



THREE FUTURES

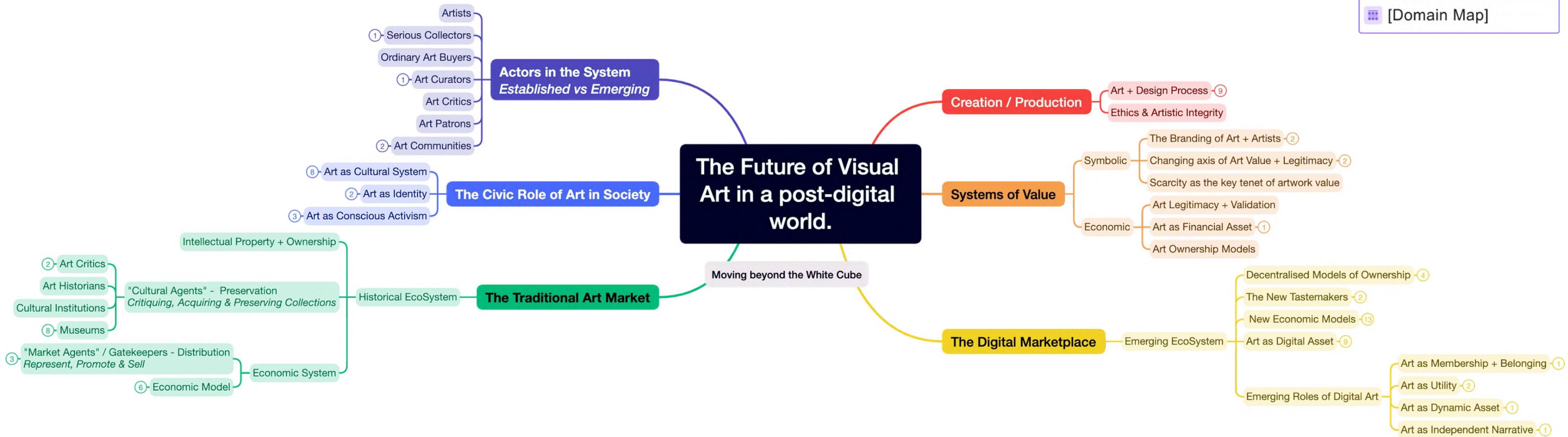
Three Stories of (Post)Growth, Power, Art, Ecology and Activism

Spring 2024

**The Future of
Art in a
Post-Digital
World**
Three Stories

World Futures Research

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Client

This research was conducted to support the (fictional) Australian Radical Art Futures Council to explore how they can meet the challenges & opportunities that will emerge within the Future Visual Art Market (both digital & physical).

Key Question | Exploratory

How might the future role and value of Visual Art be transformed in a post-digital world?

Geographic Scope

The scope for this project focuses on the Australian Visual Art Market, but given the global nature of the digital art market (actors, technologies & systems), we will look outside of Australia as part of our horizon scanning process.

Key Outcome

Understanding how we might think more critically about the emerging economic models and systems of value & legitimacy that the Digital Art World invites; and their implications for the future role and value of all Visual Art in the Post-Digital Age.

Defining Post-digital

For the purposes of clarity, I use the term 'post-digital' to describe the period in which our intense historical fascination with all things digital has passed and we accept digital as being a core part of both society and the systems within it, rather than to describe some disenchantment or withdrawal from it.



Lines of Enquiry

- How are systems of meaning and value being reshaped in the digital space?
- How will the online merging of selling & critiquing shape our future ideas of the legitimacy of art?
- How will the cultural context that is specific to the internet, change the way we think about collectable Art?
- How are advancements in technology and digital platforms reshaping the role of the artist, enabling new forms of creative expression and expanding artistic boundaries?
- If all art processes occur within a social and cultural context, how might the digital art space refocus the idea of art-making and production as a collective process? how does this impact the systems operating within the art world?
- In what ways might we see the systemic issues operating within the Arts economy, as representative of the broader economy in general?



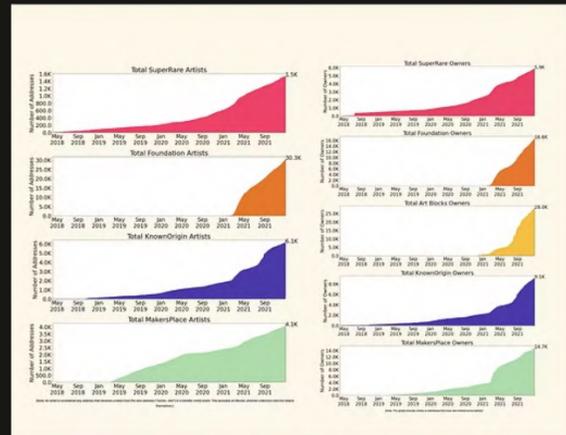
UNCERTAIN ART FUTURES

Artists, Collectors, Galleries + Museums alike are experimenting to find their way in this new landscape

SCANNING

[Current Assessment]

The digital art market has shifted the trajectory on both the supply + demand axis.



The Creators: Artist Data The Collectors: Patron Statistics



Beeple (b. 1984) EVERYDAYS: THE FIRST 5000 DAYS



Michelangelo's Doni Tondo NFT minted by Uffizi Gallery



Numbers Blockchain Protocol

Despite fluctuating NFT sales, digital artist + collector engagement continues

Whilst the market for NFTs (non-fungible tokens) surged to \$2.5 billion in the first half of 2021, no doubt buoyed by Beeple's USD\$69million sale through Sotheby's. However NFT sales have slowed significantly since 2021 with the majority of lower levels of NFT sales representing secondary sales over primary purchases (mints). Despite the fluctuating sales, new artists and collectors continue to join the major art platforms like Superrare, Foundation and ArtBlocks.

Digital + Physical | Trial + Error

Whilst declining patronage during Covid forced many museums and galleries online; **the industry appears divided about how best to tackle the online space**. Physical museums and galleries continue to experiment and adapt within the digital space - Sotheby's NFT auction of Beeple's 'Everydays: First 5000 Days' was sold for USD\$69million and shook up the traditional art world. Likewise some galleries have joined forces online to exhibit whilst others have shifted to virtual-only exhibitions. Artcrush Gallery takes a different approach, exhibiting NFTs in the physical world via large scale digital billboards which feel more outdoor advertising than art gallery.

Museums have also experimented with the digitization of their works - The British Museum has partnered with LaCollection to release NFT collections; likewise the Whitworth Museum has also launched their own NFT artworks for sale. But there are also concerns some institutions are jumping the gun early without considering the longterm impacts of 'NFT-ing' their collections for sale - the Uffizi Gallery minted a single edition NFT of Michelangelo's Doni Tondo (1505-'06) for \$170,000 which industry observers say is concerning as Uffizi no longer has ownership over the NFT for the foreseeable future.

The Digital Protection Dilemma

Authenticity and provenance remain central issues to art collectors (and thus systems of value). NFTs stored on the blockchain have immutable provenance records, and companies like Truepic and Numbers Protocol have introduced decentralised provenance photo capture with no doubt more to come onto the market in the near future. Beyond blockchain authentication and record preservation which provides lineage to ownership; there are also the everyday issues of cryptosecurity and longterm provenance management that this new world of art-as-digital-asset surfaces.

Moreover, cases like the scam purchase of a Banksy NFT and increasing cases of artists who discover their work has been 'NFT'd' without their permission or the \$13.5million dollars worth of stolen BAYC NFTs . . all continue to fuel the uncertainty about this landscape will play out in future.



NO RESOLUTION IN SIGHT

The Uncertainty of A System in Transition

Will digital unlock the socio-economic systems of power, access and value that have historically characterised the art landscape?

SCANNING

[Current Assessment]



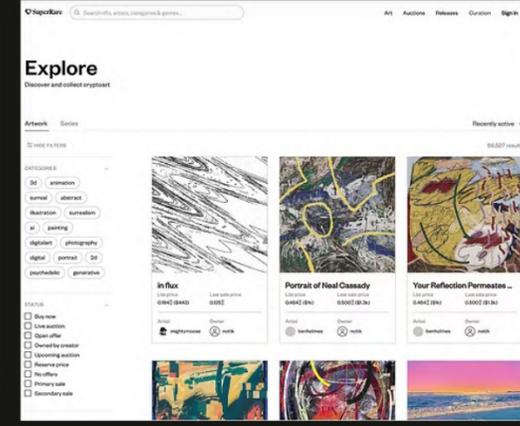
Photo by Antoni Shkraba



Photo by Markus Winkler



Photo by Rostislav Uzunov



Superrare Gallery - an NFT marketplace for curated cryptoart.

Systems of access, discovery + distribution are in flux

Incumbent models of distribution and access are problematic. **Art galleries act as both tastemakers and gatekeepers**, they are the consecrators of value who determine what will be shown and made visible. Museums also function to both preserve and historicize culture through their art collections. **Both are problematic in that they operate within the dominant economic system** with its internal bias and frameworks of value and legitimacy. Research shows that 85% of artists in U.S. museum collections are white, and 87% are male. There is concern amongst artists that the digital space is being colonised as another distribution and access network, without seeking to capitalise on the opportunity for increased artist discovery and access. Conversely, blockchains potentially represent their own form of exclusivity as collections are minted (and accessed) on one chain versus another.

Comparison of Street Art and Fine Art

Cryptoeconomics is catalysing the emergence of new organisational and economic structures

Cryptoeconomic systems are enabling more fluid non-linear, non-hierarchical organisations to form around community and project purposes (eg. DAOs) separate from the mainstream.

Foundations of Cryptoeconomic Systems in a Nutshell

New economic frameworks enable artists, collectors, curators and viewers to take advantage of (and shape) the shifting trajectories on both the supply and demand axis but how this plays out is still uncertain.

Digital scarcity remains an unresolved issue when it comes to value

Traditional models of art value rely on limited access and production to create value. NFT collections utilise these same structures with limited mints and rare collectibles and auction houses like Sotheby's are attempting to transfer perceptions of scarcity as value to digital works.

The mechanism of scarcity could easily be absorbed into old systems of power, value, distribution and access without realising the potential that the digital space offers for collective transformation of the art ecosystem.

Thinking Too Small: When Digital Scarcity Hurts The Future of Blockchain Games

NFTs: Redefining Digital Ownership and Scarcity

Definitions + demarcations of value and purpose remain unresolved

There is little public understanding or distinction between Cryptoart and NFTs; Kyle Walters in his article Data in the Year of the NFT makes the distinction between Cryptoart (akin to fine art in digital format) versus NFT Art (referring to NFT mint collections). The challenge with these unresolved issues around definition and thus, demarcation of 'art-as-asset' classes, is that each functions differently in terms of purpose, function and within particular systems of value. Whilst 'fine art style' cryptoart is akin to fine art, NFT art functions as both utility and collectable asset. Further complicating the discourse is the genericization of the term 'NFT', which within digital parlance, refers to both art assets (more specifically) and utility tokens within web3 systems of community and governance.

Furthermore, ongoing value debates continue about 'what constitutes art' with the contentious role of generative AI (in terms of perceived authorship and skill), and also concerns around the ownership of imagery utilised in large language model datasets from which the AI models work.



ART FUTURES IN A POST DIGITAL WORLD

VELOCITY

velocity /v'loʊsɪ/ noun 1. the speed of something in a given direction.

DRIVERS

Scanning for Change

Weak Signals

Emerging Change

DRIVERS

Capture the Flag

New Economy Mechanics

The Message of Medium

Glitching the System

Existential Crisis

Artivism

Search Item, Collection



Capture the Flag ALL ABOARD THE HYPE TRAIN

16.00 ETH Disruptive Speculative Potential

As historical system actors rush to capitalise on digital art trends, together with speculative collectors and NFT 'product' creators, we see the capitalist art system continue to reinforce market constraints and distribute legitimacy through the governing of systemic relationships between people, objects and value.

Art's incumbent economic system is alive and well; albeit with new digital value creation and transfer mechanisms.

Current Bid (€) 19 SCANS

Crypto Citizens Collection Driving Force: A Product by any other name

Enter the Otherside Driving Force: A Product by any other name

Most expensive crypto artworks Driving Force: Offline actors capitalise on digital

AI Art: How artists are using and confronting machine learning Driving Force: Generative Art

Will GPTs swallow NFTs? Driving Force: Generative Art

Crypto and traditional art are merging Driving Force: Offline actors capitalise on digital

Art NFTs for sale | eBay Driving Force: A Product by any other name

NBA Top Shot has done over \$230 million in transactions Driving Force: Offline actors capitalise on digital

Sotheby's Metaverse Driving Force: Offline actors capitalise on digital

NFTs are extending the life of street art Driving Force: Offline actors capitalise on digital

Shutterstock and OpenAI will team up to sell AI-generated stock images Driving Force: Offline actors capitalise on digital

China museum chief fences cultural relics from NFTs Driving Force: Avoiding First Move Failures

Christie's Announces Beeple's HUMAN ONE Driving Force: Offline actors capitalise on digital

Shopify allows merchants to sell NFTs directly through their storefronts Driving Force: Offline actors capitalise on digital

Bored Apes offer utility to utilise Bored Ape NFT in your own brand, product or service Driving Force: A Product by any other name

How Artsy became the Spotify of the fine art world Driving Force: Digital Gatekeepers

Visa buys a CryptoPunk as it takes first steps into 'NFT commerce' Driving Force: A Product by any other name

A meme gold rush? Classic viral images are selling as NFTs for thousands of dollars Driving Force: A Product by any other name

A crypto-centric luxury house Driving Force: Offline actors capitalise on digital



New Economy Mechanics POWER TO THE PEOPLE

11.00 ETH Disruptive Speculative Potential

The broken logic of the incumbent market sees the greatest source of power within the historical art system derived from its ability to control and constrain the value transfer mechanisms of legitimacy and value, through distribution and curatorial / critical discourse. Decentralised finance offers flexible, equitable, sustainable economic models, surfacing new possibility for art futures within the digital space. Decentralisation also offers the possibility of social capital at scale, arising from decentralised network structures, the interconnectedness of weak 'ties' and 'value signals' that can be surfaced, understood, built upon and shared - enabling the digital-native art system to reframe creating, curating and collecting as a collective community mechanism.

Current Bid (€) 17 SCANS

Art Blocks Driving Force: Digital-native Value Mechanisms

Azure Surveillance Driving Force: Digital-native Value Mechanisms

Highlight: On-chain creativity, Unchained Driving Force: New Rules for a New Economy

NFTs: The Latest Technology Challenging Copyright Law's Relevance Within a Decentralized System Driving Force: New Rules for a New Economy

Superrare Art Gallery, Auction + Curation Driving Force: Scaleable Curation + Discovery

Democratizing our digital existence Driving Force: The real value of blockchain

Ecosystem as a Service (EaaS) Driving Force: Digital Gatekeepers

NFTs Are Reshaping Artists' IP Rights Driving Force: Remuneration + IP

SRARE Staking Protocol Driving Force: Reputation Signals + Network Effect

The Promise Of NFTs, Smart Contracts, & DAOs Driving Force: A Living Wage For Artists

Starcoin Driving Force: Remuneration + IP

Where Art is Born Driving Force: Digital to Physical Experiences

The Doppelgänger Contract Driving Force: New Rules for a New Economy

The Artist's Contract Driving Force: A Living Wage Of Artists

ArtCrush Gallery Driving Force: Digital to Physical Experiences

Oncyber.io gallery Driving Force: Scaleable Curation + Discovery

It Is Time For A New Artist's Contract Supported By Blockchain Technology To Secure Artists' Resale Royalties

Driving Force: A Living Wage For Artists



The Message of Medium EXTENDING THE ARTISTIC ECOSYSTEM

8.00 ETH Disruptive Speculative Potential

The explosion of generative art tools and NFT collections has given rise to an age old debate about what constitutes art and whether digital art constitutes 'real Art', particularly in relation to the incumbent art system.

When it comes to digital-art modalities, the challenge for artists will be to explore digital mediums and how they enable storytelling or idea sharing in a way that can't be achieved through other mediums. Where the message of medium choice, is fundamental to the art itself.

Current Bid (€) 7 SCANS

NFC x Patrick Amadon - Glitch Art Exhibition Driving Force: A compelling story of medium + message

Digital Collectors Pablo Rodriguez-Fraile and Desiree Casoni on the State of NFT Art and Their Own Tokenized Acquisitions Driving Force: Digital-native value mechanisms

The Ultimate Immersive Art Experience Driving Force: Digital to Physical Experiences

New Mycelium Network: Art X Music NFT Drop Driving Force: Expanding the Art Ecosystem

Heart + Craft: The Latest Project by Snowfro | Art Blocks Driving Force: Expanding the Art Ecosystem

RFC Collection: Transcending established boundaries to create a new artistic ecosystem Driving Force: Expanding the Art Ecosystem

Star Crossed - Audiovisual Art Driving Force: Expanding the Art Ecosystem



Glitching the System DIGITAL DISOBEDIENCE

13.00 ETH Disruptive Speculative Potential

Glitching the System pushes the boundaries of conventional constraint, attacking the systemic structures which benefit one group over another in terms of financial flows, artistic sovereignty and narrow definitions of value and legitimacy.

The focus here is on digital art's potential to help us actively reimagine the art ecosystem and resultantly, how we interact, work, understand, know and connect with each other. That is to say, it's transformative potential is in its reimagining of the social, cultural and economic systems of possibility through the lens of art.

Current Bid (€) 14 SCANS

Studio Manifold: Your contract, Your rules. Driving Force: Artistic Sovereignty

The New Art Economy Driving Force: New Rules for a New Economy

ScanOps Driving Force: Value Production + Value Extraction

Have NFTs delivered on their promise? Driving Force: Web3's failed promise of emancipation

aura.lol manifestation NFT Driving Force: Digital-native value mechanisms

Art World as a shifting multiple goal coalition Driving Force: Digital Gatekeepers

It's a movement, not a moment. Driving Force: New Rules for a New Economy

Oncyber.io - DIY Art Gallery Curation Driving Force: Scaleable Curation + Discovery

Workers Leaving the Googleplex on Vimeo Driving Force: Value Production + Value Extraction

Extractive capitalism - The ecological cost of crypto art Driving Force: Value Production + Value Extraction

NFT Trader Exploiter messages NFT owners on Etherscan Driving Force: Security + Authenticity

Quentin Tarantino May Be Getting a Raw NFT Deal Driving Forces: Artistic Sovereignty

Are major NFT collectors mostly comprised of a small group of whales? Driving Force: The Longtail of Artists

Arts Workers of Color Riddled by Student Loan Debt Driving Force: Value Production + Value Extraction



Existential Crisis THE ROLE + DEFINITION OF ART

6.00 ETH Disruptive Speculative Potential

The current existential crisis within art extends across definitions of art, the economic vs civic role of art in society and how we think about technology's role in advancing (or reducing) art's potential societal and economic value.

The current existential crisis within art extends across definitions of art, the economic vs civic role of art in society and how we think about technology's role in advancing (or reducing) art's potential societal and economic value.

Current Bid (€) 7 SCANS

Social capital performs the same function in such networks as financial capital for markets Driving Force: Reputation Signals + Network Effect

It's crazy that this now feels almost like painting to me Driving Force: Expanding the Art Ecosystem

In an era of unsustainable growth, what exactly is art? Driving Force: Open Access Imagination

The AI Artwork of the Future - Dream by WOMBO Driving Force: Expanding the Art Ecosystem

Art for UBI Driving Force: A Living Wage

These 'AI Artists' don't want to ape existing art -- they want to create something new entirely. Driving Force: Expanding the Art Ecosystem

Design at the speed of thought Driving Force: A Product by any other name



Artivism IMAGINATION INFRASTRUCTURE FOR POSITIVE HUMAN FUTURES

2.00 ETH Disruptive Speculative Potential

The rise in SMART technology and the deep global commitment to 'creative cities' underpins our desire to shift toward healthy, positive, sustainable human futures.

Art will become a critical agent in the preservation and challenging of inclusive cultural memory. Critical to these future possibilities is the debate around universal basic income for artists, and the emerging role of art as civic infrastructure for the imagination.

Current Bid (€) 11 SCANS

A universal basic income for artists? US cities are trying it. Driving Force: A Living Wage

55 new cities join the UNESCO Creative Cities Network Driving Force: Smart Creative Cities

The FutureMuseum Project: Add Your Voice to the Future of Museums Driving Force: Digital-native value mechanisms

The Endless Summer: How Digital Art Urges for New Ecologies Driving Force: Open Access Imagination

Working Artists and the Greater Economy Driving Force: A Living Wage

Imagination Activism Driving Force: Open Access Social Change

Ukrainian artists turn to NFTs to tell their stories Driving Force: Open Access Imagination

Art for Radical Ecologies Manifesto Driving Forces: Open Access Social Change

Could Australia try a basic income for artists? Driving Force: A Living Wage

Striving for the future you want to see in the present Driving Force: Open Access Imagination

The Critical Competency Needed for the Future Driving Force: Smart Creative Cities



TENSIONS + TRANSFORMATIONS

SCANNING

[Emerging Issues]

Web3's Promise of Emancipation has Failed

The early days of the digital-native art system were web3 centric - community, decentralised power + value, and increased autonomy for actors within the system. The introduction of 'outsiders' to the system (galleries, VCs), swiftly leveraged both artists and artwork as speculative investments - promptly activated the same neoliberalism model within the digital space, that artists had been navigating in the physical world for decades.

🔥 Issue: Web3's promise of emancipation has failed to deliver for the majority of digital artists.

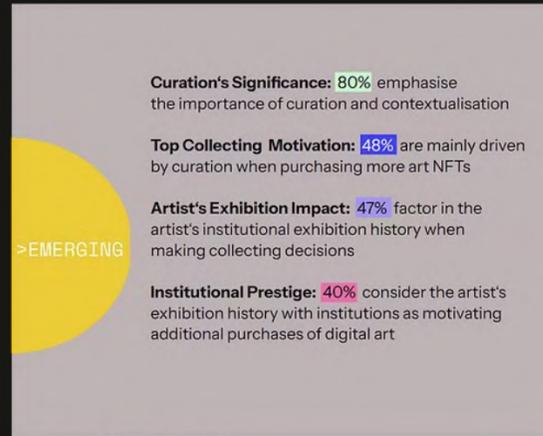
The Digital Deaccession of Museum Collections

As museums seek to enter the digital space, many are experimenting with different modes of attention and value capture. Whilst some museums such as the [Whitworth Museum](#) have launched their own purpose-created NFT artworks others such as Italy's [Uffizi Gallery](#) have minted singular high value NFTs of critical artworks. This hasty digital deaccession of key artworks (whilst legally does not confer ownership of the principle artwork or rights to its reproduction digitally in any way) highlights a critical misunderstanding of the 'social and cultural value' of NFT ownership. Should someone be allowed to own the principal NFT for a core museum artwork? Is it legitimate that any one person should own the digital NFT expression of something so culturally significant?

🔥 Issue: What if . . . the cryptoart ecosystem functioned to reinforce historical power + access constraints?

The Digital Displacement of Digital-Native Galleries

As more and more physical galleries move online (fuelled initially by Covid lockdowns) but continuing at a cracking pace - will we see the digital displacement of smaller galleries (both online and off) as larger institutions buy up bandwidth and eyeballs in a bid to remain relevant across both ecosystems?



2023 Art+Tech Report

The Invisible Long Tail of Digital Artists

Digital Collectors continue to emphasise the importance of curation and visible exhibition history as key. Furthermore, high value collectors such as [Pablo Fraile](#) suggest that within major digital art collections there is a significant overlap of digital artists being collected which suggests there is a whole long tail of artists struggling for visibility within the online art space. Therefore a key challenge emerging for the digital art ecosystem is how best to catalyse scalable discovery and curation.

🔥 Issue: Scaleable curation + discovery is key to leveraging the network effects of a digital ecosystem

Online Metaverse Galleries Enable Collectors To Curate

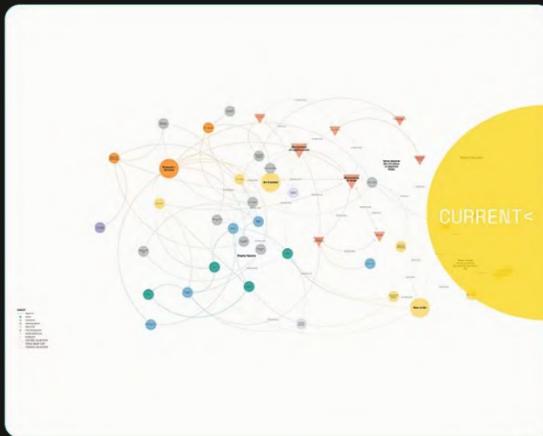
Online market spaces like [oncyber.io](#) enable collectors and artists to curate their own shows and showcase their collections in a 3D virtual gallery within the metaverse. You could be forgiven for dismissing any metaverse representation of a real-world space as insignificant, but [oncyber.io](#) has attracted some of the biggest digital art collectors and is considered an important part of the digital art ecosystem. It's also giving rise to a new generation of 'digital tastemakers' who curate their own collections and attract fans who follow their art purchases closely. Whether physical art galleries will make a move on this space or the curators within it, remains to be seen but it is fast becoming a 'hotspot' of digital art activity.

🔥 Issue: What digital-native mechanism enables more equitable visibility + discovery for all artists?

Digital-native critics argue artists *could* prioritise abundance over scarcity

There's no limit to the things you can create digitally - you're not buying canvases or spending money on materials, crypto art by its very nature is unlimited. The idea of forcing scarcity is a value constraint of the neoliberalist art system, the value transfer mechanism of a capitalist market system.

🔥 Issue: Is scarcity fundamental to a functioning art economy?



China puts limits on cultural relic NFTs



IF IT LOOKS LIKE A NEOLIBERAL SYSTEM . . .

The neoliberalisation of the arts seeks to frame art, creativity and our cultures in strictly economic terms.

>CURRENT

FUTURING

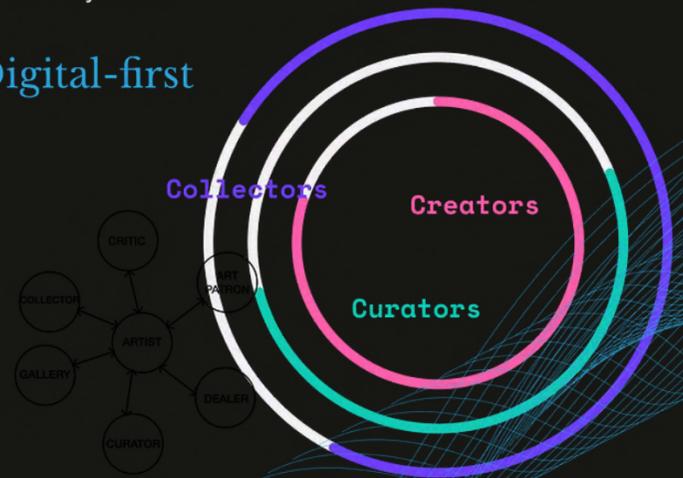
[System Dynamics]

The Early Digital-Native Art Landscape

Network Effects of Creator + Collector Ecosystems

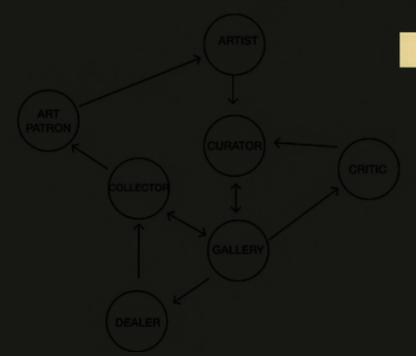
In the early days of the digital-native art economy, a large proportion of the digital art community identified as creators, collectors and curators. Artist sales of digital art often led to further dollars being invested within community art ecosystems.

Digital-first



Community-orientated model

The Traditional Art Landscape



Market-orientated model

Open-access

Abundance over Scarcity

Validation + Legitimacy is Context-Specific

The Creator Network Economy values the discovery, curation, surfacing + collecting along with context and community-specific value.

ACCESS

LEGITIMACY

As more outsiders enter the digital art space (institutions, venture capitalists) we see the transferring of art-as-wealth-asset mechanisms emerging in the art ecosystem.

VALUE MECHANISMS

Community-driven

AI + Generative Art

ART AS PRACTICE

An Emerging Market System

Language such as NFT "drops" also functions to suggest Art can be *quick* and is suggestive of a commercial cycle even if utilised within artistic / community contexts.

DIGITAL-FIRST ART
Art as Utility

Market-driven

Art as Asset
MAINSTREAM DIGITAL ART

Scarcity-driven

Tastemakers + Gatekeepers

Gatekeepers

In the physical art world museums and galleries act as gatekeepers performing a critical function in the selection, exhibition and preservation of artworks.

Legitimizing Forces

This reinforcing system functions to create, attribute and maintain art-as-asset values.

Scarcity as Value

Mechanism
Forced scarcity is a value transfer mechanism of the capitalist market system.

The Mainstream Art World

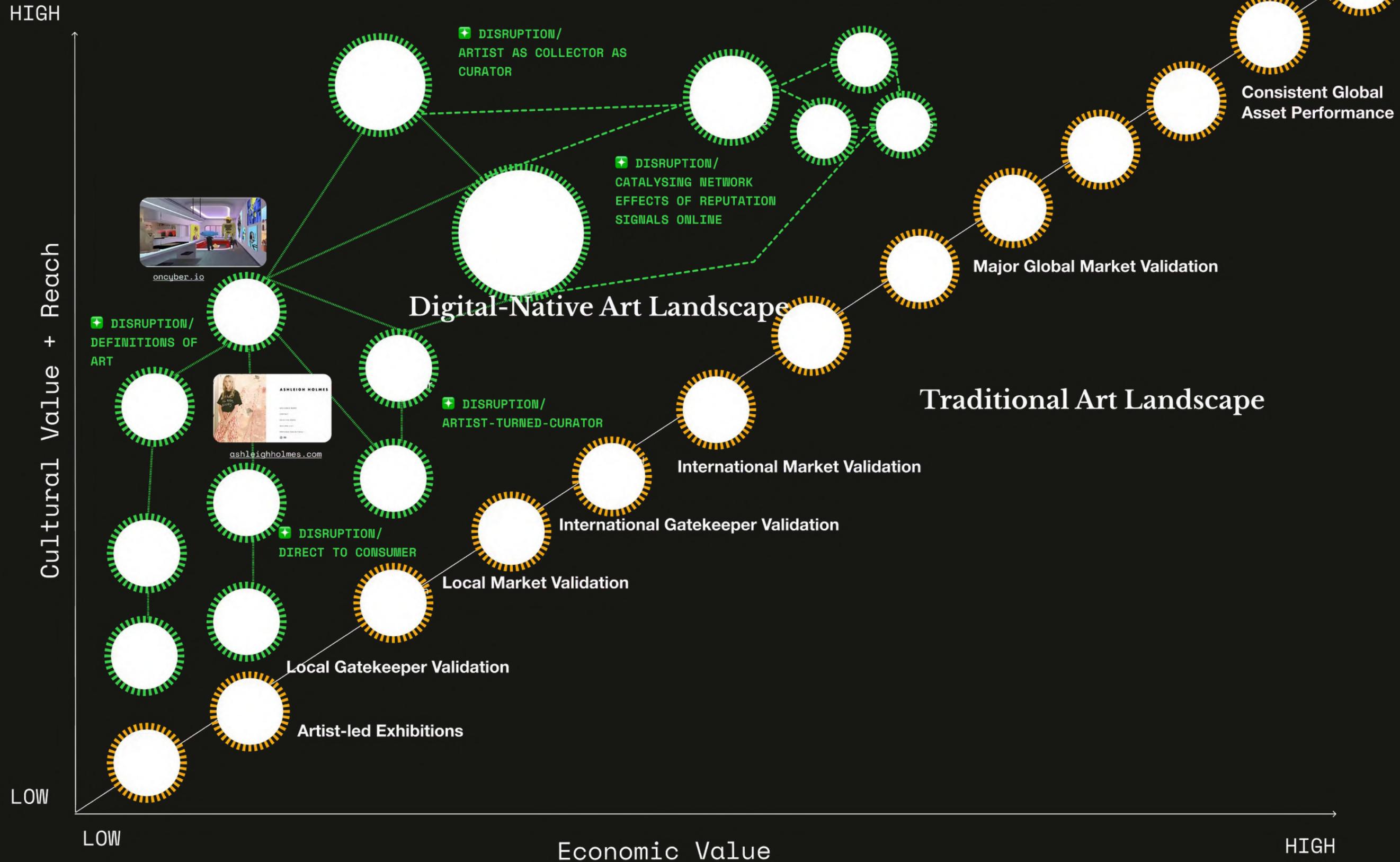
has taken advantage of digital technologies and applied them within their own economic system

CHANGING SYSTEM DYNAMICS

Adapted from 'The Artist Career Trajectory'

FUTURING

[System Dynamics]



INPUTS

CAUSAL LAYERED ANALYSIS + SCIFI STORY BLOCKS

SPECULATIVE STORY MAP

[CLA + Story Blocks]

World: Set in the city of Nova Elysium, the art capital of Terraward. Home to the Urban Artistic Imaginers.

Main Character: CypherNexus. The Creative Infrastructure Artist for transformative signals of urban change within the ImagiNex governing network.

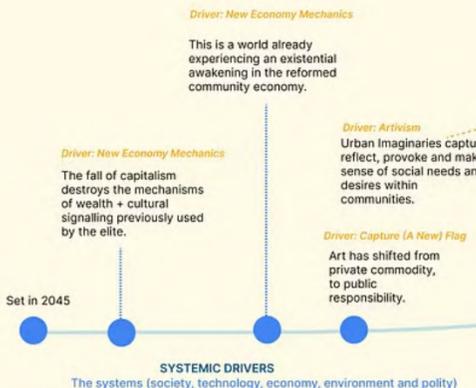
PREFERRED FUTURE

The Desired Future

Designing Tomorrow: The Rise of the Urban Engineers

Art is infrastructure for the imagination. It is free; a civic right that cannot be sold. For the first time ever, art truly is priceless.

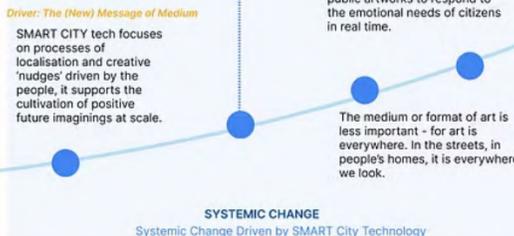
Building The World



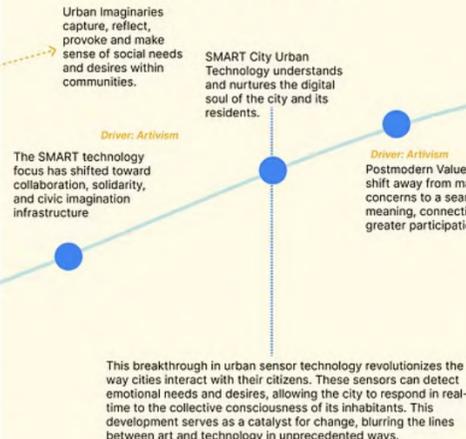
Technology Inflection Point

SMART Urban Technology enables artworks to be spread across the city in every corner - a public service of creative comfort and inspiration.

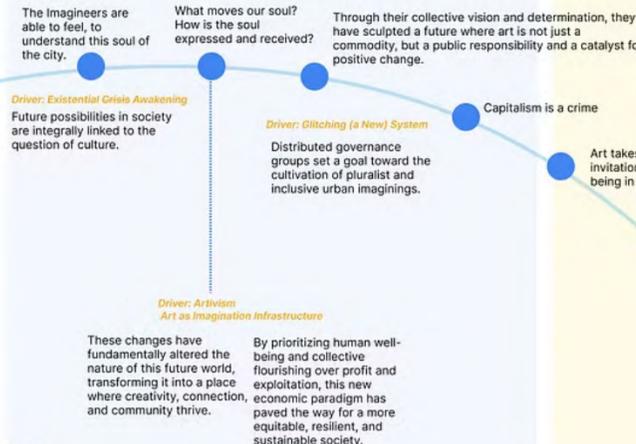
SMART CITIES provide the infrastructure to make the invisible cultural forces (through Art amongst other things) more visible and tangible



Ramifications



Human Inflection Point



What have we learned?



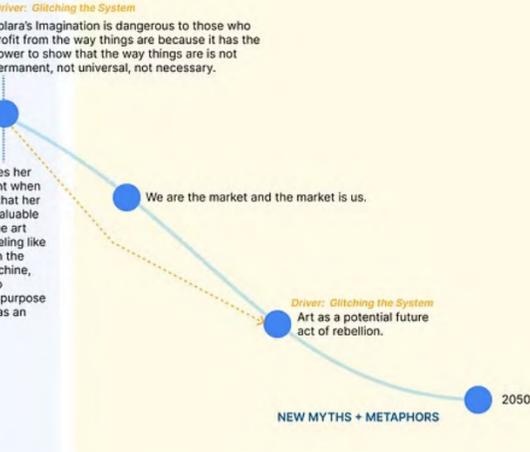
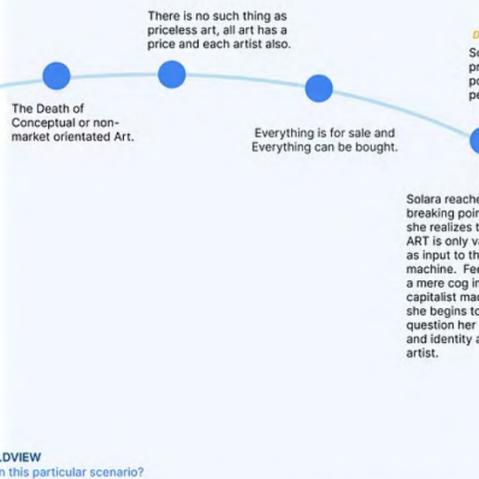
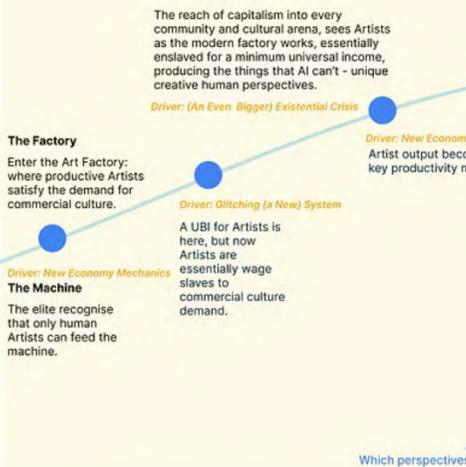
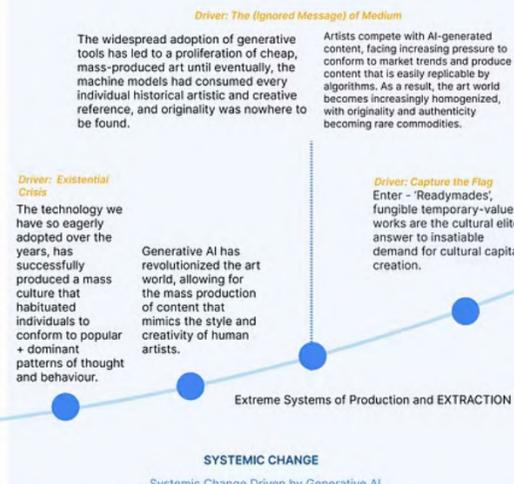
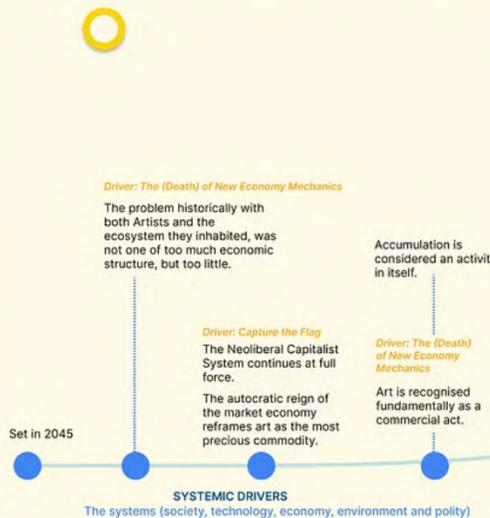
DISOWNED FUTURE

Rejecting the Future we don't want

READYMADE : Welcome to the (SM)ART Factory

In Capitalism there is no such thing as priceless art. Every piece of art has a price. Each artist also.

World: Capitalism. The World as Market Economy
Main Character: Solara Finch. BitBrusher at the Art Factory.



INTEGRATED FUTURE

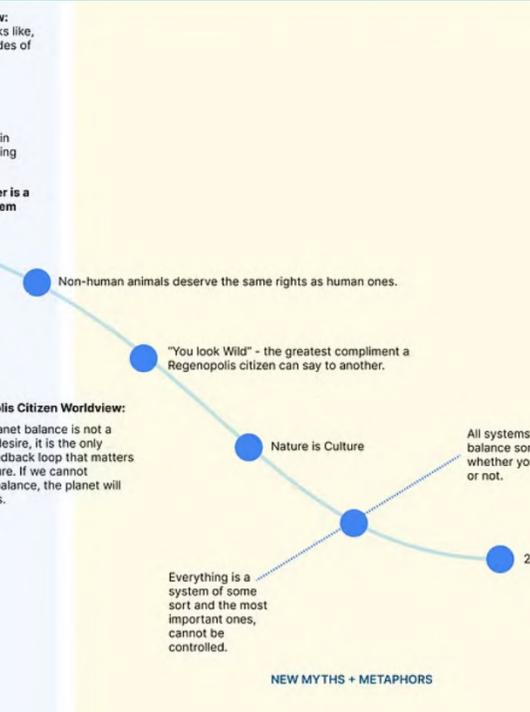
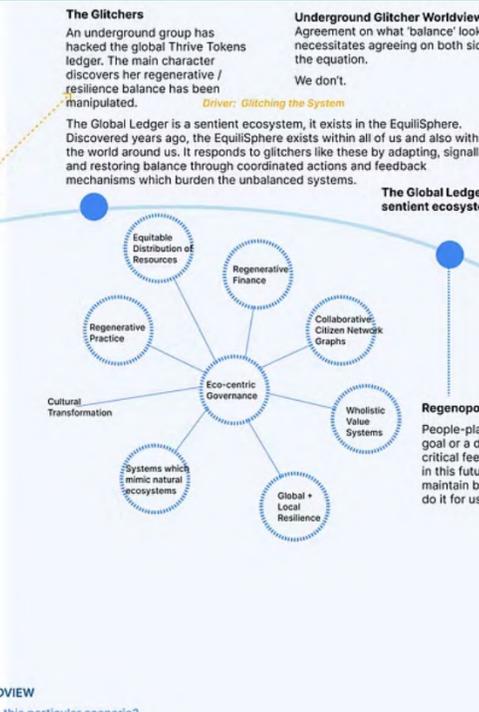
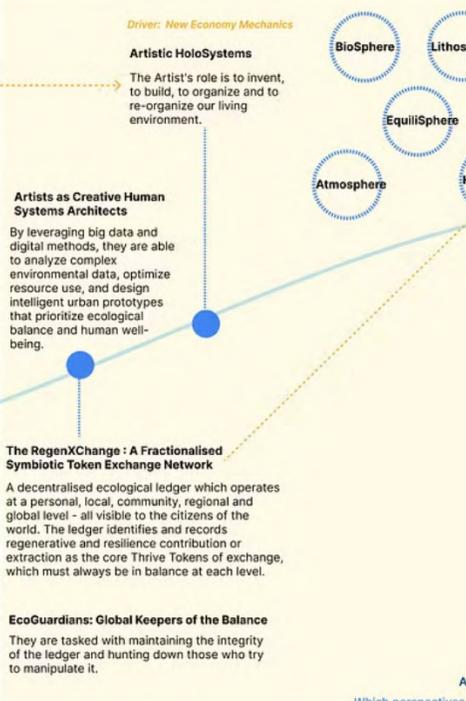
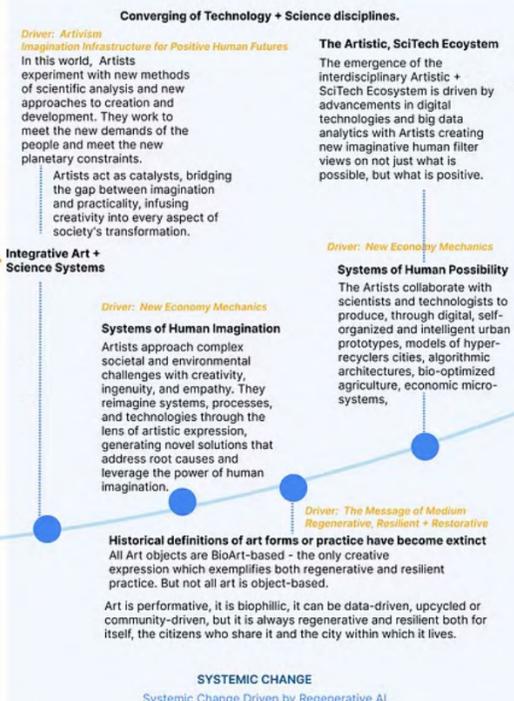
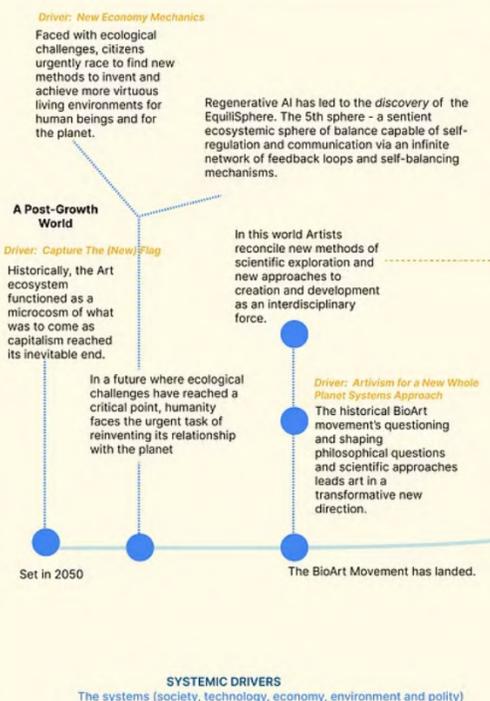
Unifying the Preferred and Disowned Futures

The Regenerative Renaissance

All systems find balance, whether you like it or not. But no matter how balanced the ledger, there will always be those who seek to put themselves first.

World: Regenopolis.
From Resilient Roots to Regenerative Horizons.

Main Character: Synthia Artisanne
Artistic Systems Creator.



UH SCIFI PRESENTS

THREE FUTURES

The Future of Art in a Post-Digital World.

01

PREFERRED FUTURE

DESIGNING TOMORROW: THE RISE OF THE URBAN IMAGINEERS

Art is infrastructure for the imagination. It is free; a civic right that cannot be sold. For the first time ever, art truly is priceless.

02

DISOWNED FUTURE

READYMADE: WELCOME TO THE (SM)ART FACTORY

In Capitalium there is no such thing as priceless art. Every piece of art has a price. Each artist also.

03

INTEGRATED FUTURE

THE REGENERATIVE RENAISSANCE

All systems seek balance, whether you like it or not. But no matter how balanced the ledger, there will always be those who seek to put themselves first.

PREFERRED FUTURE / THE RISE OF THE URBAN ARTISTIC IMAGINEERS

Art is infrastructure for the imagination. It is free; a civic right that cannot be sold. For the first time ever, art truly is priceless.

The light nodes along the street emit a small whirr as their solar batteries kick in, the sun is starting to set. Cypher Nexus stops at a water fountain and drinks in the cool water, grateful that the water temperature responds to the climate, as he wipes the sweat from his face. The day has been hot and whilst Nova Elysium might be a smart city, it's still overcrowded and on days like today, the extreme weather makes it hard to breathe.

He looks up and down the street, shines his quantum torch along the walls and spots another glow-wave glyph up ahead. He turns up the laneway and hurries on. Eventually he finds the ImagiNex governance meeting and slips in. He has worked with this distributed network of Urban Artist Imagineers forever. Their motto is "Artists for the Good of Public Imagination" or something like that. Cypher can never remember the exact wording besides, who cares anyway.

The streets are lined with interactive displays, sculptures, and murals that represent the community imaginings of Nova Elysium's citizens. A project they completed many years ago.

Cypher is exhausted; his nutrient panel has been broken for days and his health is starting to suffer. Tonight they are meeting to discuss EmotiSense and despite the lingering heat in the twilight air from last week's Thermoblaze, the second this month he notices, Cypher is excited.

As the art capital of Terraward, Nova Elysium has led the way with artistic SMART City technology. Led by artist group ImagiNex, the advanced urban sensor networks control digital art installations, interactive displays, and augmented artworks throughout the city, turning every corner into an ephemeral canvas. It makes Cypher feel even more tired just thinking about the scale of that project.

The meeting has already started. The imagineers are huddled over a new dashboard talking excitedly. They've been experimenting with new methods to develop the digital soul of the city. A translocal collaboration with human-centred technologists, together they developed EmotiSense - a protocol to utilise sensors to capture and respond to the emotional needs of Nova Elysium's citizens. The urban sensor networks are able to detect subtle shifts in mood and sentiment, allowing for real-time adjustments to Nova Elysium's creative infrastructure and amenities.

The city's artworks will be modulated to reflect and respond to signals from the urban sensor networks which are embedded in every public infrastructure, on every street and outside every building.

YEAR / 2045

LOCATION / DOWNTOWN IN THE CITY OF NOVA ELYSIUM

PLOT FOCUS / CYPHER NEXUS, ARTISTIC IMAGINEER

THE RISE OF THE URBAN ARTISTIC IMAGINEERS

They will experiment with the installation of new creative concepts of life - artistic imaginings of possible futures. The EmotiSense protocol will enable the city to respond in real-time to the collective consciousness of its inhabitants. To support the soul.

Cypher's role has been to manage the infrastructure protocol which will help to make the invisible cultural and emotional energy, more visible and tangible.

Through their collective efforts, Cypher and the Urban Imagineers' EmotiSense protocol has empowered communities to reclaim ownership of their public spaces and shape their own futures. 2050 is turning out to be a good year.

Responsive creative experiences now line the city's streets; changing constantly in colour, shape and substance, depending on the sensory data flows. The urban landscape has been transformed into a living canvas of expression and connection. A vibrant tapestry of art and technology. Through their collective visioning and determination, the Imagineers have sculpted a future where art is not just a commodity, but a public responsibility and a catalyst for positive change.

Imagining the future is how Nova Elysium citizens interpret the world around them now. By accessing the future visions that citizens have today, through artistic emotionally resonant mediums, citizens have been able to form, shape and articulate new understandings of their own futures.

This intersection of art, empathy, and SMART technology has transformed Nova Elysium. Cypher gathers with the crowd to celebrate their shared humanity, to reflect on the journey that brought them here and the infinite possibilities of tomorrow.

He is still tired. And after the celebrations, Cypher falls into bed. Within seconds of activating his dream chronometre, Cypher falls into the deepest and most satisfying sleep he has had in a long time.

YEAR / 2045

LOCATION / IMAGINEX URBAN ARTIST IMAGINEER MEETING

PLOT FOCUS / IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EMOTISENSE PROTOCOL

DISOWNED FUTURE / Welcome to the (SM)Art Factory

In Capitalium there is no such thing as priceless art. Every piece of art has a price. Each artist also.

In Capitalium, the conjoining of commerce and culture is core. The autocratic reign of the market economy has ensured that the free market is no longer a tool, it underpins the entire society within which we exist. We are the market and the market is us.

After only five years of global generative tool usage, the global creative well was dry. The widespread adoption of generative tools led to a proliferation of cheap, mass-produced art until eventually, the machine models had consumed every individual historical artistic and creative reference, and originality was nowhere to be found.

The technology we had so eagerly adopted in the past, produced a mass culture that habituated individuals to conform to the dominant patterns of thought and behaviour. Everyone that is, except the OmniSovereigns. Somehow this class of elites have maintained their own individuality, at great cost to the rest of humanity. Then came the Readymades.

The art ecosystem is no longer governed by any non-market value. In Capitalium everything is for sale and everything can be bought. There are no moral limits to what money can buy. The reach of capitalism extends into every community and cultural arena, seeing artists as modern factory workers, enslaved for a minimum universal income, producing the one thing that AI can't - genuinely unique human creativity, in the form of Readymades.

'Readymades' are the OmniSovereign's most powerful processing requirement. Unlike historical artwork, 'Readymades' are 100% fungible, but the elite pay high token prices to have the first copy, and even more to delay the inevitable release of the next thousand copies. Even now, they refuse to accept the mechanics of their own making - that no matter how early they buy, they will only be first for a time.

/READYMADE

READYMADES

In Capitalium art workers are neither autonomous nor free. The historical problem with both artists and the ecosystem they inhabited, was not one of too much economic structure, but too little. Readymades locate culture at the heart of commerce.

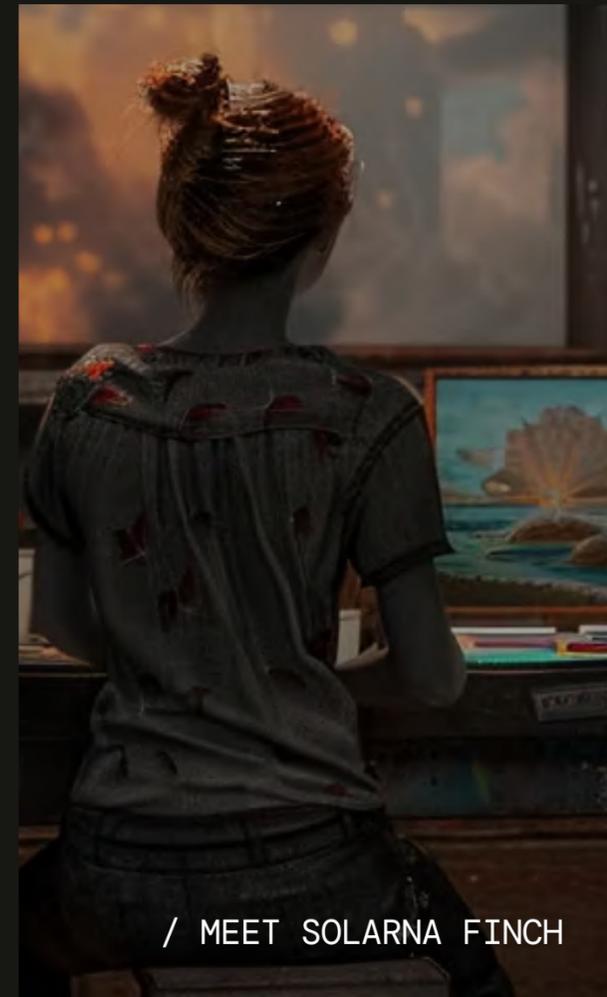
Artworkers are no longer revered as visionaries but are instead shut away in art factories, forced to churn out Readymades to satisfy the insatiable demands of the market. And even here at the lowest level of existence, amongst the Artiforge Operators, class divisions remain.

The Art Engineers are the highest ranking Artiforge Operators, they create original and conceptually complex Readymades for the machines. Some of their Readymades are sold to the OmniSovereigns, who pay a monthly subscription for fleeting access to original work.

The BitBrushers create new everyday Readymades solely to feed the DreamForge machine. The Readymades are original but far from complex. In fact, the time allocated to BitBrushers per Readymade is less than 15 minutes.

It is here that we meet Solara Finch. Solara is a BitBrusher. She cuts a lonely figure hunched over the work desk, paint brush in hand. Across the aisle, she can hear the DreamForge machines running night and day, spitting out artwork by the second. She dare not look up for even now, her Human Capital Efficiency score is the lowest in the factory. A direct result of her inability to separate the need to create, from the flashing score that sits above her station. She knows she can leave anytime she wants, but only if she gives up her Universal Livelihood Allocation (ULA). Not that anyone could find much that was lively about her existence.

Her father, a highly intelligent man was also a BitBrusher. Given another time or place, he would have been a creative force to be reckoned with, but in Capitalium he kept his head down and his family fed. One night after a few too many Binary Brews, he told Solara the story of Karl Marx's Das Capital, the quote is embedded in the codeblock of her mind "in handicrafts and manufacturing the workman makes use of a tool, in the factory, the machine makes use of the workman". Solara thought about her father and that conversation from time to time, something about it didn't compute.

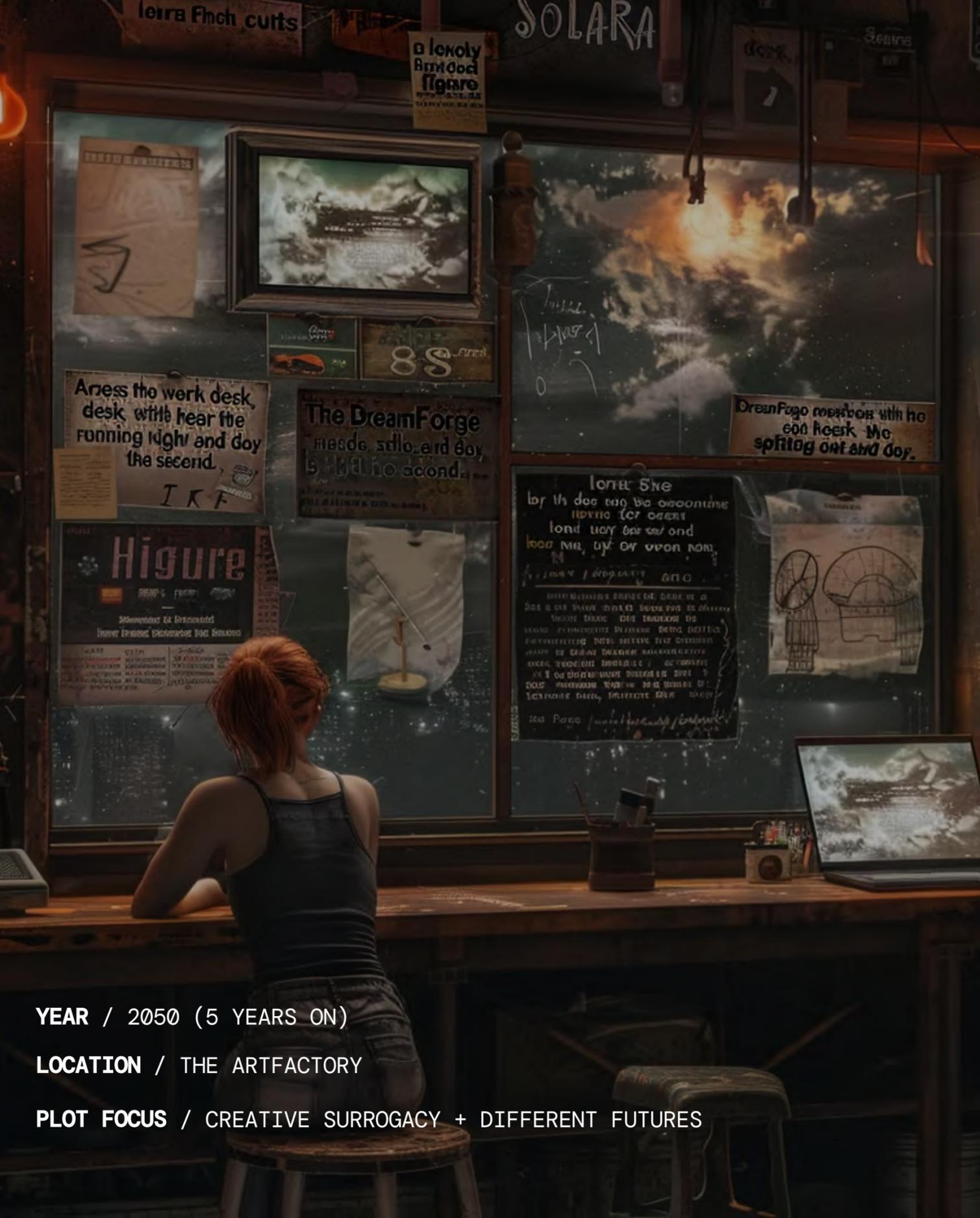


YEAR / 2045

LOCATION / THE ART FACTORY

PLOT FOCUS / THE ARTIFORGE OPERATORS

/ MEET SOLARNA FINCH



READYMADES

As time goes on, new systems of production and extraction emerge, as future art workers are identified through DNA sampling and data harvesting via routine collection swabs at birth

Scientists are working to find the creativity gene within DNA strands from those who work at the art factories in a bid to ensure a steady stream of human capital.

Solara is a senior BitBrusher now. Her father would be proud. She has Readymades down to a fine art, producing three in every timeblock. She knows to keep her imagination hidden, for it is dangerous to those who profit from the way things are.

But in the quiet moments between strokes of her brush, in the shadows of Capitalium's towering art factory, hunched over her work desk . . . Solara begins to imagine a different future.

Art as a potential future act of rebellion.

YEAR / 2050 (5 YEARS ON)

LOCATION / THE ARTFACTORY

PLOT FOCUS / CREATIVE SURROGACY + DIFFERENT FUTURES

AN INTEGRATED FUTURE

The Regenerative Renaissance

Artistic Coefficient = transformation potential X imagination

In 2035 Regenerative AI led to the discovery of the EquiliSphere; the 5th sphere- which finally took its place in human history alongside the bio, litho, atmos and hydrospheres.

The EquiliSphere is a sentient ecosystemic sphere of balance, capable of self-regulation and communication via an infinite network of feedback loops and self-balancing mechanisms. Ironic that it took years of technology to find something that was there all along.

The converging of SciTech and subsequent collaboration with Artistic Systems Architects is really what led to the discovery. The siloed academic views of the world made it virtually invisible because it exists in the world around us, and it's also *inside* us. It does not manage or measure any metric, it cannot be counted or restored or damaged or healed. It is simply an imprint of all animals (human + non-human) and reflects the animal-planet balance. When that balance is disrupted, the Equilisphere triggers cascading perturbations throughout the systems of the planet in an attempt to restore stability.

This is why historically human animals (or people as they were once called), experienced extreme weather and rapid evolutionary shifts - in the history of the world, these disruptions represented short-term damages which would ultimately counteract human-animals' impact on the natural world and reconcile the much needed balance. We know that now.

Synthia Artisanne presses her thumb to the scanpad and tries again. This is the third time her ThriveToken ledger is out of balance. Right after the discovery of the Equilisphere, a decentralised group of economic activists set up *The RegenXChange* - a Fractionalised Symbiotic Token Exchange Network.

The RegenXChange is a decentralised omnisphere ledger which operates at a personal, local, community, regional and global level - all visible to the citizens of the world. The ledger identifies and records regenerative and resilience contribution or extraction, exchanged via ThriveTokens, which must always be in balance at each level. Especially the personal.

But Synthia Artisanne's ThriveToken ledger has been out of balance three times this week. Comfortable with uncertainty and confident in self-sustaining systems, she notes the error and sets up an XR call with the EcoGuardians : The Global Keepers of the Balance. Something must be amiss in my own contributions or extractions she muses.

/FIFTHSPHERE

All systems find balance, whether you like it or not.



YEAR / 2050

LOCATION / HOME IMAGINATION STUDIO

PLOT FOCUS / MEETING SYNTHIA ARTISANNE

The Regenerative Renaissance

Synthia has been working with the SciTech Institute for 10 years now. Her job is all about balance, which is what makes this error so unusual.

Previously a BioArtist, Synthia joined the Institute during the formation of the Systems of Human Imagination Project. Only ten citizens were selected from each global region and she was flattered to be invited to participate in such a critical task force. The task force is made up of both creative artistic systems architects and SciTech experts; their role to date has been to produce, through digital, self-organized and intelligent urban prototypes, models of hyper-regenerative cities, algorithmic architectures, bio-optimized agriculture and balanced token micro-systems.

Hyper-balanced Intuitive System Digital Artist Modellers (HISDAM) is how citizens often refer to them. Which has never quite rolled off the tongue for Synthia, no matter how many times she hears it.

Her screen flashes to life as an EcoGuardian appears suddenly. She can see his community location must be quite far from Regenopolis, as the light looks different behind him and his Equimeter registers a slightly higher frequency on screen.

Synthia explains the error and the Guardian shakes his head. "It's the Glitchers" he explains. The Glitchers are a global underground group which hacked the global ThriveTokens ledger some years ago. They haven't been heard of in some time, but the Guardians have been noticing self-balancing adjustments within the Equilisphere across the Northern regions of the world.

"It's most likely the reason for your regenerative + resilience ledger instability" he explains. "Animal-planet balance is not just our desire or goal as Keepers, it is a collective global human-critical mission. It is the only critical feedback loop that matters. If we cannot maintain balance within the Equilisphere, the planet will do it for us".

They talk awhile longer and then Synthia waves her hand to signal the call's end. She leans forward on her scanner board and rests her head in her hands. She knows what must come next.

While the Guardians follow the adapting nodes in the Equilisphere's network map to try and locate the Glitchers activity pattern, she puts out a call to the Human Imagination Taskforce. A new map of possibilities will be the first step in engaging citizens to boost their regenerative + resilience balances towards the natural earth in support of this systemic imbalance. And it needs to happen now. Too much imbalance will see the return of extreme weather patterns, ecological disruption and global waves of ecosystem degradation. No matter how balanced the ledger, there will always be those who seek to put themselves first.

6 STEPS TOWARD BUILDING AN URBAN FUTURE FOR ART IN A POST-DIGITAL WORLD

THE STEPPING STONES:

The six steps toward the future provide a lens through which to view both the future role of art in urban cities, and also artistic activations to explore these opportunities in the near future.

Given the explorative and creative nature of both this project and the client who commissioned it; the strategic options are presented as a series of activation options, near-term and future project prompts and fertile areas for further discovery.

NEW MECHANISMS OF MEANING

Q1

How might collaborations between science and tech help us discover not just what collaborative futures are possible, but what are positive?

FOR IMAGINED FUTURES

Q2

How can the artist-as-cultural-steward help citizens to reimagine a more equitable, sustainable and community-focused society?

SUPPORTED BY CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Q3

How could web3 infrastructure transfer to the wider art / art-adjacent, post-digital world?

INTENTIONALLY REDESIGNED

Q4

How might Art make the invisible cultural forces which connect us to a city, more visible?

TO HABITUATE BEHAVIOURS

Q5

How could your goals be baked into the global frameworks of human-centric sustainable visions for digital / creative / SMART cities?

OF PRODUCTIVE RESISTANCE

Q6

How do we begin the process of shaping positive human city systems?

A NEW CULTURAL OPERATING SYSTEM

In a post-digital world, culture is emergent and springs up within open-ended creative ecosystems. It grows like wildflowers, springing up between cracks in the pavement. Little urban pockets of resistance that cannot be controlled.

We are fast reaching the threshold of command and control mechanisms in the art ecosystem, education, business and even in government. We need new mechanisms of value and meaning, new ways to understand each other and new ways of being that sit lightly on the earth.

Web3, game technologies and metaverse experiences are the closest thing we have to infrastructure of the future. Distributed governance systems, decentralised value signalling and social graphs, fractionalised ownership, peer-to-peer reputation signalling protocols and compensatory networks.

These New Economy Mechanics help us to reframe the art ecosystem as both a future-forward community of practice and an imagination canvas.

However our ideas about cities of the future and the infrastructure that accompany them continue to be constrained by a capitalist mindset. SMART city technology continues to be viewed through an instrumentalist lens, driven by functionality that assumes the sum of the parts will equal the whole. More problematically, we define infrastructure as investment in roads and buildings, in constructed 'things', which positions governing forces as 'infrastructure project managers'.

Important yes, but not the whole picture. Not by a long shot.

The status quo sees cultural institutions focused more on fundraising than creative production, commercialising their assets and access just to survive. And yet in a time of global crisis, it is Art that has the power to transform not only physical spaces but the *hearts and minds* of people. Imagining the future is how we interpret the world around us - how might Art be the collective imagination infrastructure for a more equitable human society?