ART IN VIDEO GAMES:
A STUDY OF INFLUENTIAL ARTISTS AND THEIR IMPACT IN THE INDUSTRY.

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ABSTRACT:

This PhD research project studies how artists shape the aesthetic, visual, and experiential dimensions of video games across time. The focus is artistic authorship and collaboration, especially cases where artists bring a distinct creative practice and visual language into development contexts and leave a clear imprint on a game's identity. The project treats games as cultural works rather than only products or technical systems, and asks how artistic decisions, made under real constraints, help certain titles become culturally iconic and influential beyond gaming. It also considers how video game culture circulates into wider creative fields and public life, where iconic games inform visual culture, inspire other media, and shape the sensibilities of entire generations.

STRUCTURE:

The research is structured as a historical review around five stages. The first stage examines early video games and proto artistic authorship, when aesthetic decisions were often embedded directly in code and hybrid creative roles. The second stage focuses on the 1990s, when stylistic identity and recognisable creative voices become more visible as production pipelines and visual resources expand. The third stage examines the 2000s, when artistic ambition develops within larger industrial structures and high production values. The fourth stage addresses the 2010s, when game aesthetics circulate more widely across platforms and into other media and institutions. The fifth stage focuses on the present and near future, including tools, procedural methods, and AI.

METHODOLOGY:

The project combines literature review, historical research, case studies, and primary research. Selected games are analysed to identify how artistic approaches operate through character design, abstraction, animation, spatial composition, interface choices, and audiovisual framing, with attention to production conditions and platform constraints. The literature review draws on game studies, media theory, art history, and platform studies to support an artist centred account of authorship. Primary research includes interviews and surveys with artists, industry professionals, and players, using tailored question sets to capture different perspectives on creative process, collaboration, attribution, and how artistic identity is experienced and remembered. The project website supports this work by acting as a research log and networking platform, sharing project materials and enabling participation through surveys, interview sign ups, and ongoing contact with the wider games community.

WORK IN PROGRESS 2026:

In 2026, the project is moving from setup into sustained content generation. The website will be expanded as an active research log and networking hub, supporting ongoing contact with artists, industry professionals, and players, and enabling continued participation through surveys and interviews. The directory will grow through the identification and documentation of additional case studies, with curated links to relevant sources. Alongside this, the literature review will be updated continuously to reflect new scholarship in game studies, media theory, art history, and platform studies. A key goal for 2026 is to complete two publications: the first targeted for completion by the end of Q1, and the second by the end of Q4.