

ZKM Atria 1 + 2, 2nd floor

Reopening of the exhibition *zkm_gameplay: the next level* with a new "spotlight": Eco Games

At last games are back! On July 28, 2021 the ZKM reopened its popular gaming platform *zkm_gameplay: the next level* to visitors. In the interim, the time was used to present a new theme in *level 5: in the spotlight*, which addresses topical concerns and debates: "Eco Games" introduces games that concentrate on the relationship between Serious Games and the environment.

Back in 1997 the ZKM opened the first exhibition on video games, *Welt der Spiele* [World of Games]. Thus the ZKM became the first art museum in the world to mount an exhibition devoted exclusively to video games — one of the most influential media formats of our time.

The current exhibition *zkm_gameplay: the next level* features around 50 works from the Indie and Art Games sectors. Unlike the products of the huge commercial gaming industry, these games are developed by independent studios and their individual game designers or artists.

The gaming platform has five levels: "retro", "modern narratives", "aesthetic & creative games", "political games", and "in the spotlight". **retro** describes the origins and development of the medium from the 1970s to the 1990s. On vintage arcade machines and consoles visitors can follow the first steps of *Super Mario vs. Donkey Kong*, hunt for points in the maze with *Pac-Man*, or fight out gripping duels with a partner in *Pong*. **modern narratives** focuses on the unique narrative possibilities of video games, from the interactive stories on thermal paper of the *Choosatron* to the surreal dream worlds of Bill Viola's *The Night Journey*. **aesthetic & creative games** presents extraordinary audiovisual representations and surprising game mechanics: here visitors can explore the infinite universe of *No Man Sky* or get their synapses tickled by haptic fireworks of light in *Wobble Garden*. In the level **political games** visitors can experience how video games can get across political processes and the background to them: with the *Democracy Machine* political differences can be clarified together. On show for the first time is *Circumventing the Circle of Death*, a video work by the prize-winning guerilla media collective Total Refusal.

The level in the spotlight, which addresses topical debates about video games, has been completely redesigned. Under the heading **Eco Games**, video games are presented that focus on ecological issues: How can we prevent our environment being destroyed and Planet Earth becoming uninhabitable for us? Here *zkm_gameplay: the next level* takes up themes that are discussed in the current ZKM exhibition *Critical Zones: Observatories for Earthly Politics*.

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Duration
29.09.2018–09.01.2022

Location
ZKM Atria 1+2, 2nd floor

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Exhibition funded by



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Eco Games take place in environments which thematize the destruction or the preservation of the environment and the gameplay demands sustainable action. Curated by Dominik Rinnhofer, Professor of Game Design at the Macromedia university of applied sciences, Stuttgart, this section presents seven video games created in the years 1990 to 2020.

Making use of the immersive and interactive nature of the video game medium, the developers seek to raise gamers' awareness of ecological issues. In the genre of dystopian and post-human games, scenarios can be experienced which point up human-made catastrophes and how these can be avoided. Entirely in line with "Play it — before you (have to) live it."

The exhibition is accompanied by an online series of talks, which kicked off with a live discussion on July 29, 2021 at 7 pm CEST in German language. In the next months, the talks will discuss different aspects around the topic Eco Games.

Further information about the kick-off event:

zkm.de/en/mit-spielen-die-welt-retten

Further information about *zkm_gameplay: the next level*:

zkm.de/en/gameplay

Curator of *zkm_gameplay: the next level*: Jérôme Nguyen

Curator of Eco Games: Dominik Rinnhofer

Curatorial assistant: Laura Schmidt

Project management: Jenny Starick

ANNEX:

Since 1997: The ZKM and Video Games

From its very foundation the ZKM has regarded itself as an interface and link between art, new technologies, and the associated societal discourses. Even before the ZKM moved into its present premises, video games were already a part of its art collection. When the ZKM building opened in 1997, the exhibition *Welt der Spiele [World of Games]* presented classic video games and art games of this medium. In 1999, all night LAN parties held in the ZKM foyer welcomed hundreds of enthusiastic visitors. *Welt der Spiele: Reloaded* continued the successful format and was expanded to include vintage computers and consoles. With *ZKM_Gameplay: Start New Game!* a new gaming platform was created at the ZKM in 2013. Contemporary trends, like the growing indie sector, commercial games with an artistic focus, and art games, now shape the look of the exhibition. Since 2017, the touring exhibition *Games & Politics*, in collaboration with the Goethe-Institut, travels the world. In 2018 *Games & Politics* went on its way with a new exhibition

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design and more than 30 new exhibits. Now *zkm_gameplay: the next level* offers five levels in which visitors can explore the narrative, creative, extraordinary and political aspects of video games.

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