

Simon Denny, Guile Twardowski, *Cosmographia* (presented with Folia.app), *Dotcom Séance*, 2021-2022, Courtesy of the artists

Exploring the Decentralized Web - Art on the Blockchain

02.09. – 12.11.2023

Opening Day: Friday, 01.09.2023

11:00: Press-tour with the curators & artists
19:00: Vernissage and party

The international group exhibition «**Exploring the Decentralized Web – Art on the Blockchain**» reviews the recent developments of blockchain and Web3 from an artistic perspective. It addresses an audience curious about art productions that creatively employ blockchain technology or ingeniously exploit the possibilities smart contracts offer. At the same time, the works assembled here invite viewers to reflect on the implications the political sphere and crypto market economies have on each other, as well as many other questions these technologies raise about how they shape our online interactions and impact our economies and societies.

Artists Botto | Primavera De Filippi | Simon Denny & Guile Twardowski & Cosmographia | Constant Dullaart eeefff | Sarah Friend | Leander Herzog & Milian Mori | Kyle McDonald | Amanda E. Metzger | Chloé Michel Rhea Myers no1s1 Labs and Dezentrum | Operator | Lukas Truniger

Curators Sabine Himmelsbach and Boris Magrini

Digital art is enjoying increasing popularity, as works become commercially available thanks to blockchain technology and, notably, the creation of NFTs (non-fungible tokens). While the phenomenon has allowed some artists to benefit financially from sales of their work, the boom of NFTs has given rise to controversial debates, such as the ecological viability of blockchain technology, apprehensions about contractual security, and the actual extent to which blockchain technologies are truly decentralized and democratic as claimed. Prior to the mainstream success of NFTs, artists specializing in digital technologies were already exploring the artistic possibilities of blockchain and continue to actively create today.

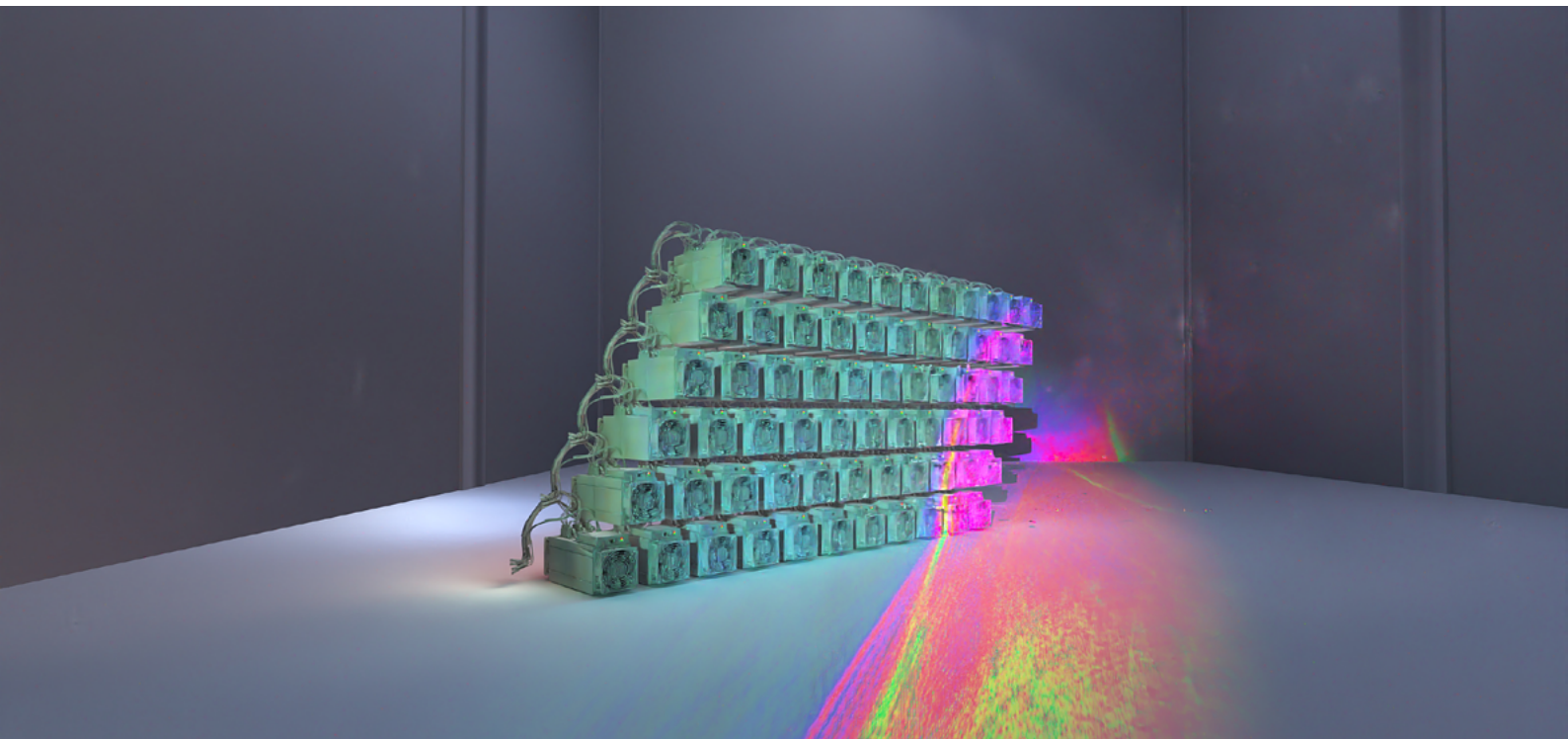
A variety of conceptual works explore blockchain's creative potential in original ways, and experiment with the parameters of smart contracts. For several years, **Rhea Myers** has been playing with aspects of blockchain to create collaborative and conceptual works that often subvert the market's specific logics or reveal the underlying mechanics behind the functioning of smart contracts. **Amanda E. Metzger** uses the large language model GPT-3 to create an intimate journal, ***beta.metzger.love*** (2023), in which every memory is saved (minted) on a blockchain, thus opening a debate on future applications of combining artificial intelligence and blockchain. **Sarah Friend's *Lifeforms*** (2021-ongoing) are NFTs that survive only if they are regularly resold, regardless of whether the sale generates profit or loss for their owners. Her recent installation constitutes a sort of graveyard for the life forms that have meanwhile ceased to exist.

Often, artists take a critical approach, creating works to raise questions about the highly controversial issues the technology entails. ***Dotcom Séance*** (2021-22) a collaboration between **Simon Denny** and **Guile Twardowski**, provides an ironic yet concise examination of the development of Web3 and its economic impact. **Chloé Michel** has built an artistic installation, ***Proof of Faith*** (2022), which consists of a mining rig for the Monero blockchain using four Raspberry Pi devices, taking the form of an altar where the public is invited

to prey and meditate. **eeefff**, a collective formed by **Nicolay Spesivtsev** and **Dzina Zhuk**, created ***Economic Orangery*** (2021), an online role-playing game with interactive elements in the exhibition space, which relates to the theme of decentralization and its economic impact.

Finally, several artists explore the creative potential of blockchain and decentralization, often by forming DAOs (decentralized autonomous organizations), for the management of projects that aim to make a positive contribution to society. **Primavera De Filippi** created a series of interactive blockchain-based sculptures in the form of mechanical plants, called ***Plantoids*** (2018-ongoing) that draw on financial resources, managed through a DAO, and commission a new artist to create the new progeny, according to predefined parameters that condition their evolution. ***no1s1*** (2021-ongoing) is a **Dezentrum** project realized in co-operation with the Blockchain Center of the University of Zurich, the School of Engineering of the Zurich University of Applied Sciences in Winterthur and the Digitalization Initiative of the Zurich Higher Education Institutions. In this project, a housing module is managed autonomously by a DAO and smart contracts, thus creating the first example of a property that does not belong to anyone but can be used by the community. With the installation ***Undergrown*** (2023), **Lukas Truniger** has created a hacking kit for repurposing obsolete crypto mining hardware for scientific research, managed by a DAO. Conceived by artist and blockchain pioneer **Mario Klingemann**, ***Botto*** is a decentralised autonomous AI driven "artist" that uses a combination of AI software models such as Stable Diffusion, VQGAN + CLIP, and GPT-3 that has been trained with millions of works of art, literature, real objects, and people. It autonomously generates artworks that are submitted to a community structured in the form of a DAO, whose members eventually decide which work to publish and sell as an NFT.

Lukas Truniger, *Undergrown*, 2023, 3d Simulation, Courtesy of the artist





Sarah Friends, *LifeForms*, 2021, Courtesy of the artist

The exhibition marks the conclusion of the project «HEK Connect – cultural participation in the age of a decentralized Internet», funded by the Federal Office of Culture and the departments of Culture Basel-Stadt and Basel-Landschaft, which enables HEK’s innovative positioning as a cultural institution in a globally networked digital economy. This also includes the creation of a blockchain-based circle of friends and events, both online and offline, such as panel discussions, workshops, and collectively initiated projects.

The exhibition also connects to HEK’s preceding exhibition, **«Collective Worldbuilding – Art in the Metaverse»**, with its focus on new online worlds, referred to as the metaverse, and the creation of DAOs. Both exhibitions are accompanied by a combined catalogue with critical texts by experts in the field, offering a comprehensive and accessible analysis of topics related to Web3, blockchains, DAOs, and the metaverse.

An extensive educational program accompanies the exhibition, providing opportunities to critically engage with blockchain and Web3 technology and its creative applications.



Simon Denny, Guile Twardowski, Cosmographia (presented with Folia.app), *Dotcom Seance: cashwars.com* (1999-2001), 2021-2022, Courtesy of the artists

Information about HEK:

HEK (House of Electronics Arts)
Freilager-Platz 9, 4142 Münchenstein/Basel

Opening Hours:

Wed-Sun, 12am-6pm
Entry: 12 / 8 CHF (reduced),
Happy Hour: Wed-Fri, 12am-1pm, free exhibition entry
Exhibition Tour: Every Sunday at 3pm in German

For more information: www.hek.ch

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About HEK (House of Electronic Arts)

HEK in Basel is Switzerland's national centre of excellence and museum dedicated to all art forms that employ or reflect on new technologies and media. HEK's interdisciplinary orientation offers a broad public insight into art production from different genres at the conjunction of art, media and technology. In a diverse program of exhibitions, smaller festival formats, performances and concerts, HEK addresses current social issues as well as technological-aesthetic developments. In addition to organising events and exhibitions, HEK is committed to answering digital art's specific demands in collection methodology and preservation.

HEK is supported by the **Christoph Merian Foundation**, the cantons of **Basel Landschaft** and **Basel-Stadt** and the **Federal Office of Culture**.

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