The makers of the Stem Player made a small projector that’s Kanye West-free

Kano Computing’s Stem Player is one of the coolest gadgets I’ve ever used. It’s a strangely soft puck-shaped device that lets you manipulate parts of songs in real time just by swiping up and down. But because the Stem Player was linked heavily with Ye, the artist formerly known as Kanye West who has taken an extremely antisemitic turn, I wasn’t much of a fan lately.

Now, Kano is back with its next Stem device, and not only is it Ye-free, but it’s a different type of gadget entirely: a video projector called the Stem Projector. The company is also teasing some wild future concepts for Stem products, like Stem food — yes, food — but we’ll get to that later.

Like the Stem Player, the projector is another small circular puck made of a fleshy-feeling material, though it’s slightly larger. For controls, it has haptic, touch-sensitive controls in a ring as well as six buttons. You’ll be able to put your own content on its 256GB hard drive, and you can add additional storage thanks to a microSD card slot. It has a mini-HDMI port, meaning you could use it as a projector for something like a game console, and it supports Wi-Fi and cellular connections.

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However, it seems like it won't be the brightest projector around. In an interview with *The Verge*, Kano CEO Alex Klein said it reaches 300 lumens or 150 ANSI lumens; for comparison, Samsung's small Freestyle projector was measured at 240 ANSI lumens. So the Stem Projector will be dimmer. But it has an onboard battery that Klein says lasts for four to five hours at full brightness and continuous use, so you'll theoretically be able to watch a fair amount of content on a single charge. (That gives it a big advantage over the Freestyle, which doesn't have a battery.)

Klein also said that it will come with some preloaded content. While he didn't say exactly what that content would be, he teased that "we're working with some of the best directors in the world, as well as some of the most interesting libraries," like Mubi and The Criterion Collection. The projector is also compatible with Chromecast and AirPlay, meaning you can stream content from your phone.

I haven't seen or tried the device myself, but in our Google Meet call, Klein showed me a few videos from his phone and talked about how to use it. It isn't exactly like your typical projector, so I'll let his words describe it:

> *When you boot up the projector, you just get a specific piece of content. A frame from it right in front of you. As you spin the ring, you go through other content that's in there. Some of it has been added by us. Some of it is algorithmically added. Some of [the content is] live channels as well, so we've got James Terrell-style artworks, wall savers, so like screen savers for your wall. And then you press the middle button, the content starts to play. If you press it again, it pauses, and that frame becomes the preview of the film. So it's a very exploratory [and] ambient way of enjoying video and movies where you're getting immediately into it right away.*

Using machine learning, the projector is supposed to tag objects in video stored on the device so that you can view a stream of associated clips in what Klein referred to as “galaxy mode.” As an example, if you activate galaxy mode when you’re looking at a clip with trees and plans, the device will serve more content with trees and plants to “create this ambient dream of different versions of the thing that you were looking at from different, incredible pieces of film or films that you’ve added yourself,” Klein said. The idea sounds somewhat similar to Sam Barlow’s new game *Immortality*, which has you explore film clips by clicking on objects to see a related object in a different scene.

You can get an idea of how the device works in this ad from Kano:

The bigger vision for the projector, like the Stem Player, is to build a device that gets your head out of your phone, according to Klein. “On our phones, we are always looking down. We’re always looking at our hands,” he said. “With the projector, you’re looking up. You’re looking out. That’s a thing that we want to bring into the world: people looking up and looking out and looking at things together rather than showing things on their little screens.”

We’ll have to see if the Stem Projector’s more novel elements make up for what could end up being a dim display. Kano will be taking preorders starting Monday for the first 1,000 devices, and they’ll cost $1,000 and come in a limited edition color. If you want a preorder, you might want to jump on it — as of Monday morning, Kano’s website says that nearly all of the 1,000 devices have already been sold.

I asked if Ye was a part of the project at all. Klein told me that Ye was not involved with the projector and that the company’s collaboration with the rapper, which included making the Stem Player the exclusive home of Donda 2, has ended. Ye “clearly saw the new medium of Stem as something innovative

and different," Klein said. "I think that will always be a beautiful moment. But no active collaboration now in light of very, very awful things that have been said." Kano still has "like 5,000" Stem Players in its inventory preloaded with Donda 2, but there are "no plans" to put new Ye content on future devices, according to Klein.

The projector is one of a few upcoming releases coming early this year, Klein said. Kano is also opening preorders for new Stem Players with exclusive music from Wu-Tang Clan rapper Ghostface Killah. Those will ship in February, and you'll be able to sign up for a monthly subscription that gives you access to music, mini documentaries, meetups with the rapper, and an exclusive concert, Klein said in an email.

The company also plans to reveal more products "into January, February and March" because it wants to establish Stem as "a new kind of consumer product idea," Klein said. He teased that the company is working on things well outside the realm of gadgets, like boots and how "we might even do a food product."

I pushed him on what that could mean. Klein said Kano has found "quite an overlap between many disciplines of design and product development today. Apparel and EVA printing and molding techniques can be applied to the shape and form of physical devices. The intelligence that goes into a Stem Player and the interface and the way in which it responds to your touch and movement could inform how a garment works as well."

That all means Kano has "this big, pie-in-the-sky dream" where "we see the potential to unify the clothes you wear, the food you eat, the devices you use, and even the spaces in which you live into a single integrated, designed system," he said. He referenced how Apple products work together to bring simplicity to "one part" of your life. "Imagine if that unification could expand into the exact size and fit of your clothes, the exact nutritional balance of your food."

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Personally, I’m skeptical that Kano can pull off a unified system for your entire life. It’s a *much* smaller company than the tech giants that have tried (and failed) to pull off something similar, and I’m still not quite sure how we get from the Stem Player to Kano-made food. Apple’s ecosystem works because it’s comprised of a limited number of tech gadgets, but given that we’ve been waiting for years on rumored projects like its mixed reality headset and a car, even Apple, one of the biggest companies in the world, seems to be hitting some limits.

That said, in speaking with Klein, I get the impression he does want to pivot the direction of Kano, which started as a company making educational computers. The Stem Player was a good start, and the new projector looks promising. But I’m just not sure about Stem food.

***Correction Monday, January 9th, 10:28AM ET**: Klein said in the interview that the price for the projector would be $600, but Kano experience design director James Hicks informed us after we published this article that it would be $1,000 and will come in a limited edition color.*

https://www.theverge.com/23538109/stem-player-projector-kanye-west-ye-kano-computing