

SOMERSET HOUSE PRESS RELEASE



SOMERSET HOUSE ANNOUNCES CULTURAL CELEBRATION OF GAMES AND PLAY ACROSS THE SITE THIS SPRING, WITH A WEEKEND-LONG FESTIVAL AND A SPECIAL EXHIBITION

NOW PLAY THIS, 7 – 9 April 2017, New Wing

GAME CHANGERS: ANOTHER WAY TO PLAY, 7 April – 7 May 2017, Terrace Rooms

- **Over 50 different games available to play across the opening weekend**
- **Participatory talks by game designers and artists**
- **A free exhibition exploring evolutions in game design**

This April, Somerset House will host a month-long celebration of games and play, beginning with the return of popular gaming weekender, *Now Play This*, and the launch of a new exhibition examining how games and the possibilities for play are evolving. Events and installations will explore new themes within this culturally and economically important industry, showcasing the latest in game design and technology, and revisiting classic favourites.

Opening the celebrations, *Now Play This* – a three-day event coinciding with the city-wide games initiative, London Games Festival – will be filled with a host of hands-on opportunities for visitors to get involved; from two-player board games to interactive multiplayer installations, outdoor activities to experimental video games. Highlights will include a post-apocalyptic mini-golf course on Somerset House's River Terrace, a ping-pong table that creates a work of art as you play, and a physical, team-based challenge to stop the bubonic plague.

Game Changers: Another Way to Play continues through the month, until 7 May. The exhibition will show how designers and artists continuously adapt the mechanics of familiar games in imaginative ways. Using three game varieties – billiards, chess and mazes – as a starting point, it will demonstrate how games are not so much created as constantly reinvented and transformed over time by new technologies and ideas. It will showcase a number of exciting new works by contemporary artists that draw on these traditional methods of play, alongside archival material and imagery charting the evolution through different forms and media.

FURTHER DETAILS

Now Play This Highlights

A new theme for the third-edition of *Now Play This* will be a **Cabinet of Impossible Games**, in which visitors can discover games and prototypes that were started but never finished or released, providing an insight into the process of designing and producing for play. Examples will include plans for playgrounds that could not be built, incomplete video games, and designs for board games that were never produced.

Also new for 2017 will be **The Ten Second Room**, filled with games exploring the way duration impacts play. Each will challenge players to complete a task at top speed, whether trying a hand at being a virtual make-up artist or sketching a digital masterpiece. The festival will also debut three brand new games which have been specially commissioned for *Now Play This* from international artists, Patrick Smith (Vector Park), Lee Shang Lun, and Yara El-Shabini.

Other top games to play over the weekend will include:

- **The Awkward Arcade**, a real life experimental video arcade by James Medd, showcasing games that are designed to make participants think and move in ways uncommon to mainstream games culture

- A new interactive game from London-based theatre group, Block Stop – **Of Plagues, Deceptions and Other Things** – where players have to explore Somerset House and solve puzzles to stop an outbreak of the bubonic plague
- A recreation of street artist Aïda Gómez's **Joy Is Here**, a massive communal word search covering the walls of an entire room
- **Restless Spirit Projector**, a new ghost-catching game from award-winning writer and illustrator Vivian Schwarz

Special Events

A series of five-minute **Microtalks** will be running on Friday 7 April, covering a range of subjects from the details of game design to people's favourite forgotten games from the past.

On Saturday 8 April, the **Board Games Showcase** will feature a board game library fully-stocked with a range of familiar favourites and brand new games. Visitors will also have the first chance to play a selection of tabletop and board games that are yet to be publicly released, such as **RainboDisko**, a board game played on a spinning record player. There will also be a line-up of evening talks by architects and artists discussing how to get people playing in everyday life.

The **Strange Controllers Showcase** on Sunday 9 April will demonstrate alternative creative approaches to a traditional hand-held game controller. Prototypes available to play will include Robin Baumgarten's **Rubber Arms**, a game played on a screen but controlled by stretching a rubber band; and Becca Rose's **Bear Abouts**, a digital/paper hybrid book that gives children the power to create and influence stories.

Game Changers: Another Way to Play

This special exhibition will provide a more in-depth look at the creative process behind game design. Visitors will discover how traditional forms of chess, billiards and mazes continue to influence designers making exciting new games today. Archival imagery will provide a timeline tracing how these game types have evolved, and there will be a selection of contemporary examples – both physical and digital - on show for visitors to try, including:

- Four regional variations of **Orthogonal/Diagonal**, Nova Jiang's modified chess sets which showed at Now Play This in 2016. Inspired by traditional Bauhaus chess sets, the pieces' physical shape indicates how they should move
- A playable installation of Zach Gage's **Really Bad Chess**, a digital game that recreates chess with a random selection of pieces for each player
- **Home Turf**, by Ed Saperia, a distorted billiards table that combines the normal challenges of billiards with a deliberately difficult shape
- **INKS** by State of Play, an on-screen game within a physical pinball-style environment – derived from more traditional forms of billiards and bagatelle
- **Maze**, a challenging, two-player table-top maze game by sculptor Alexander Berchert

Now Play This runs from 7 – 9 April. Supported by Arts Council England, Games London and Somerset House. Tickets from £6.50, available now at somersethouse.org.uk

Game Changers: Another Way to Play runs from 7 April – 7 May. Admission free.

For further press enquiries and images please contact Nina Sandhaus on nina.sandhaus@somersethouse.org.uk or 020 7845 4624

LISTINGS INFORMATION

Dates: *Now Play This*, 7 – 9 April 2017. *Game Changers: Another Way To Play*, 7 April – 7 May 2017

Now Play This Opening Hours: Friday & Saturday: 10:00 – 20:00, Sunday: 10:00 – 18:00

Exhibition Opening Hours: Saturday – Tuesday: 10:00 – 18:00, Wednesday – Friday: 11:00 – 20:00

Admission: *Now Play This* Day Ticket £8/£6.50 Concession, Unlimited Entry Pass £23/£15 Concession. Entry free for under-12s, though not all games will be suitable for children. Tickets available from www.somersethouse.org.uk. Entry to *Game Changers: Another Way To Play* is free.

Address: Somerset House, London, WC2R 1LA

Transport: Temple, Embankment Charing Cross, Waterloo

Somerset House Facebook: www.facebook.com/SomersetHouse

Somerset House Twitter: @SomersetHouse

Somerset House Instagram: @SomersetHouse

Hashtag: #NowPlayThis #SHGameChangers

Somerset House public enquiries: 020 7845 4600

About Somerset House

A unique part of the London cultural scene, Somerset House is an historic building where surprising and original work comes to life. From its 18th-century origins, Somerset House has been a centre for debate and discussion – an intellectual powerhouse for the nation. Somerset House is today a key cultural destination in London in which to experience a broad range of artistic activity, engage with artists, designers and makers and be a part of a major creative forum – an environment that is relaxed, welcoming, and inspirational to visit while providing a stimulating workplace for the cultural and creative industries. Since its opening in 2000, Somerset House has built up a distinctive outdoor public programme including Skate, concerts, an open-air film season and a diverse range of temporary exhibitions throughout the site focusing on contemporary culture, with an extensive learning programme attached. In October 2016, Somerset House launched Somerset House Studios, a new experimental workspace connecting artists, makers and thinkers with audiences. The Studios provide a platform for new creative projects and collaboration, promoting work that pushes bold ideas, engages with urgent issues and pioneers new technologies. Somerset House is also one of the biggest community of creative organisations in London including The Courtauld Gallery and Institute of Art, King's College London Cultural Institute and over 100 other creative businesses. It currently attracts approximately 3.4 million visitors every year. www.somerset house.org.uk