

NOW PLAY THIS

PRESS RELEASE

Friday 8 April – Sunday 10 April



New Wing, Somerset House

General Admission £9 / Concessions £6.50

Family Ticket (Two adults and up to three children) £25

somersethouse.org.uk/whats-on/now-play-2022

- See and experience cutting edge game design
- Talks, panels and films from radical game designers
- Weeklong design camp and conference

London's leading festival of experimental games **Now Play This** returns to Somerset House, as part of the city-wide London Games Festival, showcasing the very latest in independent and experimental game design from the across the globe. Now in its eighth year, the festival hosts a weekend of engaging interaction and play for all ages to enjoy.

This year's festival explores the relationship between **democracy and game design**, inviting audiences to creatively explore what democracy can learn from game design, and in turn how game design can become more democratic. Power, decision-making and representation serve as inspiration for thought-provoking solo and multiplayer gaming experiences by pioneering creative voices, with the festival showcasing both a curated selection of works and submissions gathered from around the world as part of the festival's annual open call.

From how elections are influenced through the shape of voting districts (**The Redistricting Game by Chris Swain & Peggy Weil**), understanding parliamentary procedure via fantastical realms (**Rules & Roberts by Molleindustria**), the process of violent revolution (**Statues by Space Backyard**) to visions of utopian queer communities (**We Dwell in Possibility by Robert Yang & Eleanor Davis**), visitors will have the chance to creatively interrogate some of the most pressing issues the world faces by viewing- and playing- the best trailblazing projects inspired by gaming culture.

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A powerful creative medium, the games featured seek to make even the most complex political questions of our time accessible.

As well as hands on opportunities to play, a programme of engaging talks, films, installations, panels and workshops from games and arts professionals will take place across the weekend, inviting audiences to explore further the relationship between democracy and games.

As well as an interactive exhibition open to the public, the 2022 festival hosts an events programme and design camp, giving game and political enthusiasts the opportunity to collaboratively discuss the theme of the festival. From 2 - 8 April the camp gives curious participants the chance to try new innovative gaming techniques first-hand, from digital interactive poetry to virtual reality experiences. Meanwhile, the events programme brings together makers and mentors from the camp, artists who have been commissioned or are exhibiting, further experts and audience members to discuss the themes of the festival.

Tapping into the power of digital gaming to unite people from all over the world, satellite festival activities will be taking place in the Nigerian city of Abuja in partnership with gaming **Nibcard Games Cafe**, as well as in Leeds, UK, in partnership with **Year of Culture**, and **Turner Contemporary** in Margate.

GAMES HIGHLIGHTS

- **Playing Democracy** is a giant multiplayer version of **Pong**, a table-tennis themed arcade game originally released in 1972. Created by designer and artist **Ling Tan**, the audience controls the game paddles using their bodies tracked by a camera. The twist comes when you realise the games simple rules, which players can modify throughout, explore the principles of democracy.
- **Sculpture Playground**, designed by artists **Lucy Cran** and **Bill Leslie** as part of their collaborative project **Leap Then Look**, is a set of brightly coloured wooden objects which invite participants to test their potential for play and temporary sculpture making. Designed to be rolled, rocked, wheeled, stacked and combined into multiple ever-changing arrangements, the game encourages new ways of looking, making and thinking.
- **Downpour** was created by artist and technologist **v buckenham** to allow users the chance to make their own games. By taking photos of themselves, their drawings and much more, uploading and linking them together, you can create your own videogame to share with others.

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- **Out for Delivery** is a 42-minute playable documentary created by team **Yuxin Gao, Lillyan Ling, Gus Boehling** and **John Bruneau** during the first Covid-19 shut-down of Wuhan City. Shot with a 360-degree camera, the documentary allows players to choose how they observe the journeys of food delivery workers during the unprecedented historical event.
- **The Redistricting Game** was created in 2007 by **Chris Swain** and **Peggy Weil** at the University of Southern California (USC) Game Innovation Lab - part of the USC School of Cinematic Arts', Interactive Media Division. The game aims to educate, engage, and empower citizens around the issue of how elections are influenced by the shape of voting districts. By allowing players to experience the realities of how this phenomenon undermines democracy, and the ways to overcome it, it provides hands-on opportunities for civic engagement and political action.
- **Rules & Roberts** allows players to engage in collective decision-making while exploring perilous dungeons and fantastical realms. Designed by **Molleindustria**, a producer of short experimental games aimed at communicating radical ideas since 2003, the game hopes to educate players in the 19th Century 'Robert's Rule of Order', a set of parliamentary procedures used by a wide range of democratic organisations with live play events for groups throughout the festival.
- **Robert Yang**, a videogame developer whose work explores gay subcultures, joined forces with cartoonist and illustrator **Eleanor Davis** to create **We Dwell in Possibility**, a simulation game where players have the chance to be part of a queer community of gardeners. Commissioned and produced by Manchester International Festival, the game invites players to create their own improvised landscape and society in a projected interactive installation, where they can choose to harvest and eat the fruit they've grown with unexpected results.
- **Space Backyard** is an independent creative crew made up of **Alessandro Arcidiacono, Simone Tranchina, Maddalena Grattarola** and **Gianluca Pandolfo**, who work to share stories through games and visual arts. They've created, 'Statues', a short game with a folk-tale narrative inspired by a classic children's game, about the violent overthrow of a ruler who tries to deceive his citizens by holding a lavish party.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

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ABOUT SOMERSET HOUSE

London's working arts centre

Somerset House is London's working arts centre and home to the UK's largest creative community. Built on historic foundations, we are situated in the very heart of the capital.

Dedicated to backing progress, championing openness, nurturing creativity and empowering ideas, our cultural programme is ambitious in scope. We insist on relevance, but aren't afraid of irreverence, and are as keen on entertainment as enrichment. We embrace the biggest issues of our times and are committed to oxygenating new work by emerging artists. Where else can you spend an hour ice-skating while listening to a specially commissioned sound piece by a cutting-edge artist?

It is this creative tension—the way we harness our heritage, put the too-often overlooked on our central stage and use our neo-classical backdrop to showcase ground-breaking contemporary culture—that inspires our programme. Old and new, history and disruption, art and entertainment, high-tech and homemade, combined with the fact that we are home to a constantly shape-shifting working creative community: this is our point of difference. It is what we are proud of. And it is what makes the experience of visiting or working in Somerset House inspiring and energizing, urgent and exciting.

FOR PRESS ENQUIRIES, PLEASE CONTACT:

press@somersethouse.org.uk/0207 845 4624

Address: Somerset House, Strand, London, WC2R 1LA

Transport: Underground: Temple, Embankment / Rail: Charing Cross, Waterloo, Blackfriars

Website: www.somersethouse.org.uk

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