Finding Aid to the
Age of Empires Collection, 1996-1997, 2023

Summary Information

Title: *Age of Empires* collection
Creator: Ensemble Studios (primary)
ID: 2023.aoe
Date: c. 1996-1997, 2023 (inclusive)
Extent: 1.5 linear feet (physical); 1.1 GB (digital)
Language: The materials in this collection are in English.
Abstract: The *Age of Empires* collection contains two sketchbooks with loose drawings inserted, as well as digital artwork used in the development of Ensemble Studios' *Age of Empires.* The original materials are undated but are likely from 1996-1997.
Repository:
Brian Sutton-Smith Library and Archives of Play at The Strong
One Manhattan Square
Rochester, New York 14607
585.263.2700
library@museumofplay.org

Administrative Information

Conditions Governing Use: This collection is open for research use by staff of The Strong and by users of its library and archives. Though the donor has not transferred intellectual property rights (including, but not limited to any copyright, trademark, and associated rights therein) to The Strong, they have given permission for The Strong to make copies in all media for museum, educational, and research purposes.
Custodial History: The *Age of Empires* collection was donated to The Strong in May 2023 as a gift of Anonymous. The papers were accessioned by The Strong under Object IDs 123.1283 and 123.1652. Materials were received from the donor in one physical shipment and one digital transfer.
Preferred citation for publication: *Age of Empires* collection, Brian Sutton-Smith Library and Archives of Play at The Strong
Processed by: Julia Novakovic, May 2023

Controlled Access Terms

Personal Names
- Crow, Brad
- Deen, David
- Gagen, Don
- Goodman, Suzanne
- Goodman, Tony
- Pottinger, Dave
- Shelley, Bruce C.

Corporate Names
- Ensemble Studios
- Microsoft Corporation

Subjects
- Age of Empires
- Computer adventure games
- Computer games -- Design
- Game design and development
- Microsoft Age of Empires
- Role playing games
- Simulation games
- Video games -- Design

Historical Note

Age of Empires (1997), often abbreviated *AoE*, is a real-time strategy video game designed by Ensemble Studios. Based on historical events, the game allows the player to advance through time while leading one of 12 ancient civilizations from Europe, Africa, or Asia. Players experience the Stone Age, Tool Age, Bronze Age, and Iron Age, with each era introducing new items, weapons, and technologies. (The original working title of the game was "Dawn of Man.")

Age of Empires' campaigns follow the history of the Egyptian, Greek, Babylonian, and Yamato civilizations, with four distinct architectural styles appearing in the game. Resources such as food, stone, wood, or gold are acquired through farming, fishing, foraging, hunting, logging, mining, or trading. Players research technologies; control civilian and military units; and construct buildings, infrastructure, and monuments. Using the Scenario Builder tool, players can even create their own game maps, customize rules, and establish specific conditions.

Microsoft published *Age of Empires* in 1997. The title received good reviews, and the success of the game spawned expansion packs and sequels. (The Microsoft Gaming Zone also supported multiplayer gameplay of *Age of Empires* online.) As of May 2023, there have been nine total games released in the Age of Empires series.

Collection Scope and Content Note

The *Age of Empires* collection contains two 14" × 17" sketchbooks (with loose drawings inserted), as well as graphics and animations used in the development of Ensemble Studios' *Age of Empires*. Though the original materials are undated, they are likely from 1996-1997. (Access copies of the graphic files were created by the Senior Archivist at The Strong in 2023.) Additional information can be found in the Contents List section of this finding aid.

The collection is arranged into two series. Physical materials are stored in one oversized print storage box, and digital files are accessible on-site at The Strong.

System of Arrangement
  Series I: Sketchbooks, n.d. [c. 1996-1997]
  Series II: Digital artwork, c. 1996-1997, 2023

Contents List

Series I: Sketchbooks, n.d. [c. 1996-1997]

> **Scope and Content Note:** This series holds two 14" × 17" sketchbooks with additional loose drawings inserted between the pages. Contents of the sketchbooks include symbols, buildings, icons, logos, and more. The donor noted that most of the sketches were drawn by Don Gagen, with some possibly created by David Deen.
>
> [Note: The original metal spiral bindings were removed from the sketchbooks to prevent further damage to the pages.]

Box 1

Folder 1   Sketchbook 1 – Ensemble Studios, art from Don Gagen [and David Deen?], n.d. [c. 1996-1997]

Folder 2   Sketchbook 2 – Ensemble Studios, art from Don Gagen [and David Deen?], n.d. [c. 1996-1997]

Series II: Digital artwork, c. 1996-1997, 2023

> **Scope and Content Note:** This series houses graphics and animations created by staff at Ensemble Studios in the development of *Age of Empires*. Images include scanned sketches, screenshots, renderings of people and locations, logos, and more.
>
> Original file names have been retained as transferred by the donor. Access copy .JPG files in the Graphics folder can be opened with standard image viewer; .FLC files in Animations folder should be viewed using QuickTime.

Digital-II

Folder 1   **Folder 01_Graphics**
  o *01_Original raster files* [94 files] – various .EPS, .BMP, .TIF, .TGA, .PSD graphics created for *Age of Empires*; n.d. [c. 1996-1997]
  o *02_Access copies* [94 files] – .JPG access copies of original raster files for *Age of Empires*, 2023

Folder 2   **Folder 02_Animations**
  o *01_Early_AOE_Animations* [13 files] – computer-rendered .FLC animations for animals [gazelle, horse, lion, wolf], trebuchet, and man; n.d. [c. 1996-1997]