

## Novel gaming devices go on show

The London Science Museum has been showing off some technologies that may one day make computer games more fun.

On show are a giant inflatable sphere on which images can be projected and a pneumatically driven chair that helps people interact with games.

Also being showcased is a drama that people interact with by singing.

The Future Playground showcase runs alongside the Game On exhibition at the museum which recounts the history of video games.

Dominique Driver, an exhibition developer for the Science Museum who found the technologies seen in the Future Playground section, said it was intended to be a companion for the bigger Game On event.

"That's about the history of gaming and this is about the future of gaming technology," she said.

### Ball games

The Puffer Sphere is an inflatable ball on which images can be projected, said Oliver Collier - one of its creators.

Mr Collier said the idea of using the inflatable as a display grew out of an undergraduate project at the University of Edinburgh to use it as the basis for an interactive art installation.

Mr Collier and friends have set up a company to market the Puffer Sphere and it is already getting a lot of interest from artists, exhibitors and event organisers.

"Some artists are creating bespoke content for the sphere that exploits the characteristics it has got," said Mr Collier.

A two-metre sphere is on display at the Science Museum but Mr Collier said the ball could be 10 metres across or even hung from a ceiling.

Some artists are keen to let people go inside the sphere and become part of whatever work is projected on the bubble, he said.

"It's about making virtual reality projection technology portable, accessible and robust so it can take a bit of a kicking," said Mr Collier.

### Hi-tech chair

The Active Chair links a pneumatically driven seat to a curved display that helps to immerse someone in a virtual world.

Dubbed a "personal simulator", the Active Chair has come out of work done to help children with disabilities interact with computer technology and provide feedback about what they are seeing.

Beneath the chair are a series of pistons that move it in reaction to what is being displayed and which sense what the occupant is doing.

The tight coupling of scene and chair has helped some disabled youngsters get a sense of what is happening in a virtual display that might be impossible any other way.

"We can map any haptic device to a visual application," said Clilly Castiglia, one of the technologists working on the chair.

For all its complexity, Ms Castiglia said the system can be driven by a USB port. "You could run it off a laptop," she said.

The work on the Active Chair is being carried out by a research group at the University of East London's Smart Lab.

#### Sound and vision

The third exhibit in the Future Playground showcase is a novel kind of interactive film which people navigate through by singing.

Interactive artist Chris Hales said he had spent 10 years working on ways to involve audiences in what they saw. Before now he had experimented with touch screens and systems that spot how two coloured balls are passed around to drive a drama.

"I've been looking at how you find interesting film forms that are suitable for interactivity," Mr Hales told the BBC News website.

The aim of the sound-driven cinema system is to get the audience singing the right notes for long enough to make the system show the next image in the story.

The version seen by the BBC involves an opera singer practising her performance - a story that helps to involve viewers who will also be singing.

"It's not about the technology because these technologies have existed for many years," he said. "It's more about finding the right film form and the right sort of narrative."

*Future Playground will take place at the Science Museum between 18th and 20th December*

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