Behold, The Winning Swipe For Every Level Of Angry Birds

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As we grow more accustomed to life with smartphones, so, too, do our fingers become more adept as tools for controlling them. Young kids get it instantly, with an eerie innateness that makes it seem like multitouch is now something that's coded in our DNA. But older users can catch on, as well; even those who never matured past hunting-andpecking on a full-size keyboard can be seen navigating their phones deftly and fluidly. It's a skill we all just picked up instantly–using our thumbs to navigate apps with a thoughtless, balletic grace. And that dance becomes even more complex when you start talking about mobile games, experiences that require not only precise taps but complicated swipes, well-timed flicks, and often the use of additional digits. All those interactions, however, are invisible to us–until you put some ink on your finger and slide a sheet of tracing paper on top of your screen.

That's exactly what artist Evan Roth did for his latest piece, <u>Angry Birds All Levels</u>. Currently on display at the Science Center in Dublin, the installation shows the exact gesture needed to complete each of the game's 300 levels.

Roth's first forays into multitouch art came last year, with <u>a series of images</u> that showed inked impressions of his fingers performing various smartphone tasks. Pieces in that initial set included "User Name and Password," "Slide to Unlock," and "Launch Twitter. Check Twitter. Close Twitter." Soon after, Jonah Peretti, one of the founders of BuzzFeed, commissioned a painting of the winning swipe for the first level of *Angry Birds*—an enlarged version of which <u>now hangs on his office wall.</u> So when Roth heard that the Science Gallery, a Dublin museum where he'd previously shown some of his work, was doing <u>an exhibition dedicated to video games</u>, he knew just the project to propose.

If it sounds like a tedious endeavor-it was. "I had actually completed *Angry Birds* long before," Roth says, "but in an effort to reduce my temptation to cheat, I started with a clean installation of the game, so that I would actually have to unlock each level to move forward." To make sure his successes were documented, every attempt necessitated a clean sheet of tracing paper. But of course not every swipe *was* a success, and the resulting stack of "loser" sheets grew to be as tall as a coffee cup.

"It took a long time," Roth recalls. "I was playing in five-hour shifts, and there were definitely frustrating moments watching the sheets of paper pile up from a single level." But he knows what you're thinking, and he agrees: "It's hard to complain too much, though, when you're playing *Angry Birds* professionally."



While some of Roth's first multitouch paintings had been presented as large-scale reproductions on acrylic canvasses—things that made thumbprints look more like "art," essentially—the new piece is composed of the original documents themselves, pinned to the wall in an orderly grid. The whole project reads a bit differently because of it. Instead of saying, "Hey, when we touch our phones, it's kind of like finger painting!" the new *Angry Birds* set puts more emphasis on the interactions as such. Visitors can see, at a glance, how more complex input is demanded as the game progresses and new mechanisms are introduced, and the effect is such that you can't help but consider bigger questions about how—and how much—we're touching our phones in a broader sense.

Of course, this is just the start. As Roth points out, we're in the "relatively early years" of touchscreen computing, and part of his interest in the project is "archiving these initial encounters we are all experiencing." The *Angry Birds* piece is as much a catalog of interactions as it is an ode to their incidental beauty, and, someday, perhaps, when we're using not only our fingers but <u>our palms, nails, and knuckles to tease unimagined</u> <u>functionality of our futuristic smartphones</u>, we'll look back at these little black blobs and think, "Oh, how quaint."