

POCKET WORLDS

The logo consists of the words "POCKET" and "WORLDS" stacked vertically in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The letter "O" in "WORLDS" is replaced by a magnifying glass. The lens of the magnifying glass is positioned over a stylized globe with a grid of latitude and longitude lines. The handle of the magnifying glass extends downwards and to the right. To the right of the magnifying glass, the letters "R", "L", and "D" of "WORLDS" are rendered in a blocky, pixelated style, with several small squares scattered around them, suggesting a digital or data-driven theme.

This resource was put together during the COVID-19 pandemic, when many artists and art institutions struggled with connecting with their audiences during lockdown. As many offices and organizations shifted to Zoom, or other online forms of communication, artists and galleries were challenged to consider digital environments for art presentation. And further, how and where could art be presented in ways that wouldn't contribute to Zoom fatigue? As I write this, we are still in the pandemic, and we have a unique opportunity to reimagine how we present and experience art in remote, digital spaces. Do we construct webpages for online curation? Do we try to replicate the physical gallery environment in the digital realm? How do we digitally engage with the larger art community in a meaningful way when they have so much more media at their disposal?

Video games are platforms that already geared towards engaging audiences remotely. And many have a variety of social tools that can be used to create an environment for exploring and sharing art. Video games and online multi-player sandbox environments offer limitless possibilities for artists to deliver their work digitally and often already allow participants to communicate and collaborate.

In the Spring of 2020, I curated my first art exhibition in the game environment *Animal Crossing: New Horizons*. My exhibition, *PAWS: Protest Activism Whimsy and Self-Care* introduced me to new ways of making art that could only be discovered in this particular game environment. Digital landscaping in video game environments, make-believe assemblage using game items, and perspective tableaus using game cameras are art techniques that I would have never considered before, much less in a virtual art space. Through digital installations and online gallery curation, I've continued to explore dynamic tools for storytelling.

There is an endless variety of online game environments/sandbox tools that can spark creative joy for artists and introduce audiences to new art forms. In this resource, I've compiled a list of platforms, apps, and games with their own sets of tools that offer unique digital exhibition possibilities. I'm excited and looking forward to experiencing the new dimensions in art that will be dreamed up from these resources.

Thank you,
Ciel

Animal Crossing: New Horizons

Interesting Use:	Hong Kong Protestors
Pros:	Animal Crossing is very soothing game that both kids and adults enjoy. Artists can offer custom patterns and clothing for visitors to download.
To Archive:	Record video with game capture card and save to external hard drive.
Examples:	Hellmann's Mayonnaise Charity Island Event A Pink Island A Clever Island

Animal Crossing: New Horizons is a Nintendo Switch game where players can decorate their own island. Players spend their days crafting, collecting items, landscaping, and getting to know the residents. New Horizons also lets you decorate inside your house and outdoors on your island. You can add your own personal creative touches to almost every corner of your island. Animal Crossing is the perfect platform for creating virtual assemblages made from digital objects rather than physical ones. Players often use visual perspective and make-believe with objects to transcend the limits of the platform. It's a delight to see the curved perspective of the world reveal a new area as you run. When you see the area filled with fake buildings made from wall prints and populated by dolls, you can't help but feel like there's yet another curious and whimsical element to this very unique game.

Animal Crossing: New Horizons also offers players the ability to visit each other's islands (by airplane) or dream islands (by going to sleep). Dream islands are snapshots of island builds where no visitor actions can alter the island. Islands are highly customizable with hundreds of in-game items and the ability to import images as custom patterns and clothing. This, paired with ability to visit other players' islands in various forms creates an ideal environment for exploring digital exhibitions.

I curated *PAWS*, an exhibition in New Horizons. In my experience, New Horizons is a delightful platform to create art with. I was introduced to beautiful machinima, heavily themed islands, islands that communicated a compelling narrative, and a pervasive child-like sense of suspension of disbelief. The limited tools available to players force you to play “pretend” with some of your constructions, which fits the playful environment and gives the art created within this realm its own unique look.

In my exhibition, I collaborated on an umbrella-themed installation with Battleax Bunny, the exhibition designer and artist. Umbrellas are a symbol used by the Hong Kong protestors. The umbrellas were an authentic symbol related to our project and we had both been delighted by the variety of umbrellas the game had to collect. We took an item that was prolific in the game and used the placement tools to create clusters of them, drawing attention to the exhibition’s themes.

Animal Crossing has its challenges, specifically in the tracking and limited spaces for custom designs. Tracking refers to how the game selects options and positions the character when performing certain tasks. A recent update improved the custom designs memory, but tracking is something you still need patience with.

Requirements

A Nintendo Switch and a copy of the Animal Crossing: New Horizons game is required, along with a Nintendo Switch Online membership. Audience members will also need a Nintendo Switch Online membership. Currently (September 2021) a free 7-day trial is available. See rates [here](#).

Stardew Valley

Inspiration:	Leah's Art Gallery
Pros:	Very soothing game, not often used for art exhibitions
To Archive:	Record video and save to external hard drive
Examples:	Garden Valley mod Year 4 Farm Tour

Stardew Valley is an indie farming simulator that is highly praised for its art, music, and relaxing atmosphere. The original version of the game was made by a single developer, ConcernedApe, over a four-year period. It is a slow game with very little combat and a passionate fanbase. Stardew Valley also happens to have a very talented mod community.

After doing my research, I think that to create an art experience in Stardew Valley, one would have to develop a custom mod. Mods range from small programs that include things like custom items and new dialogue to large projects that include extra storylines and new environments to explore. The mod community has created frameworks that allow easy installation of mods without interfering with the base game. For example, one could develop (or utilize) a mod that creates a new art gallery build, which visitors could travel to by bus. Another mod might allow for a special traveling art show to take place in Pelican Town (the main town location in Stardew Valley) on particular days of the year, perhaps with a rotating schedule of artists. This idea is inspired by Leah, a non-playable artist character (NPC) in Pelican Town. Players can engage with Leah, and could perhaps encourage her to have an art show. Exhibiting and rotating the art that other players make could create a sense of the “larger world” surrounding Pelican Town in a fun and immersive way.

This project would be fairly robust and require a fair amount of programming knowledge. It is not one of the easier projects to create, though it could be very satisfying.

Requirements

A copy of the game Stardew Valley, the skills to create custom pixel art, and coding experience is needed to create this project. This might be a good opportunity for an artist who can also use programming languages.

The Sims 4

Interesting Use:	Creepy Undine machinima (caution: suspense)
Pros:	Very interactive, popular for making short films, large fan community, students familiar with
To Archive:	Record video, copy custom files, and save to external hard drive
Examples:	The Sims 4: Art Gallery Build, Angela Washko

The Sims 4 is a life simulation game for PC published by EA games, part of a gaming franchise called The Sims. The game has a strong fanbase and mod community. Players design “Sims” (playable characters) and direct them in how to live their lives. Sims can go to school, have jobs, have relationships, and build skills, among other game interactions. The game has been a popular choice for machinima artists, artists who create cinematic experiences in computer environments (especially video games). There is an active builder community that creates buildings for the online Sims 4 gallery and an active creator community that make hundreds of custom items and outfits for the Sims.

A custom art experience for The Sims 4 could involve an artist creating custom images and presenting them in an art gallery building. The artworks would be offered as custom content and the art gallery would be available for download in the game’s online social gallery. This can be a fun way to design an art show that recreates a gallery experience.

Because of the wealth of custom content, many paintings and drawings of various subjects are already available to add to your game. You can curate shows with many different themes, and camera mods make excellent tools for capturing video for your archive.

As someone who has played The Sims, I can attest that the game's design leaves lots of space for spontaneous and hilarious interactions. You may find joy in figuring out how your Sims respond to your new artistic creations.

Requirements

A copy of The Sims 4 as well as an Origin or Steam gaming account is required to share content in the online gallery. The ability to code would be an asset as the artist would need to pair their custom images with the painting canvas for the item to become a painting in the game.

Cryptovoxels

Pros:	Parcels can easily mimic a physical location like a gallery space so the same exhibition can be toured physically and virtually, artists can sell digital work seamlessly through the digital gallery, avatars can wear custom clothing
Cons:	Inter-Planetary File System and Ethereum, parcels can be expensive.
To Archive:	Record video and save to external hard drive
Examples:	SandyMeows Gallery Tour Video

Cryptovoxels is a 3D virtual world that can be explored through a web browser or through the Godot app in VR. Individuals purchase parcels that they can build upon or can create spaces for free. Parcels are part of the open world city and visitors can walk between them, while spaces are accessible through a direct link and exist in a pocket world.

The main city of Cryptovoxels has an artsy and experimental vibe with lots of strange and beautiful builds. Some parcels are even set to “sandbox” which allows any visitor to build on them. Individuals can purchase parcels by using Ethereum, a cryptocurrency that exists on a decentralized blockchain, and can start building through a tool as simple as their browser.

Parcels can display art, video, text, and three-dimensional models to create the layout of a physical gallery online. Images used in the build on parcels can be uploaded through the website but images for spaces must be hosted on a peer-to-peer system called the [Inter-Planetary File System](#), an alternative to the current internet structure.

Of all the platforms I’ve mentioned, Cryptovoxels is the one most geared specifically to digital art displays. It also has a variety of communication and multi-player tools built into the environment such as text and voice

chat, the ability to display YouTube and Twitch streams, and a direct messaging system.

Requirements

You must be able to use web3 apps powered by Ethereum to purchase a land parcel and use builder for Cryptovoxels.

Minecraft

Interesting Use:	Minecraft: Education Edition
Pros:	One of the most popular games in the world, has classroom environment tools, lots of community groups make servers
To Archive:	Record video, copy custom files, and save to external hard drive

Minecraft is a popular sandbox game available for PC, smartphone, and most video consoles. The game drops players into an algorithmically generated world (creating a sense of chance and variety) that they can cultivate, change, and explore. The game feature animals, minerals, plants, villagers, and different biomes. Crafting can be an engaging activity as the players begins to explore the villages, lore, and locations that create the Minecraft narrative. Minecraft also has a very robust creative mode that allows players to forgo the regular survival goals and focusing on building.

Minecraft servers and builds have grown extremely elaborate and are even able to incorporate custom snippets of code to run simple mechanics. This script capacity and vast number of modding tools allows players to create elaborate and narrative projects for others to explore. Servers with unique mechanics and builds can quickly grow in popularity among players.

Because of the simplicity of play and the various applications for crafting (for instance, the game teaches the basics about combining compounds), Minecraft has a whole suite of educational tools to help teachers engage students. It is one of the most popular computer games in the world.

Art experiences in Minecraft can often take the form of builds or servers surrounding a specific theme or using scripting to engage the audience in unique ways. Earlier this year, the Mackenzie Art Gallery hosted a Minecraft-based residency. I am curious to see how these kinds of opportunities develop and pop up in more art organizations.

Requirements

A copy of Minecraft as well as a Microsoft account is required to play the game. More tools may be required to host servers. The environment is meant for building, so many things can be made directly in-game to explore.

Second Life

Interesting Use:	Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace
Pros:	very interactive, popular for making short films, large fan community
To Archive:	record video, copy custom files, and save to external hard drive

Second Life is an online virtual world with 3D content generated primarily by the users. The game allows users to create whatever kind of in-game experiences they would like and is free to access. Players are known to have developed careers in the game doing various jobs in exchange for Linden dollars, the world's virtual currency.

A robust economy has developed around the game that allows users can trade that virtual currency for real currency. In 2015, the Second Life economy was larger than that of some small countries. Institutions and groups can sponsor closed sections of Second Life and the platform has been used to host art shows, live music, live theatre, and more.

I have less experience with Second Life than some of these platforms, though I can say that like Cryptovoxels, Second Life is a robust environment for displaying images and sculptures built-in three-dimensional digital space, with built in tools for communication and multi-player functionality. I'd be interested in seeing digital installations in Second Life that use the simulation tools to create immersive narratives or engaging machinima.

Requirements

A copy of the Second Life client is required to run the game. 3D modeling software such as Blender may be required for custom content.

POCKET WORLDS

The logo consists of the words "POCKET" and "WORLDS" stacked vertically in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The letter "O" in "WORLDS" is replaced by a stylized globe showing latitude and longitude lines. A black magnifying glass handle is positioned at the bottom center of the globe, pointing downwards.

Researched and compiled by Ciel Noel