



Press release

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Larva Labs, collective founded in 2005,
composed of Matt Hall and John Watkinson,
CryptoPunk # 110, 2017
NFT (image on the block-chain).
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Blockchains and NFT : the Centre Pompidou's first acquisitions

The Centre Pompidou has acquired a set of works dealing with the relations between blockchains and artistic creation, including its first NFTs.

This is the first acquisition of a set of NFTs by a French public institution, and the first on such a scale by an institution dedicated to modern and contemporary art.

This acquisition forms part of the Musée national d'art moderne's strategy, since its inception, to support artists as they seek to master new means of creation. It is the result of joint work with the scientific and administrative teams of the Ministry for Culture. On 18 January 2023, 18 projects by 13 French and international artists were thus selected by the acquisitions committee of the Musée national d'art moderne – Centre Pompidou, and joined the collection by donation or by purchase. These works were produced by a variety of practices and cultures: crypto art, the plastic arts, net art and generative art. They reflect the astonishing wealth of the forms of artistic creation associated with blockchains and the variety of positions adopted by artists with regard to this phenomenon.

Artists and works selected :

Aaajiao (*NFTs_aaajiao*), **Emilie Brout et Maxime Marion** (*Nakamoto (The Proof)*), **Claude Closky** (*NFT*), **Fred Forest** (*NFT-Archeology*), **John Gerrard** (*Petro National (Nigeria), Smoke Hands (dark)*), **Agnieszka Kurant** (*Sentimentite-Mt. Gox. Hack*), **Jonas Lund** (*Smart Burn Contract (Hoarder)*), **Larva Labs** (*CryptoPunk #110, Autoglyph #25*), **Jill Magid** (*Hand-hacked Bouquet 1*), **Sarah Meyohas** (*Bitchcoin, Cloud of Petals*), **Robness** (*Bitcoin, Dorian Generatives*), **Rafael Rozendaal** (*Horizon 31, Horizon 59, Horizon 73*), **John F. Simon Jr** (*Every Icon #419*).



Spotlight on current artistic practices around blockchains

Blockchains have had a considerable impact on the digital art ecosystem, both in terms of the production and circulation of artworks. The research conducted by the Musée national d'art moderne into this phenomenon has enabled it to develop an ambitious acquisition project for the "new media" collection, dedicated since the creation of the Centre Pompidou in 1977 to observing the artistic applications of emerging technologies.

The idea is not so much to focus on the cultural phenomenon of "collectibles", collections of images sold by NFT, as to explore the most daring creative uses of these technologies, prompting an original study of the ecosystem of the crypto-economy and its impact on the definitions and contours of artworks, creators, collections and the receiving public.

This project thus aims primarily at a selective approach in the tradition of major developments in the history of art which, since the 20th century, have taken on a conceptual dimension in order to engage with the contemporary world and to play a role in it by subverting the commercial uses of both technological and artistic resources. One of the roles of the Centre Pompidou is to focus constant attention on emerging creation and artistic experimentation. With its historical perspective, the Musée national d'art moderne calls for a scientific approach that is both exploratory and selective. The aim is for State collections to include artistic creations which, by virtue of their originality, complexity and critical quality, are of a standard to engage in dialogue with the current and future history of art, over and above the media hype of the market.

Environmental issues

While this requirement is contemporaneous with a slowing down of the speculative phenomenon observed over the last two years, the burgeoning of NFT technology in terms of energy has also been essential to the Centre Pompidou's commitment in this respect. The recent change by the Ethereum blockchain, the most used in the art world, from the energy-intensive *Proof of Work system* to the *Proof of Stake system*, presented by some as being 99% less intensive, was a particularly important signal in this regard.

An acquisition project rooted in a genealogy of the dematerialisation of artworks

Since the inception of the Centre Pompidou, the collection of the Musée national d'art moderne has welcomed art forms which, by virtue of their profoundly innovative character, challenge the habits of a heritage institution in terms of the acquisition, conservation and diffusion of artistic creation.

The "new media" collection has a particular mission to focus on art forms related to emerging technologies. Since the 1970s, this goal has enabled it to bring together a unique body



of artworks ranging from the pioneers of electronic sound and of video (Peter Campus, Joan Jonas, Bruce Nauman, Nam June Paik, Julia Scher, Steina and Woody Vasulka, Bill Viola), to interactive digital works, or works that implement generative technologies. Several generations of explorers with a preference for digital tools are thus already represented in this collection : Zoe Beloff, Claude Closky, Rainer Ganahl, Chris Marker, Mika Tajima, Juha Van Ingen, Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries, and others.

At the same time, the collection of the Musée national d'art moderne is a testament to a tradition of "immaterial" artworks based on certificates and other experimental forms of transaction: ranging from Yves Klein's *Chéquier* (1959) to Tino Sehgal's *This Situation*, a 2007 work acquired in 2010, without the artist leaving any material trace of the transaction, in accordance with the protocol specific to his living practice, which excludes all forms of record. So many works that reflect a genealogy of the dematerialisation and reproducibility of artworks, which is essential for a comprehension of the NFT phenomenon.

Blockchains, NFTs and collection practices

The NFT acronym stands for "non-fungible token". In concrete terms it means a digital token that is stored on a blockchain, or "chain of blocks": a networked data storage technology comparable to a shared, decentralized and encrypted ledger.

Unlike other digital tokens, such as those used for cryptocurrencies, NFTs are not interchangeable – hence their "non-fungible" quality.

This uniqueness explains the specialised usage of NFTs as certificates or deeds of ownership for digital goods, including artworks. When they circulate on the market, NFTs also accommodate automatic management of certain aspects of copyright (including follow-up rights, providing for artists to receive a percentage of the transaction for each sale of the work). For creators, NFTs are also a means of maintaining a more direct relationship with a community of enthusiasts and collectors by liberating them from the traditional players on the art market.

While these tokens can attest to the ownership of an artwork, they are rarely the support of a work, referring in the majority of cases to an externally stored file: we thus speak of "*off-chain*" works. More rarely, they contain all the data that makes up the work, for which they actually constitute a support: we thus speak of "*on-chain*" artworks.



Rendez-vous

Round table

Saturday 8 April 2023, 3pm

Petite salle, level -1

As part of the "video and after" programme, built up from the works in the "new media" collection of the National Museum of Modern Art, a round table discussion entirely dedicated to NFTs was held in the Centre Pompidou on Saturday 8 February. Artists were given pride of place; they reviewed the effects of the development of blockchains on their practice and on the art world in general.

Find more information and the names of the artists to come on centrepompidou.fr.

Presentation of the artworks in the rooms of the Musée national d'art moderne

All the works acquired are to be presented as part of the museum's collection in 2023. The presentation deals with the relationship between artistic experiments and the emergence of Web3 in the last decade, viewed in perspective through the prism of broader artistic issues in the second half of the 20th century. In this respect, the history of conceptual art constitutes a particularly important reference. On the one hand, conceptual art enabled striking progress in the dematerialisation of artworks, particularly in the form of protocols and certification. On the other hand, it has provided enlightening analyses on the mechanisms of the art economy. Exploring the technical specificities of blockchains and getting to grips with the transformations they introduced, the chosen works also perpetuate long-term interrogations in the field of new media, both in terms of the evolution of supports for artworks and in terms of managing their scarcity and their modes of distribution.

In addition, you can find the [article](#) of the online Magazine of the Centre Pompidou.