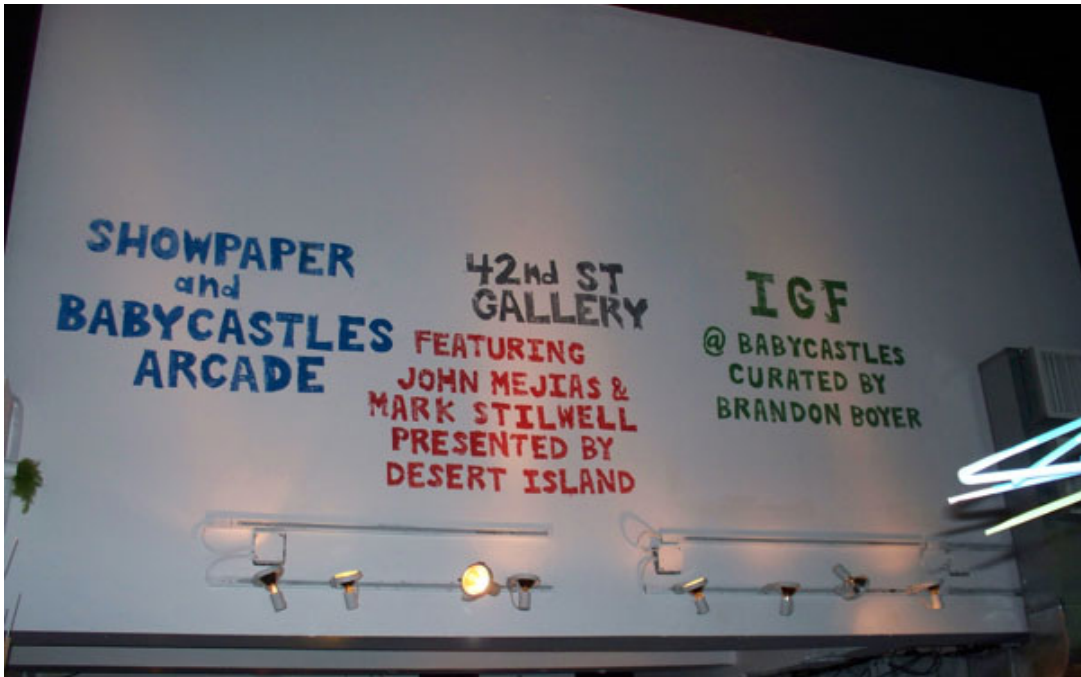




## Babycastles Takes Manhattan

The outer-borough indie arcade brings DIY game sensibilities to the Big Apple.

Posted 11/29/2010 11:05 AM by Evan Narcisse



It's been almost two months since the minds behind Babycastles inaugurated their residency just a few blocks from Grand Central Station. The space comes courtesy of Chashama, an organization that sets up artists in empty real-estate locations like retail storefronts or office spaces. Previously, Babycastles lived at the Silent Barn music venue in Rudgewood, Queens. You didn't need a password but their space at Silent Barn felt like a video game speakeasy. Finding yourself at the nondescript metal door and going down to the basement illuminated by screenlight meant you now belonged to a secret society of people privy to a bubbling, fertile cultural movement.

Still, the bigger, splashier Midtown East locale required a change in approach, both in terms of what the show and how they show it. Syed Salahuddin, one of the founders of Babycastles, offered that "we could do whatever the f\*\*k we wanted at Silent Barn. That crowd was more acclimated to trying out new things, even if they didn't play video games." He continued with the observation that "here [at Chashama, we need to have things that are more palatable. We want to be people's introduction to indie games."

The [latest exhibition](#)--curated by Independent Games Festival chairman Brandon Boyer--featured the biggest names yet, with indie success stories "Super Meat Boy," "Continuity" and "Enviro-Bear 2000" playable in custom-made cabinets. Saturday night saw a closing party for the exhibition, with musical performances by chiptune artists Starscream, Neil Voss and Knife City. Salahuddin says that openings have been great, but ordinary weekdays have been a mixed bag: "Midtown is an alien world for us and it's a little difficult to get people from Brooklyn to come out."



However, they have managed to draw a curious cubicle-dweller crowd: "People wander in during their lunch breaks, because nothing cool or cultural happens in this part of the city. They've been super-appreciative." So has Chashama, who have extended the Babycastles residency through to the end of January. The pace of exhibitions has doubled in the new space, up to two showcases a month. A January show will feature the work of Eddo Stern, who helped curate [Fantastic Arcade](#) at the 2010 Fantastic Fest and is also known for "[Tekken Torture Tournament](#)."

Speaking of upcoming exhibitions, Eric Zimmerman and Nathalie Pozzi have also created "Flatlands," a new site-specific work for the space that Zimmerman described as a "conversational" game about aesthetic discourse. The pair plan to re-work the feel of the venue a little bit as Pozzi described the look of the non-digital game as more somber interspersed with bursts of

color. Zimmerman didn't get in specifics but said that playing "Flatlands" involves old-school board games from the 1980s and that which board you choose will in itself be a move. Asked why Babycastles' Manhattan space is important, Zimmerman answered by noting, "As digital games enter the cultural pantheon alongside literature, film and other media, it's important to create context for their distribution and experience beyond a box on a shelf or a slot on a Xbox Live Arcade release schedule. There has to be a curated kind of space and Babycastles is both a symptom and a cause of the rise of indie games."

Brandon Boyer agrees, adding that Babycastles is part of a larger movement happening in many cities. "Toronto has its Torontron and Seattle, Austin are trying to set up similar things. Places like this take everything back to the 1980s, when there still were communal spaces for playing games together," he says.



Taken From: <http://www.ifc.com/news/2010/11/babycastles-takes-manhattan.php>

