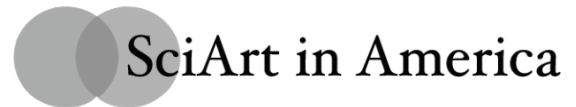


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"Eddo Stern: New Works" At The Beall Center For Art + Technology Elevates Video Games Into An Embodied Experience

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Eddo Stern, "Cruise Control" (2013) and "Vietnam Romance" (2014), computer/video games. Photo Credit Natalie M. Goldman

By Natalie McKeever Goldman

Gamers rejoice! A new exhibition by conceptual-tech artist Eddo Stern opened at the Beall Center for Art + Technology in Irvine, CA. *Eddo Stern: New Works* includes five interactive works of varying conceptual explorations, all equipped with video game controllers.

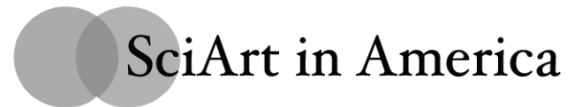
Stern's technological works border fantasy and reality, exploring the topical connections between living in the real world, and our beloved electronic simulation through computers, phones, social media, and game-apps. He works in various media including computer software, hardware and game design, kinetic sculpture, performance, and film and video production.

Five computer game installations are in *New Works* including *Still Life With Putin* (with Cyril Kuhn), *Cruise Control*, *House Stern Pachinko*, *Vietnam Romance: Levels 1-3*, and *Darkgame 4.0*.

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Still Life With Putin, 2014

Central to the game is the perpetually spinning, multi-faceted head of Vladimir Putin. The painted image of Putin's pouting face, by collaborator Cyril Kuhn, revolves down a corridor lined with horses, bears, and Nadia Comenecis. It is tempting to use the controls to move Putin back and forth, slamming into nearby objects in hope of gaining points. The objective is to move Putin through each doorway to the next Imperial-style hall, asking little more than to avoid the occasional low hanging chandelier. Beware knocking down Lenin as the walls will break apart causing the game to restart. This game calls for the player to be passive and watch as the disembodied head of Russia's President moves calmly forward.

Cruise Control, 2013

This side-scroller involves a Tom Cruise caricature riding a motorcycle with a headless blonde clinging to the backseat. Players toggle between the landscape and the inside of Cruise's mind. As you speed along you occasionally jump over a stray tire or pop a wheelie. The real excitement is inside Cruise's head. Jumping a minesweeper-like object from platform to platform, the player collects *Top Gun* fighter jets, rearing stallions, and throbbing hearts. The ability to toggle between related frames is an interesting gaming innovation, requiring the player to maintain a grasp on two simultaneous virtual worlds. A funny nod to the power of ego, the more objects you collect inside the mega-star's head, the more abilities you have in the landscape view.

House Stern Pachinko, 2014

Game of Thrones theme music resonates from this pinball style game. Eddo Stern's family tree serves as the backdrop and players bounce a coin off the portraits of the artist and his ancestors. This game seemed out of place alongside the rest, with a simple concept and standard game-play, though the humor of the epic score and cartoon caricatures was welcomed.

Vietnam Romance Levels 1-3, 2014

Three levels from a larger game are showcased in *New Works*. The first level has the player driving a grey-bearded man through the Mojave Desert to catch a plane. The car breaks down occasionally, and players scroll through a stack of game-play cards to fix problems. The real conceptual meat of the game occurred in the subtitles and dialogue, not the interactivity. "*If you hated the war, but loved the movies, then this game is for you*" scrolls across the sky. In the following level, Vietnam is imagined as a tourist hot-spot with images from *Full Metal Jacket* and *Platoon* plastered all over. As a version of The Rolling Stones "Gimme Shelter" plays, passengers in the tour-bus make wry comments including "*Who played that guy anyway?*" and "*Is Defoe still among the living?*" In this game, the media representation usurps the reality of the war in memory and importance.

Darkgame 4.0, 2014

Darkgame is billed as a "sensory deprivation game." Three game-play stations allow for single or multi-player ability. Players wear tentacle-like headgear and use a controller to navigate a bodiless head through the empty, rocky surface. Swirling around each character are a number of "senses" embodied by eyes, skin, heart, ears, and hands. Each sense has a special ability that can be employed—use the heart to go faster, eyes to see from a birds-eye view. After each use the ability will drain, which is where the game gets interesting. If your eyes are gone you will have to use other senses to navigate, which makes it nearly impossible to complete the game's challenge of locating the 'Big Head.' The headgear interface really makes this game interactive. When one employs the skin ability, vibration motors at the bottom of each tentacle alert the player which direction to move their character. The idea of experiencing what it is like to lose part of your sensory capabilities forced you to adapt quickly to your new sensorial self. The integration of the player's body and senses in *Darkgame* made a video game as medium a necessary factor to this piece and elevated the medium into an embodied experience beyond standard home gaming.

See *Eddo Stern: New Works* through January 24, 2015