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NFT: The New FuTure

This exhibition of rare NFTs is a chance to see some of the digital art traded using blockchain technology. Sadly, though, it fails to educate viewers about this new phenomenon, not least about cryptocurrency around blockchain's carbon footprint or recent cases of fraud

Paris Hilton and Blake Kathryn, Rainbow Blue, 2021. Installation view. Photo: Ana Beatriz Chaves

Mary Bavendam
The permanent exhibition from 28 October 2021

by ANA BEATRIZ CHAVES

Visitors to the Modern Contemporary (Mocy) Museum in Barcelona will probably not see NFT: The New FuTure as an exhibition in itself, but as just another permanent section of the newly opened branch of the private museum inaugurated in September in 2021. The small room in which it takes place looks six-sided, with walls covered in black and white tiles and a ceiling with lights arranged using fibonacci technology, which gives physical existence by means of TV screens. All the pieces belong to the same collector, identified as "Ly".

NFTs are tokens that link to a digital asset, stored on a blockchain technology, a decentralised way of making payments with cryptocurrency, in order to make them unique and therefore scarce and valuable. They were born just in 2017, when the so-called CryptoKitties entered a frenzied collectible craze on the ethereum blockchain.

In contrast, and not dedicated to any specific collector, the permanent exhibition Mocy's Masters and including names such as Salvador Dalí, Andy Warhol and Jeff Koons, is a collection of NFTs that aims to be a "representation of the single-after artists producing NFTs – are not likely to be recognized by most visitors. An exception is Paris Hilton, a celebrity who partnered with the American digital artist Blake Kathryn to create the new digital art world.

Hilton, who defines herself as an "OG Crypto Queen" OG, attending the "original crypto" and blockchain, is known for her "Paris Hilton Collection" and has been a long-time fan of big NFT influencers. "Simple Kathryn is NFT for a time you can wear in Fortnite or on your Roblox character," she says on her website.

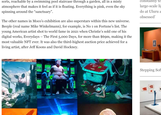
Paris Hilton and Blake Kathryn, Rainbow Blue, 2021. Installation view. Photo: Ana Beatriz Chaves

Rainbow Blue (2021), delivered as an open edition, is a part of a collection named "Simple Kathryn" and combines Hilton's and Kathryn's signature pastel-colored landscapes are meant to work as a therapeutic strategy to escape from the stresses of the real world. Hilton describes Rainbow Blue as an "ethereal escape ... a place of tranquillity and peace". Kathryn's work, which is also included in the metaverse, with a gambling bed, a chandelier and dog statues over an altar of soils, reachable by a swimming pool distance thy change of the seasons, such as a stony atmosphere that makes it feel as if it is floating. Everything is pink, even the sky spanning around the "universe".

The other names in Mocy's exhibition are also superstars within this new universe: Beeple (real name Mike Winkelmann), for example, is No. 1 on Forbes's list. The artist's work, Everydays – The First 5,000 Days, is the most valuable NFT in the digital works, Everydays – The First 5,000 Days, for more than twice, making it the most valuable NFT ever. It was also the third-highest auction price achieved for a living artist, after Jeff Koons and David Hockney.

Beeple's Everydays – Rose, 2020 (detail). First minute video edition of one. Installation view. Photo: Ana Beatriz Chaves

Everydays – Rose (2020), his piece at Mocy, is a reduced and earlier version of the artist's work, which is a digital collage made from 5,000 images, and represents the first minute video in which a composition of Everydays' drawings in different sizes scroll down. The name derives from the fact that Beeple, whose pseudonym comes from the first name of his mother, Rose, has been "drawing every day for years". Rose's lineage is the let about to move. The piece is a parade of colors, monsters and nine-eyed creatures mixed up with pop culture figures such as Pikachu and world leaders, such as the former US president Donald Trump and the South Korea leader Kim Jong-un. While some may find the 3D spectacular scenes crowded with many characters and objects, the Mocy curatorial team considered that visitors have called them exhausting and even panic. Sadly, the artist seems to agree, as he states on his website that "a lot of it kind of blows me", and that "he's working on making it work less everyday".



Daniel Arsham, Eroding and Reforming Bust of Kouros (Blue Vase), 2020. Installation view. Photo: Ana Beatriz Chaves

Another American, Daniel Arsham, is less controversial, perhaps because he comes from the traditional art world. Traditional, though, is not the best word to describe his work, which dissolves / erodes, cross / art's internal limits, mixing sculpture, drawing, installation, film, and, in this case, digital art. Arsham's work, Eroding and Reforming Bust of Kouros (Blue Vase) (2020), the piece at NFT: the New Future, uses cool hues of serenities, hyperstudios and classicism (as he revisits the art from the Roman Empire) all mixed up with archaeological research that he says is fictional.

The work is his first NFT, but it is also a series of previous creations exploring classic sculptures in ruins, where time was already a central topic. It displays a replica of a Greek bust, with a vase, in a pedestal, with a crack in the middle, and a pixelated hole over Vase. It is, as, at the center of a vortexed surrounded by a garden. In this passes, symbolized by characteristic signs of the change of the seasons, such as the leaves of the trees, the vase, and the pedestal, which seem to be in the cyclical cycle of one year in real time. Adds from the pedestal. The decay is observable on the "camera" moves around the piece, showing eroded plaster where colonnade crinkle vines. After the course of a year, the cycle restarts, continuing over and over, for a thousand years. Or, as the artist has said, "for as long as the internet exists". The video on display at Mocy Barcelona is, of course, an extract from the year-long one.

Daniel Arsham, Eroding and Reforming Bust of Kouros (Blue Vase), 2020. Installation view. Photo: Ana Beatriz Chaves

For an artist pretty much devoted to materiality, the piece could seem a fresh start. But the impermanent illusion does not solve the continuity of the confrontation between the past and the future, as well as between time and space, as in the Renaissance, and the ruins of Classicism, and the contemporary Contemporary. The piece provokes the same pulse of boundaries, this time inside the new medium of an NFT, an artwork that modifies over time. Arsham enlisted the help of studio Sin X. Fire and the Tally Gateway platform to bring the idea to reality.

Aisha Hassaj, Time Flies, 2020. Installation view. Photo: Ana Beatriz Chaves.

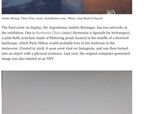
Aisha Hassaj, whose official webpage shows it raining money, is a French-cryptic artist who describes herself as a "Photoshop Pirate", an "NFT Shaikhar" and "Most Notable Unusual Aspects Provider in the Space". The pseudonym reveals her homeland, Saudi Arabia, which explains the use of the image of the sources, such as the Kaaba, in her work. Hassaj's piece, Time Flies, is a "pixel-perfect tribute," she says in an interview published on the website Arsnob. The Time Flies Contest, at Mocy Barcelona, is an effort effects animation after the painting Madame Bouguereau Bouguereau, by William-Adolphe. The piece, which is a GIF, shows a "pixel-perfect" original piece has become the star of a season of transportation the conducts. Moving but arrive as if sliding gears, she makes the vertiage move, at a stop, a bus, a motorcycle, a bicycle, a car, a train, a plane, a rocket, a hot air balloon, and a beam fan-cooling for rays. Then, as if Mocy is passing through a tunnel, as it is the illumination remain but shall. Finally, when the shifts gears again, a dumbbell rolls in sand to bar. And the cycle restarts.

Aisha Hassaj, Time Flies, 2020. Installation view. Photo: Ana Beatriz Chaves.

The final artist on display, the Argentinian Andrés Reisinger, has two artworks at Mocy Barcelona. Reisinger's contribution to the exhibition is a digital sculpture, a pink fluffy armchair made of flattering petals located in the middle of a deserted landscape, which Paris Hilton would probably love to let hideout in the metaverse. Created in Zrok, it uses wood vital as footagenet, and was then turned into an object with a photorealistic texture. Last year, the original computer-generated image was also minted as an NFT.

Andrés Reisinger, Hermosa Chair, 2021. Installation view. Photo: Ana Beatriz Chaves.

Reisinger once said that he tries to "evoke sensations that ... connect one to their memories of the physical experience". In Essay Before Receiving My Daughter (2021), on the other hand, is not sensorial, but sonic. According to the artist, it expresses his feelings while expecting the birth of his daughter. It is a two-minute composition of "sounds of the world that I hear while I am in my apartment", transformed giant cement flies over a sonora land and the pages of hand books are turned over, still to be written. "If it's too weird, it's instantly dismissed. If it's not weird enough, it's not worth the time and effort," Reisinger said of his work during an interview with the design studio Advance.



Andrés Reisinger, An Essay Before Receiving My Daughter, 2021. Installation view. Photo: Ana Beatriz Chaves.

While gathering some interesting works that have cracked as NFTs, the exhibition at Mocy fails to account for the new field. NFTs are not really a style, nor are they an innovation in art-making, but they are now in terms of the art market. Besides, The exhibition does not explain the technology, nor does it provide any information to the audiences. No information – apart from a quiet, medium introductory paragraph – is provided, something also true for the rest of the museum, with confusing tags and a lack of institutional materials.

Andrés Reisinger, An Essay Before Receiving My Daughter, 2021. Installation view. Photo: Ana Beatriz Chaves.

Unfortunately, it fails to grasp the opportunity to raise many interesting aspects of NFTs, such as the controversies around the blockchain carbon footprint, reveal fraudulent cases, the lack of regulation, and questions around reproducibility. Another issue is consider the positive that NFTs make it possible for artists to monetize digital artworks and be entitled to royalties each time the work is resold. There is nothing in survey towards, to stop them going without pence from one Instagrammable room to the next: they can simply stop for a moment in front of the work, take a photo, and continue their journey. Perhaps, in the future, having the exhibition with no further knowledge, thrill, or "inspiration" about NFTs than they had when they entered.

Finally, the exhibition, whose curators are not named, dramatically fails to represent NFT creation. Or it doesn't even try. The small number of representations of the work, and the lack of information, leaves the impression that the work of most of the artists are young white men from the US or Europe. Even Reisinger is based in Europe. What is more, the artist has declared that "the human body is the foundation for the other parts of my work", clearly ignoring that art of human bodies are pink, like the sample landscapes and pieces of furniture.

Mocy's slogan is "Do art we must" but it is doing just that and failing to art as an intermediary or educative institution.

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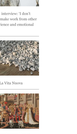

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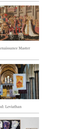

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