditional art forms and this helped blur the lines. This is done again on slides 14 and 15 when I transition from how art has changed over the centuries into how indie games are changing the way we see art in video games.

Design Decision #2

In *Presentation Zen Design* (2009), Reynolds advocates using images as a highly effective way to get people's attention. He further discusses how still images are great because they capture a moment in time, allowing a viewer to reflect (p. 97-98). I took this same approach for the majority of images used in my presentation. I tried to use my own photographs when it made sense, such as the violinist and the piece of art from Art Prize, to capture experiences that I had with art in real life. I also found that Medina's (2008) statement about memory, which stated that "the more visual the input becomes, the more likely it is to be recognized and recalled (p. 233)," reinforced this approach. All of the video game screenshots were taken with these principles in

mind. I wanted to capture moments that would show what these games were really about. I used the in-game engines available to try and set up most of my shots as if I was actually holding a camera in these fictional worlds.

Design Decision #3

One piece of communication advice that Heath, C., & Heath, D. (2008) recommends is the use of “repetition, repetition, repetition.” This was the primary method that I used to help persuade my audience that video games can be art. When discussing some of the video games experiences I’ve had, I repeatedly use the terms “art” and “artistic style” to drive home the point that they are indeed art. In conjunction with this, Medina (2008) says that, “if information is only presented orally, people remember about 10 percent of it after 72 hours, but when pictures are added, that number goes up to 65 percent.” I used my video game slides to help reinforce this approach (slides 8-13 and again at slides 15-17) by repeatedly showing many examples of artistic video games.

Design Decision #4

Contrast is one of the most powerful design concepts of them all because it’s what we notice first and it helps give the design energy (Reynolds, 2009, p. 153). I explored this in two different ways. On slide 15, when I first start talking about indie games, I wanted to illustrate how unique they are from each other so I chose three games with completely different art styles and color palettes. This helped provide contrast between them. The second way, refers back to slides 5 and 6, where I show the Van Gogh painting followed by the video game screenshot. Contrast can be an effective way to help emphasizing what is important. At the same time, too much contrast can

overwhelm the audience (JTF, 2014). I thought using contrast in this way helped illustrate my point about how video games are no different than other forms of art.

Design Decision #5

I kept the text on my slides to a minimum, but for the slides where I did use text, I was mindful about how I incorporated it. Two key takeaways from Reynolds (2009) that I kept in mine are designing for the last row (p. 34) and style matters (p. 60). For the slides where I used text, I made sure I selected a large font size and one that would be easily readable. I also made sure to use fonts that worked with the contents of a particular slide. In slide 4, for example, I found a font that replicated the Mountain Dew type and styled it to look similar. Golombisky & Hagen (2010) also suggest to keep writing tight by explaining the subject and purpose in six words or less (p. 163). I kept my type down to a minimum as well, as I didn't want my audience reading my slides rather than listening to what I was saying.

Formative Evaluation Response

The questions I asked my peers covered the areas that I knew needed the most improvement, but wasn't quite sure about how to address. Below are the questions I asked, along with the specific feedback I received, and how I addressed it.

Peer Review Question #1

What can I do to improve the overall flow of my presentation? I asked this because I wanted to know if there was anything confusing or that disrupted the way information was presented.

Peer Reviewer A: The information that you were presenting was very good and informative.

Unfortunately, it was very monotone and hard to listen to. I would suggest changing your voice dynamics as you are reading to keep the viewer engaged and interested. I'm assuming this is a topic of much interest to you - sound excited about it! One thing that I was told when I was starting out as a teacher was that if you sound excited about the math you are teaching, the students will be so much more excited to learn! Change the sound of your voice every so often to get the viewer excited.

Peer Reviewer B: I have a few specifics in the questions below, but one thing I really enjoyed was the mountain dew art picture; that was one of my favorites. One thing I was unsure about was the slide with the wind blowing, the desert, and the wolf; you didn't talk about the wolf picture. I would add that to the voice, otherwise I would cut out that photo and just use the first two. Overall though, I like the connection between art and video games. Not everyone sees it that way and I think this could open some people's eyes!

Considerations: One quick fix I made was to update the audio for the slide with the wolf (slide 15) and mention what that game is about. I also changed the content of a few other slides to

make them fit together better. Finally, I rerecorded the audio for my entire presentation while trying to be conscious of adding more dynamics to my voice.

Peer Review Question #2

How can I boost the instructional value of my presentation? I thought I had some good information about art in general, but knew there was room for more information as far as art in video games.

Peer Reviewer A: I liked how you asked questions and then paused to give the viewer a chance to interact. This is a great technique when teaching something. I would continue to incorporate things like that - when a viewer is involved, they are more likely to remember the information that is being taught to them. I would try to add as many question and answer times as possible!

Peer Reviewer B: If you are able to make the voice more laidback and less scripted, I think that could boost the overall impression for your viewers. With a more relaxed voice, your audience can relate more and therefore stay connected to the material. If you are comfortable, some improvisation would be refreshing, or even a joke somewhere. You obviously know a lot about video games and I'd like to hear it from you rather than you reading a script.

Considerations: There wasn't too much advice here that I thought fit in with my presentation. I tried making my presentation interactive. I also tied in art history slides with my video game slides to make them relate. I think the other fixes that I made from questions 1 and 3 further addressed this problem.

Peer Review Question #3

How can I smooth out my transitions between slides/topics? I noticed that once I started talking about a few of the artistic games that I've played recently the transitions seemed a little abrupt. I was looking for input on how to adjust this.

Peer Reviewer A: My only suggestion is to maybe shorten some of the slides speaking area because it goes right up to the 20 seconds and as you are finishing your word, the slide is changing. It looks and sounds very choppy that way. However, I know I am going to have the same problem, so if I find any more suggestions on how to do this, I'll let you know.

Peer Reviewer B: I thought your transition from the Van Gogh painting to the picture from the video game of the blind girl was an amazing transition. That really caught my attention so I recommend not tweaking that at all. One transition that was tough however, was the slide with the music. The music seemed much louder than your voice so if there is a way you could play the music a little softer; that would transition better for your viewer. I also was unsure if the slide after that went with the song or not. Maybe rethink the order and/or transition there? Or maybe rethink the explanation for that song? Another transition that seemed out of place was the slide about “how to solve a dispute with a coworker”. Maybe I missed the purpose of that photo and/or where it came from? If so, make the voice over that slide more obvious as to the purpose of that picture. The last thing I saw that could be tweaked was in the last 20 seconds, there was a pause as if you stopped and then restarted recording your voice. Try to cut that out if possible to make your presentation seamless.

Considerations: I modified my script so the audio for each slide wasn't cutoff. I also worked out better transitions for a few slides, including the one that contained music. I decided to remove the Stanley Parable slide and dedicate an additional slide to Guild Wars 2, as I thought it really needed two slides to discuss.

Peer Review Question #4

How can I enhance my learning objective? I did not want my learning objective to become confusing and was thinking about ways I could keep reinforcing it.

Peer Reviewer A: I would add the following to the end of your learning objective "...such as, ____". I would do this so that the viewer has something to relate to when making sure they can accomplish the learning objective. This makes it more clear on what you want a viewer to be able to do at the end.

Peer Reviewer B: Your learning objective is stated as, "Audience will be able to identify the artistry involved in video games and critique them with the same respect as traditional forms of art." After your presentation, I feel I can identify the artistry involved in video games but I am unsure if I could "critique" them properly. What if one or two slides asked the viewers to guess whether it was a painting or a video game? A good place for this would be after the Van Gogh slide and the blind girl video game slides.

Considerations: I ended up change my learning objective a bit because it's impossible to expect someone that doesn't play video games to critique them. This was an over sight on my part. The main objective I was looking at achieving was for my audience to respect them as an art form and understand how they contain elements of other types of art.

Peer Review Question #5

What CARP improvements can be made to my slides? There were a few slides I was not quite happy with as far as my design is concerned. I was looking for additional ideas before I went back and fixed these.

Peer Reviewer A: I actually thought the presentation looked great and followed the CARP standards well. I like how you repeated a lot of the same words when you were speaking in order to make it clear to the audience members. I would keep the presentation looking exactly how it is because the images are great for what you are saying. I was drawn in mainly by the way your presentation looked.

Peer Reviewer B: On the slide with the PlayStation controller in the middle and the four bubbles, I would suggest having each bubble labeled with text to clarify which bubble was sculpture versus painting, etc. And as a side note, I don't see a credits slide. I would add that since it seems you used lots of pictures from video games, websites, etc.

Considerations: I was not thrilled with the PlayStation controller slide so I ended up completely changing the graphic. I also added my sources to the last slide. All of the slides with screenshots from video games were taken by myself so I simply stated the name of the game on each slide. Slides that contained graphics from other sources were cited right on their slide.

Lessons Learned

The most challenging aspect of this project for me was timing my slides out to 20 seconds each. Recording my own voice is something I typically prefer not to do. Usually for these types of projects, I work with a voice actor to record the audio. The first time recording, a few of my slides were too short, while others were too long. Trying to adjust for this was actually a lot harder than I thought it would be. Originally, I tried recording my audio separately as one track that I would then overlay over my slides, but cutting it down to fit each slide was a bit tedious. Adobe Captivate helped lessen the pain of this problem since I could just record the audio for each slide directly in the application and it would then tell me the length of the slide.

Designing 20 slides of content was also more challenging than I thought it would be. After my initial outlining, I only had 13 slides worth of content. I had to take a step back and determine what content needed to be fleshed out on more slides. Figuring out what to actually put on each slide was another story. I had a few things already cued up from my ideation journal, which did help, but I also had to try out a few different designs for some of my slides before I was finally happy with them.

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