

# Queer Desire and Aesthetics in Video Game Exhibitions at Art Venues

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## Keywords

queer video game exhibition, curatorial practice, art museum, Rainbow Arcade, Pride at Play, queer desire, game design, LGBTQ+ art, exhibition catalog, contemporary art

## INTRODUCTION

Since 2013, Western cities have hosted numerous queer video game exhibitions, including the Queemess and Game Conference, GaymerX, the Melbourne Queer Games Festival, Gayming LIVE, and the Seattle Queer Games Showcase. Among these, *Rainbow Arcade* and *Pride at Play* are notable for their extensive catalogs, which feature interviews with the game creators (Shaw et al. 2019; Ho 2023).

*Rainbow Arcade* offered a broader historical perspective and deeper engagement with LGBTQ+ social discourse, while *Pride at Play* focused on Oceania and the Asia Pacific, demonstrating queemess's impact on game design. *Rainbow Arcade* was in a thematically aligned museum, whereas *Pride at Play* was in venues with broader artistic ranges.

This research investigates two queer video game exhibitions hosted in art venues: *Rainbow Arcade* (Germany) and *Pride at Play* (Australia). The analysis draws on interviews with game creators and curatorial writings from exhibition catalogs, focusing on four games, two from each exhibition, namely: *Caper in the Castro* (Ralph 1989), *GayBlade* (Best 1992), *Hard Lads* (Yang 2020), and *The Beat: A Glam Noir Game* (Miller 2022). It examines published texts through the lens of desire, exploring the specific forms of queer desires that motivated each creation.

The research then proceeds with a curatorial analysis, examining how curators highlight specific game elements through interview questions and how these questions deepen understanding of the embedded desire. By integrating curatorial contexts, queer studies, and the frame of contemporary art, these exhibitions offer a broader perspective on queer desires.

Finally, the research examines the games' aesthetics, drawing on images from the catalog and external sources. It seeks to understand the function of the games' aesthetics and whether they resonate with the queer desires they express.

The queer games analyzed demonstrate that queer desire in video games is more intricate than simply non-normative sexual desire. This desire can serve as a driving force for game creation, stemming from a love for the community or the need to transform experienced injustice into creative expression. When queer desire is integrated into the game's content, it can explore the enigmatic line between

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homosocial and homosexual desire, and the realization of homosexual desire within restrictive power structures that hinder its articulation and fulfillment.

The unique aesthetics of these games are shaped by both the game maker's art philosophy and the underlying technology, including HyperCard, Windows 3.1, 3D simulation, and photogrammetry.

Interviews conducted by queer video game curators with game makers reveal crucial insights that would otherwise remain unknown. These insights include a game's historical significance, the game's public reception, the integral role of writing in the game-making process, and its aesthetic influences.

Curators of these queer video game exhibitions create unique opportunities and spaces, enabling the public to engage with queer culture through contextually grounded queer video games. In doing so, these curators not only emphasize the individual worth of queer games but also articulate their collective importance to the public.

In Chinese game studies, women's desire in game design has recently been discussed (Liu 2024); however, queer desire in game design has not been analyzed. This research examines two queer video game exhibitions in Western art venues. By situating this work within Chinese game studies, it aims to address the current knowledge gap in queer game exhibitions research in the Sinosphere. Future research could investigate queer games and their exhibitions, particularly within the Sinosphere.

## **SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL**

Presentation video: [youtu.be/sxOzgQnUhuQ](https://youtu.be/sxOzgQnUhuQ)

## **BIO**

TC (TengChao) Zhou is a practice-based PhD researcher at Monash Art Design & Architecture and SensiLab. This research is part of his ongoing PhD work exploring the intersection of queer arts and culture, video games, and contemporary art.

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