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## RECAP: INDIE ARCADE @ SMITHSONIAN AMERICAN ART MUSEUM

DECEMBER 10, 2014 | 11:30AM

**OPEN MIKE  
Comedy Show**  
Thursdays @ 8 @ Chief Ike's

Dec. 18 Headliner!  
**ROB MAHER**

Also featuring!  
**JOFFAI**

Thursday 12/18  
THURSDAYS: OPEN MIKE COMEDY  
NIGHT!! 8:00pm! ALL Comedians  
Welcome! @ Chief Ike's Mambo Room

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Photos By *Jordan Edwards*, Words By *Kalee Rinehart*

The Indie Arcade – hosted in the courtyard of the Smithsonian American Art Museum in collaboration with MAGFest and the American University Game Lab – was super rad for a number of reasons:

- It was completely free (unless you bought a beer or a pretty delicious sandwich from The Courtyard Cafe);
- It was intended for and attended by people of all ages; and
- Video games. All sorts.

There were new games from local developers, classic cabinets, and even classes to learn how to create your own game.

The center of the courtyard was devoted to the older consoles (Sega, Nintendo, Atari, what have you) with the typical cast of characters (Sonic, Mario, Kirby, et al.) This area had a high percentage of tween boys.

The most attention-grabbing game – *Big Huggin'* – was also probably the cutest because the controller was a very large, stuffed teddy bear. Kids (well, mostly kids. Adults weren't discouraged!) squeezed the bear to make the little on-screen bear avatar jump over various obstacles.



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Actually, the entire event was full of cuteness: parents holding their kids up so they could reach the controls on the old school cabinets, game developers excitedly showing off and explaining their creations, two guys wearing kilts... something for everyone.

Three classes were offered, with age ranges from 8 to adult. The first of such classes taught kids how to make a simple game using [Scratch](#), a free programming language and online community hosted by MIT. The other two classes taught students how to make the classic Pong (with free software [GameMaker](#)) and how to make 3D character and game using [Unity](#) (which also has a free version).

There were pretty, arty games like [Flower](#) – where the “character” you control is the wind; point-and-click adventure games, [Alum](#) being a nice looking example; and even a capitalist-inspired reverse tower defense game, [Fat Chicken](#), where the goal is to fatten up livestock with food, hormones, and antibiotics so you’ll make more money and eventually overthrow the competing company.

Drawing the largest crowd was Oculus Rift – the first commercially-viable virtual reality headset. Wikipedia says the consumer version will not be available until next year, so people had the chance to test out a cool, unreleased technology and were able to stop living vicariously through [this old lady](#) who already had the pleasure.

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That Rock, Paper, Scissor game was a fun take on something that I don't necessary consider a "game"... more of a way to solve disputes or decide who has to take the garbage out. Three players competed against their natural RPS enemy (i.e., if you control rock, you have to attack scissors, while avoiding paper), a task made more complicated by the fact that you could power-up (going invisible, dropping bombs, etc).

My favorite part of the afternoon was the four young men (by young I mean probably in their early 20s) standing in a circle playing Super Smash Brothers on their own personal Nintendo DSs. They were so engulfed in their game, I could barely get them to tell me what they were playing. On any other day, these guys would have seemed a little out of place, but it made sense at the Indie Arcade. They were having a lot of fun doing something most of us have done at least once: getting lost in a video game, even as the world goes on around you.



If you missed the Indie Arcade, but like games and have an extra \$60, you could check out the actual [MAGFest](#) (Music and Gaming Festival) at the National Harbor January 23-26, 2015. Or check out some of the free software and have a go at creating your own.

















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