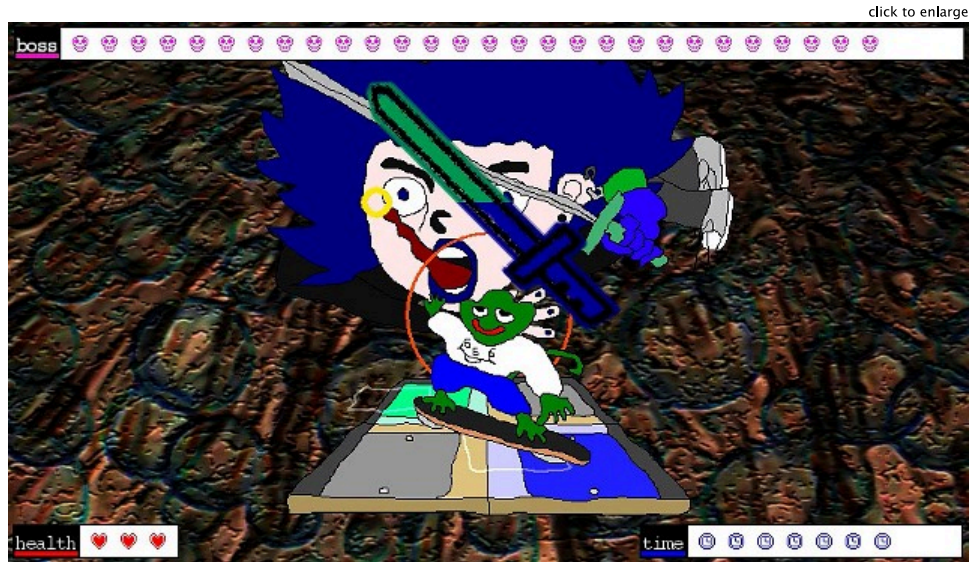


Barnyardia brings experimental games to Visual Studies Workshop

By Patrick Hosken @patrickhosken



BARNYARDIA.

A screenshot from 'Scrapeboard,' one of the games featured at the 'Hardware and Software by Barnyardia' pop-up arcade hosted by Visual Studies Workshop on Thursday, April 25.

Roger Ebert **famously declared** that video games can never be art. As that debate rages on, New York City–based creative duo Barnyardia collaborates on projects that blur those lines.

The pair, Frank DeMarco and Blake Andrews, recently built a game in which the controller is a skate deck scraping across a floor pad. They made the prototype with a board donated by none other than pro skater Tony Hawk for a separate art installation.

“We were like, ‘what do we do with it?’” DeMarco said. “Well, we’re game designers, ostensibly, so we decided to make a video game with it.”

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scrapeboard new



“Scrapeboard” is just one of the games featured at the “Hardware and Software by Barnyardia” pop-up arcade hosted by Visual Studies Workshop on Thursday, April 25. Another, DeMarco’s “Playzing,” consists of a gaming console drilled into a toaster.

As players engage with the top screen, a chicken nugget cooks below. The idea came from the **KFConsole**, an April Fools’ Day joke that DeMarco decided to turn into reality.

Modified food elements and alternative controllers appeal to the duo as a way of changing the gaming experience itself. “As long as it's wired up, you can turn a banana and anything that conducts electricity into a video game controller,” DeMarco said.

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FRANK DEMARCO.

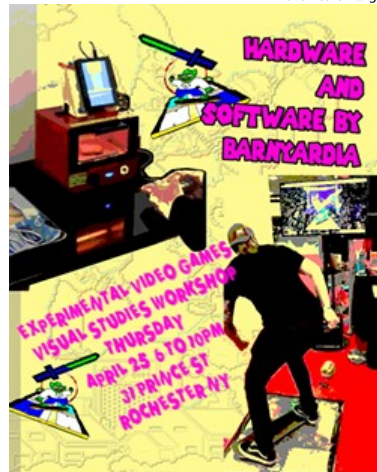
A user interacts with 'Playing,' a gaming console drilled into a toaster.

This creative thinking initially brought DeMarco and Andrews together as New York University graduates involved with the gaming arts collective **Babycastles**, which aimed to amplify diverse voices and foster creativity.

Andrews said their collaboration stems from shared online experiences. The duo came of age playing freeware games and Flash animations, which helped solidify their DIY approach.

"I'm not setting out like, 'I'm going to make an art game today,'" Andrews said. "Frank and I, we're thinking about how we can make the mechanics, and then there's something artistic to the game [itself]."

Their avant-garde offerings seem to fly in the face of the commercial gaming industry, which is worth \$50 billion annually. And Nilson Carroll, the assistant curator and preservation specialist at VSW, said their pop-up arcades cement the place of video games in the sphere of experimental media art.



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Barnyardia, the third such pop-up, offers a chance to demystify underground gaming and build community. DeMarco and Andrews will play their own games as users experience them for the first time.

"When we interact with a game online by ourselves made by a person we don't know, there's something sort of impenetrable about that," Carroll said. "To see the maker playing their own game, it really humanizes it, and you really see the maker as the artist and as a person."

click to enlarge At 2019's Global Game Jam — a competition to build a game from scratch in 48 hours —



BLAKE ANDREWS.

A screenshot from 'Home R Where The Heart Is.'

Andrews offered a heavy take on the year's theme, "What Home Means to You."

The end result was web game "Home R Where The Heart Is," pure clickable chaos in which dark-skinned versions of the Simpsons family fight each other. It will also be featured at VSW.

"That comes from my experience, because my experience at home is not necessarily the best thing," Andrews said.

Carroll, who also founded local queer art games collective Swampbabes, said Barnyardia creations like "Home R" revel in that blurry line between gaming and art.

"A lot of small game makers don't really think of themselves as artists who would show in an art space," Carroll said. "We're kind of scrappy over here. I think that resonates with DIY game makers."

"Hardware and Software by Barnyardia" runs from 6 to 10 p.m. at Visual Studies Workshop on April 25. More information here at vsw.org.

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