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obliged to hand over the controls to the other people waiting to play, so there may be other aspects to *Sam* that I did not fully explore. The museum's web site had a short interview with the artist, and, when asked about the violent nature of the piece, the artist responded that the life of *Sam* is directly related to anger and frustration. He said the idea of destruction can be simultaneously pleasant and painful, and the aggressive aspects of play cannot be isolated from the reality in which we live. Another interesting note is that *Sam* was shown in a section of the museum called "Les Tokyo Games," which is set aside strictly for the artistic exploration of the medium

of videogames.

The acceptance of these recent works is an extension of the art world's embrace of digital media over the past two years (marked in my mind by the simultaneous technology shows at the Whitney and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art last year) although, in the case of *Sam*, I'd wager there's also a tie to the growing, government-supported French game industry. With the recent boom in digital art, the museums are more than open to the medium of digital interactive media, and in some cases they may even still be partially biased to the potential of such an exciting new medium.

Who will contribute to the creation of such works? I doubt anyone working in

a commercial medium that rakes in 9 billion smackers a year is ready to cut off an ear just yet. But it is an exciting prospect to work in a medium with the potential for such artistic expression, and I hope that, just as the commercial film industry has learned and grown from participation in the indie/art film scene, the game industry also will take an active role in supporting its own cultural growth. 🎮

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The Games of Art

Angst-filled cries can be heard from time to time within the development community that videogames receive little or no recognition from the art world. Without going into whether most products of this industry-fueled medium merit such recognition, there are two recent examples worthy of mention that have demonstrated the willingness of art museums to accept pieces created from digital interactive games as “higher” art.

The first is a video piece by well-known New York avant-garde film artist Peggy Ahwesh, titled *She-Puppet*. Though not an interactive piece, *She-Puppet* is worth mentioning for its use of the game TOMB RAIDER as its focus, and because of the recognition it has received on the festival circuit, most notably with its inclusion in this year’s Whitney Biennial.

She-Puppet is a 15-minute video collage of captured footage of the artist “playing” the game. The video is overdubbed with quotes from philosophical texts and from such eclectic sources as Portuguese author Fernando Pessoa, science-fiction writer Joanna Russ, and interstellar jazz musician Sun Ra. I say “playing,” as it is really the artist acting as puppeteer of Lara Croft, placing her

in situations that have nothing to do with achieving the goals of the game.

Ahwesh guides Lara on an existential romp, questioning her own existence as a videogame character (much like a low-tech, highbrow mix of *The Onion*’s article “Video-Game Character Wondering Why Heartless God Always Chooses ‘Continue’” and the *QUAKE* Machinimas). Ahwesh allows a swarm of vultures to slowly kill Lara, and, in another sequence, the artist edits together a looped series of Lara’s death animations. When asked about these death sequences Ahwesh said, “The death throes are the most deeply pleasurable [part of the game] . . . It’s like a sex act.”

In contrast to *She-Puppet* is a piece titled *Sam*, which I found in Paris’s Site de Creation Contemporaine, a museum

housed in the Palais de Tokyo. Where *She-Puppet* is a video piece whose content is based on the medium of videogames, *Sam* is a fully interactive HALF-LIFE mod creat-

ed by Stockholm native Palle Torsson, who received recognition for a similar piece he did with Tobias Bernstrup titled *Museum Meltdown*, a collection of HALF-LIFE and DUKE NUKEM 3D deathmatch levels modeled on well-known museum spaces (which was featured in the Lyon Biennial in a section strictly for videogames).

Sam is projected onto a large movie screen located in a small, dark room in the middle of the museum space. Navigating with a mouse and joystick, you interact with the piece by taking on the role of a young girl named Sam. You begin in Sam’s happy little girl’s room in her typical suburban home. But it just so happens that this little girl is packing heat. After shooting up her room, you proceed downstairs and execute her parents. You then help Sam escape to the outside world, where you are free to massacre shopkeepers and pedestrians in a small town area. You then go to her school, where the violence continues. This, at least, was how I chose to interact with the art.

It was quite a popular piece, and I felt
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