



s.e. barnet & hillary mushkin
“MARIO’S FURNITURE 2” at TELIC

The Do-It-Yourself movement makes a foray into the world of video games with this collaborative multimedia installation from the team of Hillary Mushkin and S.E. Barnet, officially titled *Mario’s Furniture 2: A Mushkin-Barnet Game*. A sofa, two chairs, a coffee table and other living room staples are arranged in a semicircle to one side of the gallery, which has been painted black. A camera mounted on a rotating base rests on a pedestal against another wall with a large projection screen behind it; in front of the lens tiny figures sit on tiny plastic furniture. When viewed through the camera, the scale and focal planes converge to give the illusion of looking at a coherent space, and what the camera sees is played live on the screen throughout the event. When play starts, one team member stands behind the camera and moves the figures so they stay within its field of vision. Meanwhile, the rest of the team drags furniture back and forth across the gallery floor with the goal of maintaining a friendly arrangement facing their “guests”; the floors are painted with blocking marks and directional arrows to aid them. The game was developed in collaboration with Clay Chaplin and Lorin Parker, who wired it all with electro-magnetic sensors triggered by movement and screen captures that use color-sensing technology; to score one sits on a piece of appropriately placed furniture before the camera moves on.

The success of the piece lies both in its considerable appeal as a spectacle when in use (footage from the opening night evokes an evening at the roller derby) as well as its cozy, retro warmth as an installation. Even passively viewing saved games while sitting comfortably on the “set” gives a sense of the total dynamic of dire hilarity. There is an enchanting element of recreation in this art experience, which is mercifully free of inhibition, rationality or mediation, as witnessed by players’ single-minded focus and inventiveness in making up their own rules and strategies. Yet beneath all the comfort, nostalgia and freedom of the piece lies a philosophical meditation on the impossibility and absurdity of the quest for perfection itself. You can play *Mario’s Furniture*, you can watch others play, you can get a very high score; but there’s no way to win.