Phoenix Art Museum

News Release

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National exhibition *Art of Video Games* invades Phoenix in Summer 2013

The Smithsonian American Museum of Art exhibition opens at Phoenix Art Museum on June 16, 2013

PHOENIX (May 15, 2013) – Mario, Luigi, the Princess and Pac-Man will invade Phoenix beginning June 16, 2013, as Phoenix Art Museum presents *The Art of Video Games*. One of the first exhibitions to explore the art of gaming from early 8-bit ingenuity to modern marvels, this foray into the 40-year history of video games first premiered at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington DC. It will be on view in Phoenix Art Museum's Steele Gallery June 16 through September 29.

"This is unlike anything the Museum has ever featured in its more than 50 year history. It's an exciting opportunity for us to bring a cutting edge show of this caliber to the Valley," says James K. Ballinger, Sybil Harrington Director of the Phoenix Art Museum for the last thirty years. "The art of gaming has become one of the most impactful popular culture design forms, and is a multi-billion dollar global industry. This exhibition explores not only its evolution as a technology, but the artistic intention behind the medium."

Focusing on striking visual effects and the creative use of new technology, the exhibition features some of the most influential designers in video game history, beginning with early pioneers to contemporary designers. The exhibition covers twenty gaming systems including Atari VCS, ColecoVision, Commodore 64, Nintendo Entertainment System, SEGA Genesis, Nintendo 64, Xbox, GameCube, Wii, and PlayStation III. Additionally, *The Art of Video Games* also features 80 different individual games selected by Melissinos from public votes, to include *Space Invaders, The Legend of Zelda, Super Mario Bros*., *Pac-Man*, *The Secret of Monkey Island*, *Myst*, *Tomb Raider*, and *Flower*. The games range in type, skill level, and era for an intergenerational experience that offers something for everyone.

But, most importantly, *The Art of Video Games* is not just a historical catalog of the advances of game theory and technology. It is a presentation of the artfulness of it, the ways in which multiple art disciplines come together to produce works that are visually stimulating and compelling. "These games are an amalgam of art disciplines whose sum is typically greater than its parts," Melissinos describes, in his book by the same title. "This defines a new medium that is beyond traditional definitions used in the fine art world." Recently, New York's Museum of Modern Art acquired 14 games for its collection.

As such, this exhibition branches out from traditional exhibitions more common to an art museum. "This is the first exhibition in the Museum's history that will involve an integration of technology to this extent," explains Ballinger. In addition to still images of characters and game environments, *The Art of Video Games* experience includes interactive kiosks and on-screen interviews with game designers illuminating their creative processes and passion as artists, seeking to create a world that begins first in imagination. Additionally, visitors will have an opportunity to play five of the featured games, including fan favorites *Super Mario Bros*. and *Pac-Man*. Each of the playable games is family-friendly and appropriate to all ages.

Along with works in the gallery, the Museum will also present an array of education and entertainment programming including a lecture by the show's curator Chris Melissinos, late-night gaming fests, an arcade in the Museum, and game design challenges with industry experts. The programs not only enrich the viewing experience and provide enhanced context to the show, but serve as an opportunity for community engagement and connections for a range of audiences, from families and video game novices to experienced gamers. "One of the most distinct aspects of gaming has been its ability to connect seemingly disparate audiences through a shared experience," notes Christian Adame, Assistant Curator

for Education at the Museum. “We want to create that same feeling among our visitors. We want to help visitors to develop new perceptions of what art can be and how it connects us, not just in this exhibition but every time they visit.”

The Art of Video Games is a traveling exhibition organized by the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, DC and curated by gaming collector and industry expert Chris Melissinos. Its Phoenix premiere is made possible through the generous support of Salt River Project (SRP), Ernst & Young, LLP, and Heather and Michael D. Greenbaum.

About Phoenix Art Museum

Phoenix Art Museum has provided access to visual arts and educational programs in Arizona for more than 50 years and is the largest art museum in the Southwestern United States. Critically acclaimed national and international exhibitions are shown alongside the Museum’s collection of more than 17,000 works of American, Asian, European, Latin American, Western American, modern and contemporary art, and fashion design. The Museum also hosts a comprehensive film program, live performances and educational programs designed to entertain and educate visitors of all ages. Visitors also enjoy vibrant photography exhibitions through the Museum’s landmark partnership with the Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona. To learn more about Phoenix Art Museum, visit PhxArt.org, or call the 24-hour recorded information line at (602) 257-1222.

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