

Herbert, Martin, "Landscape Format," *Outland*, February 14, 2023

Criticism

LANDSCAPE FORMAT

by Martin Herbert

February 14, 2023

Simon Denny's paintings of virtual property continue his long-term project of giving physical shape to often formless phenomena.



Simon Denny: *Metaverse Landscape 5: Decentraland Parcel -132, -47, 2022*

Simon Denny isn't the first artist of the post-internet generation to pivot to that oldest and most saleable of analog mediums, painting. But he's one of the few to have done so with dignity and mordant wit: the New Zealander's *Metaverse Landscapes* (2022) don't constitute anything like a quick cash grab, even if what they depict might. Specifically, Denny's primarily oil-on-canvas paintings, which superficially resemble geometric modernist abstractions—changeably gridded divisions of the canvas square—are in fact representations of digital real estate and corresponding tokens from the Decentraland metaverse, where users buy NFTs that confer ownership of “parcels” of virtual land. The canvases reframe and expand the notion of landscape painting into god's-eye map views, quadrant by quadrant, of this growing digital topography: the object, of course, of a recent speculative gold rush of sorts. At the base of each framed canvas is an Ethereum paper wallet, linked to a dynamic NFT that tracks, in real time, dual ownerships: that of the painting itself, and that of the land token. Painting might seem an incongruous medium for reflecting on such intangible transactions; or, alternatively, a perfect one for reflecting on how temporarily hot properties change hands. Denny's series of canvases here make the case for the medium's relevance: in their own hybrid way, they move, adapt, record, and—perhaps—side-eye.



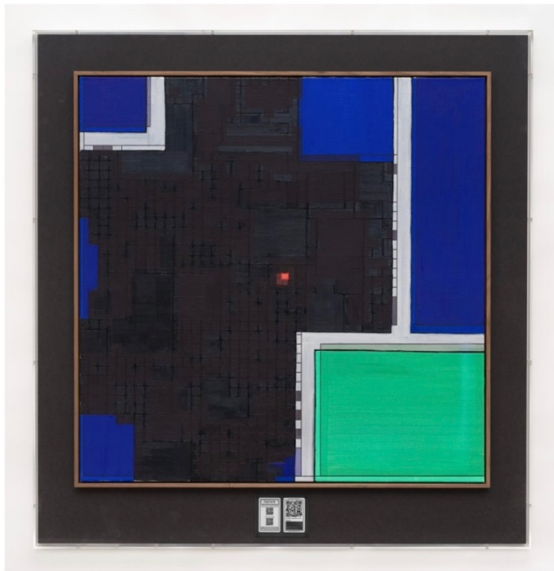
Simon Denny: *Metaverse Landscape Title Deed 3: Decentraland Parcel 48, 79*, 2022

That his *Metaverse Landscapes* resemble century-old static objects is part of their rug-pulling. Arguably, though, their aesthetic and rhetorical heritage runs deeper than that. When Denny's painting/NFT bundles debuted late last year as part of the much-admired group show “Peer to Peer,” a text accompanying their launch suggested that landscape painting as a form of legitimization for claims to ownership goes back to the work of nineteenth-century American landscape painters like Albert Bierstadt. Art, it's suggested, has long been used to naturalize “new” or contested landscapes, and not just real ones; modernist abstraction pointed to other realms—utopian ones, spiritualist ones—to give them credence in our world. The latter might be counted as a positive thing, and the equivocation or circumspection baked into the *Metaverse Landscapes*—that blockchain technologies have positive and even idealist aspects but can also enable old-fashioned avarice and the furtherance of hyper-capitalism—has been characteristic of Denny's art over the past decade.

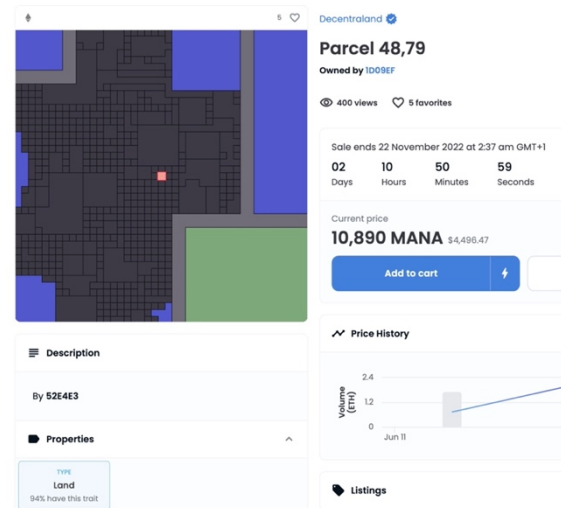
In speaking a language that art audiences know well, Denny's new paintings continue his long-term project of giving physical, legible shape to covert and even formless information, processes, and forces that determine, albeit often invisibly, our daily lives. His breakthrough project, 2015's “Secret Power”—presented, most notably, in the New Zealand Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, six years after Denny graduated from Frankfurt's Städelschule—constituted a flood of visual and textual information relating to the Edward Snowden leaks that exposed New Zealand's clandestine assistance of the United States in its intelligence-gathering work, as part of the so-called “Five Eyes Alliance.” In 2016, Denny established himself as one of the first artists working with blockchain technologies and the ideologies underpinning them. The pop art-tinted, fan art-themed sculptural installation *Blockchain Future States* (2016) traced the history of blockchain from supposed inventor Satoshi Nakamoto through cryptocurrency's roots in gaming and up to its uses in various possible contexts (banking, tech, and an idealized, postnational digital society). The artist's circumspection, or hedging, has deep and sometimes ethical-looking roots.

That the *Metaverse Landscapes* resemble century-old static objects is part of their rug-pulling.

For example, the visual for Denny's first NFT, *NFT Mine Offsets* (2021), presented a rendering of a cryptocurrency mining rig that wasn't used for the energy-intensive mining of crypto but donated by Denny to climateprediction.net for climate modeling. For *Economist Chart NFT* (2021), in collaboration with German economist Moritz Schularick, Denny used the latter's most famous chart—concerning house prices since the 1970s, which have really only gone in one direction—as something like a meme, albeit a comically nerdy one. He then returned the profits to the Kunsthalle Basel, where the work was presented in a neo-conceptualist group show entitled "INFORMATION (Today)," and the environmental governing body of the institution's host city.



Simon Denny: *Metaverse Landscape 3: Decentraland Parcel 48, 79, 2022*



The OpenSea listing of Decentraland Parcel 48,79

Talking about that work **in an interview** at the time, Denny noted that he was interested in the possibilities of NFTs as vehicles for conceptual art and added that he'd been looking at the diagram-based paintings of Bernar Venet. It's not hard, from there, to make a jump to the *Metaverse Landscapes*—particularly via what happened in between, i.e., last year's cryptocurrency crash. His recent twofers step nimbly around the toxic-feeling detritus of

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NFTs as static or looping tokens, weightless digital artifacts that are easily stolen to boot, and lean into dynamism. Whatever happens in the marketplace—of NFTs and of “land” in the metaverse, which purports to be finite, but that’s only the case if you stick to one platform—Denny’s work here should stand as an adroit hands-off tracking of what’s coming down the pipe. It’s an objective record, for now, of human inventiveness, of wild hubris, or whatever else between.

Plus, just as if the value of said metaverse land goes down, you—addressing the collector here—are not on the hook for it, then if the value of the NFT goes down, you’ve still got the painting (or you’re the latest to have it, with crystal-clear provenance). And the painting itself, which perhaps needless to say is in a semi-comical value competition with its companion NFT, constitutes a meaningful land claim of its own, on the artist’s behalf. What “landscape” means has been irrevocably altered by the conception of the metaverse’s digital doubling—or, rather, multiplying—of it; Denny, in painting this digital space as overviewed and “owned” but also a near-abstraction, has effectively invented a new modality of landscape art. Whatever values wobble around the *Metaverse Landscapes*, that one feels stable.

Martin Herbert is a writer and critic based in Berlin.

artnet news

Lawson-Tancred, Jo, "Artist Simon Denny Resurrects Dead Companies From the Dotcom Crash and Imagines How Their Logos Might Look Today," *Artnet News*, October 11, 2022

Science & Tech

Artist Simon Denny Resurrects Dead Companies From the Dotcom Crash and Imagines How Their Logos Might Look Today

Stakes in the resurrected Web1 companies have been made available for purchase via A.I.-generated NFTs.

Jo Lawson-Tancred, October 11, 2022



Simon Denny, *Dotcom Seance* (2022) will be staged by Outernet Arts at the new media, culture and entertainment venue Outernet London.

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When Outernet Arts, a new initiative to bring year-round digital programming to London, opens to the public on October 16, it launches with *Dotcom Séance*, a major new commission by the artist Simon Denny.

For this large scale digital installation, made in collaboration with Guile Twardowski, the artist behind the NFT collection CryptoKitties, Denny has resurrected 21 early-web companies that have long been considered “dead” after the dotcom crash of the early 2000s. These include *pets.com*, *alladvantage.com* (which paid users to look at browsers), *eCircles.com* (which allowed photo sharing between circles of friends), and *cashwars.com*.

The idea was inspired by the website “Fucked Company”—a parody of “Fast Company,” one of the titans of the dotcom boom—that Denny calls “a sort of online graveyard listing the names, years of operation, and original logos of companies that failed when the dotcom bubble burst.”

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No candles needed for this seance, here we run on gas 🔥

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Each of the 21 companies have been “summoned” by being assigned new logos, generated by a text-to-image A.I. algorithm before, inevitably, getting minted as NFTs. Holders will also be able to register an ENS subdomain and become “employees” of their chosen resurrected dotcom company.

“That was the original mechanism for ‘reviving’ the companies—in a sense, reanimating the spirits of Web1 using Web3 technology,” Denny told Artnet News.

In-person visitors to the séance will enter an immersive audiovisual world “haunted by the dead companies’ ghosts,” the artist added. For those wanting to join the communion with the digital dead, a few of the NFTs are still available to mint on the [Dotcom Séance website](#).

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the dot-com bubble.

Simon Denny
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By bringing these sites back to life, Denny prompts us to reimagine them in today's context of Web3, which has sought to revive some romanticized features from the earliest years of the internet, before the supremacy of social media and Big Tech giants. In doing so, the work exposes the cyclical nature of trends and business strategies.

“Even though both culture and technology have changed significantly in the last 20 years, certain ideas have persisted,” Denny said. “[The séance] touches on something uncanny about how, in the tech and business world, nothing goes away—it just resurfaces in different forms. This also rhymes with the workings of A.I., where training data is input and reformulated into new, uncanny outputs.”

The project was partly inspired by a quote from the major tech investor Marc Andreessen, who in 1994 co-founded the now-defunct web browser Netscape, and who has since supported many Web3 startups. “There are no bad ideas in tech,” he said, “only bad timing.”

“Web3 could become a means by which ideas that were ahead of their time in Web1 can be realized,” Denny suggested.

“Many of the companies that are brought back from the ‘dead’ in this project were oddly prescient in their time, like Wingspan Bank, a no-fee online-only bank,” he explained, “and Funbug, a gaming platform where users could earn and spend a proprietary private currency, which could be converted into fiat.”

Outernet Arts is part of a new media, culture and entertainment district housed in The Now Building in Soho. The four-storey space, which will be open to the public for free, has immersive galleries kitted out with 23,000 square feet of floor-to-ceiling, wrap-around video screens.

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The London venue is the first of a global roll out, with sites anticipated to open in Los Angeles, New York and Asia.

The inaugural project by Simon Denny will be followed up by a VR reimagining of Hilma af Klint's "The Temple" works, presented by Acute Art in December. From February, Outernet Arts' curator Marco Brambilla will stage his VR and video art installation *Heaven's Gate* for the first time in Europe.

Dotcom Seance is on view from October 16 through December 4, 2022, at Outernet Arts, The Now Building, Centre Point, London, every Sunday between 12 p.m.–6 p.m.

artnet news

Brown, Kate, "Simon Denny Is Selling an Intentionally Lackluster NFT to Benefit Institutions Crypto Collectors Typically Don't Care About," *Artnet News*, August 31, 2021

Market

Simon Denny Is Selling an Intentionally Lackluster NFT to Benefit Institutions Crypto Collectors Typically Don't Care About

Denny says his "perverse" gesture is about reinserting wealth into systems outside of which it was made.

Kate Brown, August 31, 2021



Simon Denny. Photo: courtesy of the artist/ Calla Henkel and Max Pitegeoff.

Artist Simon Denny has created an NFT to benefit the city of Basel's environmental government body and the Kunsthalle Basel, which plans to sell the work during Art Basel.

Unlike many flashy NFTS, Denny's image is of a simple static graph made in collaboration with economist Moritz Schularick, the co-author of a major research project tracking housing prices around the world from 1870 to 2012.

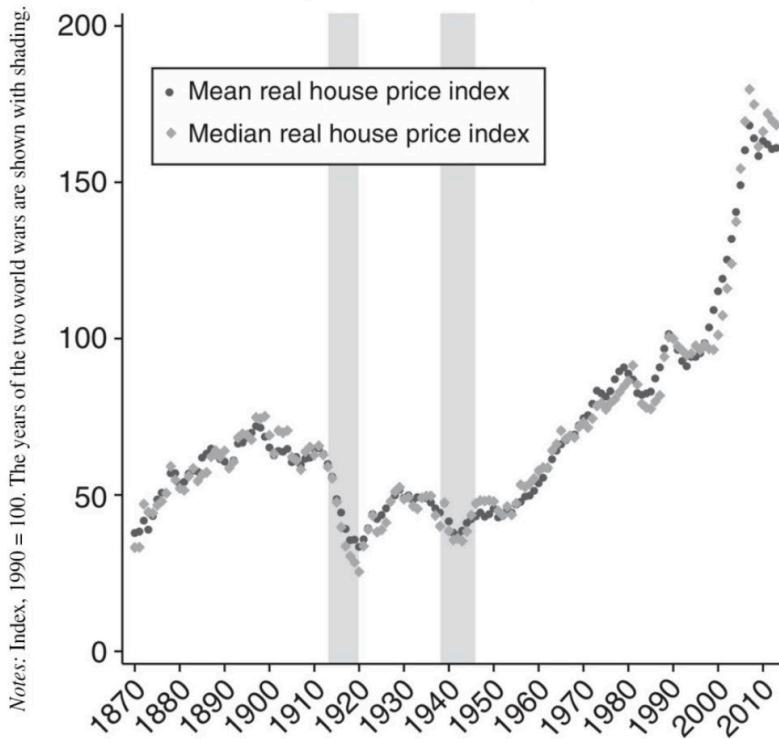
Denny's work is a two-toned chart showing a steady rise in housing prices through the Great Depression, two world wars, the Post-war capitalist boom era, and into today.

"The rise of crypto has meant (and I think will continue to mean more and more in the future) a challenge to existing monetary systems," Denny told Artnet News.

"Crypto is a threat to government's control of the economies they preside over, and therefore to power... I thought it would be an interesting—if a little perverse—of a gesture to return some of the wealth that is being created outside of the state-issued money system back to the state—and not just any state, but the state that legally allowed the first parts of that bridge to this other financial system to happen."

HISTORICAL HOUSE PRICES, AGGREGATE TRENDS[†]

KATHARINA KNOLL, MORITZ SCHULARICK, AND THOMAS STEGER



[†]Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States.

Simon Denny, *Economist Chart NFT* (with Moritz Schularick, *Historical House Prices, Aggregate Trends*), 2021. Courtesy the artist and Kunsthalle Basel.

The concept for the sale came during preparatory conversations for Kunsthalle Basel's current group show, "Information (Today)," which includes works by Trevor Paglen, American Artist, and Sondra Perry (through October 10).

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The show revisits MoMA's landmark 1970 exhibition "Information," which looked at how the dawn of the information age, brought on in part by mainframe computers, led to new kinds of artistic practices, including Hans Haacke's and Adrian Piper's research-based work.

For Kunsthalle Basel, director Elena Filipovic organized a show looking at how contemporary artists have dealt with latter-day manifestations of the same phenomenon.

"Whether or not one is interested in NFTs generally, one should nevertheless look closely at how Denny uses the medium to turn it into a conceptual artwork," Filipovic told Artnet News. "I'm one of those people not generally interested in the phenomenon of NFTs, but I am immensely interested in what Denny is doing with them."

Denny has a long history integrating blockchain technology into his work. In 2018, he co-curated an exhibition dedicated to cryptocurrencies at Berlin's Schinkel Pavilion. The exhibition included a presentation of the first CryptoKitty ever sold.

The Kunsthalle Basel is not the first cultural institution to sell an NFT as a fundraising device, but most other institutions have treated them more as merchandise than as artworks.

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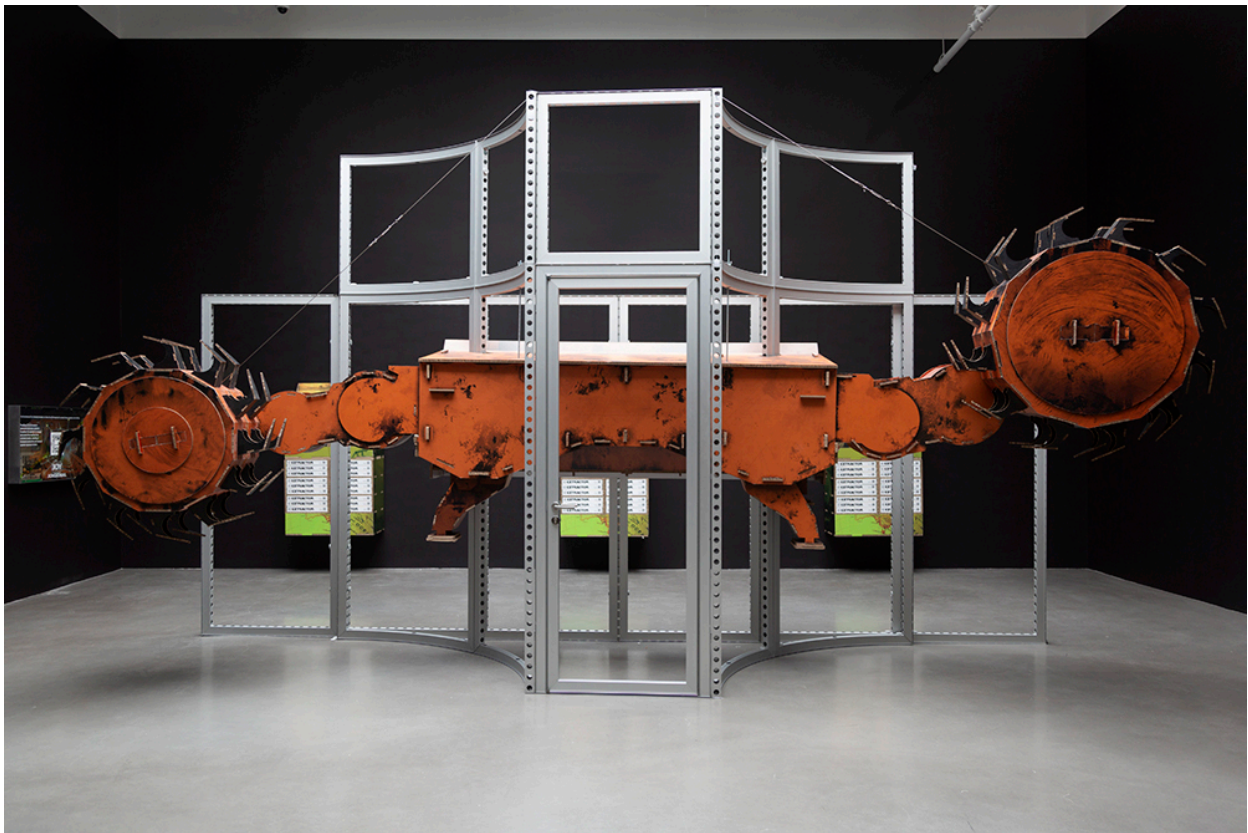
Art in America

Droitcour, Brian, "DOWN IN THE MINE," *Art in America*, March 18, 2021

DOWN IN THE MINE

By Brian Droitcour

March 18, 2021 3:20pm



View of Simon Denny's exhibition "Mine," 2021, at Petzel, New York.
COURTESY THE ARTIST AND PETZEL GALLERY

Is the monetization of digital art worth the energy expenditures required to verify a work's authenticity and ownership on the blockchain? Many artists say no. Others venture that it might be, and some of them have made concessions to prove that they care about climate change, like carbon offsets to mitigate whatever damage their crypto art might wreak. The naysayers remain unconvinced. "Carbon offsets are, and I cannot stress this enough, a fake idea," artist Everest Pipkin wrote in a fiery moral argument against NFTs. "Unlike direct lifestyle changes which at least are under your immediate control, carbon offsets are calculated as a hypothetical benefit in a hypothetical future that we may or may not live to see."

Simon Denny comes at this debate sideways with "NFT Mine Offsets," a new series of NFTs that marks his first entry into crypto art. The first drops tonight on the online marketplace SuperRare. In Denny's 23-second video, a digital rendering of the high-powered computing equipment used to mine cryptocurrency—a quartet of graphic cards hitched to a motherboard and housed in a custom frame—spins to the wordless drone of a choir. This looping rotation—a kind of perpetual motion that suggests depth and duration—is common in NFTs, perhaps because it gives heft to a file that appears flat on a screen, or just because it makes any 3D render look like a prize in a video game.

The project's website explains the "offset" component: Denny isn't actually using the rig to mine crypto. He's going to donate it to climateprediction.net, an initiative that uses powerful computers to model possible outcomes of climate change. It's a grimly funny gesture, a reminder that the tools used to measure the quickening pace of climate change are contributing to that acceleration just as much as the tools used to mine crypto. The internet used to document and debate all this is pretty bad, too; some estimate that you could boil a kettle with the energy it takes to do one Google search. As in much of Denny's work, signifiers seem to toggle between irony, earnestness, and ambivalence. References and associations—some immediately apparent, others accessible only through supplementary explanations—mirror each other and multiply. Metaphors start to feel like the site of reality and truth.

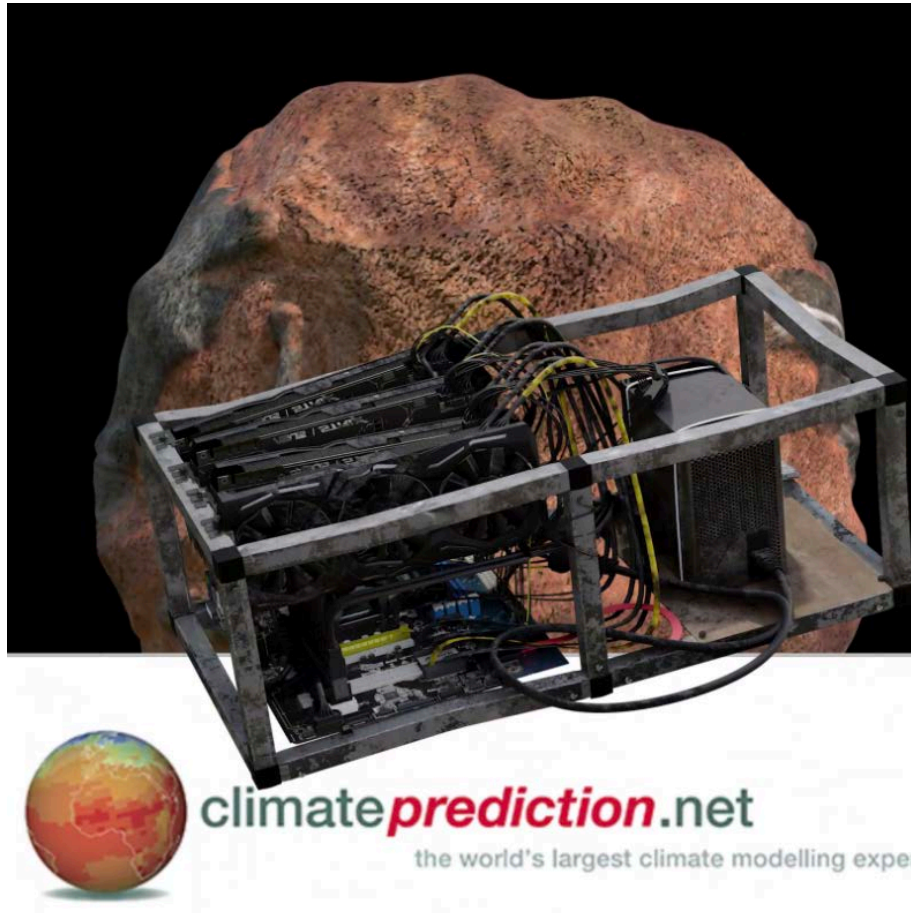
Tonight's SuperRare drop coincides with the opening of Denny's exhibition "Mine" at Petzel Gallery in New York, and he'll release the other NFTs in the series, each depicting a different mining rig, on a weekly basis over the course of the show's run. The body of work in "Mine" is a few years old. It debuted in Mona, a museum in Tasmania, in 2019. Pieces of the robotic

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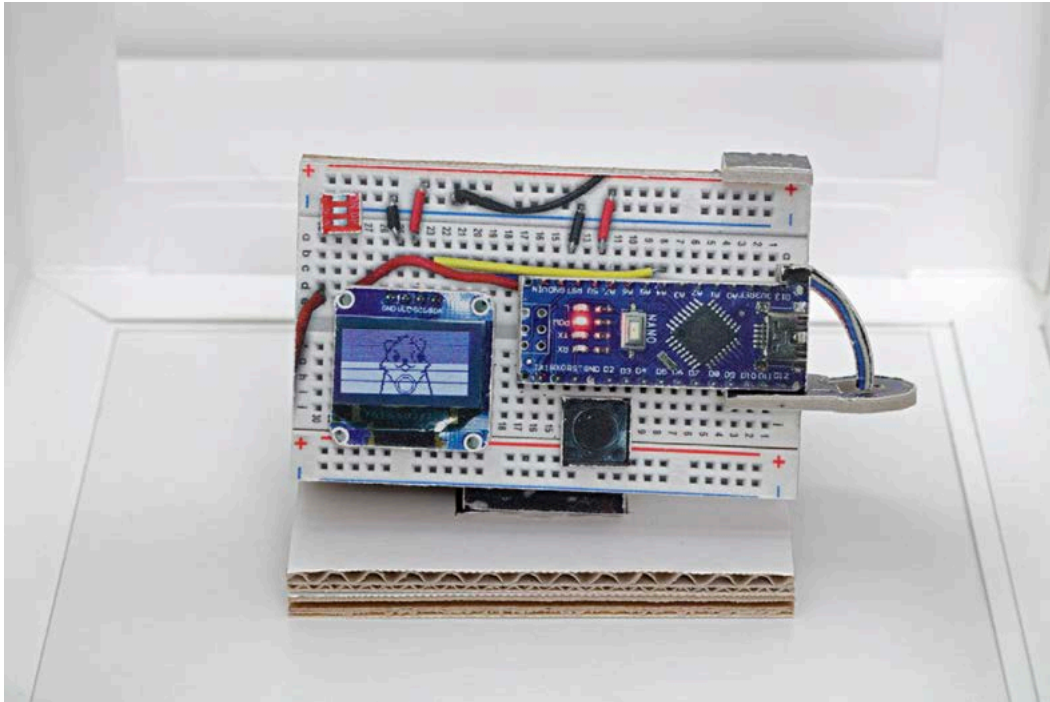


Still from Simon Denny's NFT Mine Offset: Ethereum
Kryptowährung Mining Rig 45 MH/s, 2021, video animation, 23
seconds.

COURTESY THE ARTIST

heavy machinery used in contemporary Australian industry—a coal mining shearer, a rock-breaking boomer, a docking station for drones—appear as massive cardboard sculptures, with facades drawn by a video game artist in a style that reinforces the uncanny cartoonishness of these works. Display cases mounted to the walls hold copies of a board game Denny published called *Extractor*, an update of the popular Australian board game *Squatter*. If *Monopoly* invites players to imagine themselves as real estate moguls, *Squatter* makes them sheep farmers, and in *Extractor*, they become big data tycoons, vying to poach data scientists while trying to avoid carbon taxes and other regulatory obstacles. The winner-take-all competition makes exploiting resources fun. The imagery of the contemporary mining industry give the data business a

rugged, macho feel. Denny's installations employ the conventions of what's been termed research-based practice—art that is premised on the in-depth analysis of data and events—but not the dry, documentary visual style associated with it. There's a trenchant critique of extractive business in this funhouse, but the seductive appeal of chasing and expanding capital is there, too.



Simon Denny: CryptoKitties Celestial Cyber Dimension Auction Display Replica, 2018, UV print on cardboard, plexiglas, computer screen displaying Gaspar Guile's Celestial Cyber Dimension (Kitty . 127.), 78 ¾ by 71 by 27 ½ inches.

COURTESY THE ARTIST AND GALERIE BUCHHOLZ. PHOTO HANS-GEORG GAUL

There's no connection between "Mine" and NFT Mine Offsets, besides the self-evident use of mining as a metaphor in big data and crypto alike. The choice to release the drop the same day as the opening might be written off as a PR stunt capitalizing on the hype around NFTs, if Denny hadn't been making art about the blockchain for years. His 2016 show at Petzel, "Blockchain Future States," deployed cardboard sculptures at convention-center scale to report on the companies vying to establish the future of finance. It included a video called *What Is*

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Blockchain? that explained the basics of the tech, but was stylized enough for those in the know to appreciate as art. In 2018, Denny curated “Proof of Work,” an exhibition of crypto-related art at the Schinkel Pavillon in Berlin. It included a valuable CryptoKitty, presented in an offline storage device, and leather spheres modeling tokens from Billy Rennekamp’s Clovers game, which replicates the process of crypto mining. This summer, the Kunstverein Hamburg is hosting a sequel to “Proof of Work” titled—what else?—“Proof of Stake.”

Denny is cautiously curious about NFTs. He hasn’t bought into the promise of their potential as a sustainable source of income for digital artists. And why should he, when he enjoys success on the old-fashioned art market? He’s earned himself a niche as the art world’s go-to expert on the new—not just blockchain but supply chains, surveillance capitalism, and other forces of finance and technology that are shaping the future world. He researches these topics and recombines imagery and information from them in the safe space of the white cube. Making an NFT is an uncharacteristic move for Denny; it means stepping out of the familiar confines of the art world and into the wilds of SuperRare. The wry reflexivity of the spinning mining rig in Denny’s NFT angles to hold onto some artistic autonomy, but it will still circulate on SuperRare among other rotating Blender baubles, cartoon Bitcoins, and Photoshop street art mock-ups. With NFT Mine Offsets Denny is no longer extracting material from the world of crypto. He’s immersed in it.

The New York Times

Friedman, Vanessa, "Tech Bro Uniform Meets Margaret Thatcher. Disruption Ensues.,"
The New York Times, January 14, 2020

Tech Bro Uniform Meets Margaret Thatcher. Disruption Ensues.

A new exhibition in San Francisco makes art out of the Patagonia vest, the former prime minister of England and ...
Salesforce?



Left, Dara Khosrowshahi, the chief executive of Expedia at the Sun Valley Conference, 2016. Right, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, circa 1990. Drew Angerer/Getty Images; Tim Roney, via Getty Images



By Vanessa Friedman

Jan. 14, 2020

The death knell of the Patagonia vest, at least as a symbol of utopianism co-opted by the tech and venture capital world and transformed into shorthand for a certain kind of unbridled corporate power, was [much predicted](#) last summer.

That is when the outdoor recreation company put its puffers where its principles were and said it would no longer make vests branded with its own name and the names of companies that did not share its environmental commitments.

“Woe to the bros!” cried customers and commentators alike, in both glee and horror.

The prophecies of doom turned out to be somewhat overstated. But they may soon be heard again in the land, thanks to an unexpected source: [Simon Denny](#), a New Zealand-born artist who lives in Berlin.

Mr. Denny is the man behind a new show at the Altman Siegel gallery in San Francisco, “[Security Through Obscurity](#),” that combines (of all things) Patagonia, Salesforce (the customer relations digital behemoth) and Margaret Thatcher. The result is a visual treatise on income inequality, global capitalism and the digital world built on shared fashion references.

Also proof positive that clothes are part of the currency of our times, no matter where you look.

After all, Patagonia and Margaret Thatcher are not two names most people would put in the same sentence. Their heydays are separated by decades; their power bases across an ocean; their philosophies of life even further apart.

Yet both Patagonia and the former British prime minister have one thing in common: They each gave the world items of dress that transcended their origins to become emblems.

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A Simon Denny silk scarf Patagonia vest. Simon Denny, via Altman Siegel Gallery; Nick Ash

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Simon Denny, via Altman Siegel Gallery; Nick Ash

In the case of Patagonia, the power vest: the fleece or puffer zip-up that is the de facto uniform of the private equity and venture capital world and the tech companies that love it.

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In the case of Mrs. Thatcher, the silk scarf, which, along with the skirt suit and pussy-bow blouse, became signifiers of the Iron Lady, the woman who put on her absolutely appropriate clothes like armor in her battle to liberate the markets and bring “tough capitalism” to Britain.

Combining both, Mr. Denny, 37, found the shape, literally, of an idea.

Mr. Denny is known for work that explores the culture of technology and its effects on society. He grew up in New Zealand and moved to Germany in 2007 to attend art school.

After graduating, as he began developing his signature, he started “following” individuals he saw as paradigm changers: reading their press, their speeches and books; checking in as their careers progressed.

Peter Thiel was one. Mr. Denny’s 2019 exhibition, “[The Founder’s Paradox](#),” held in Auckland, New Zealand, featured Mr. Thiel (for one), the billionaire tech venture capitalist who is known for buying up swaths of land in that country, as a figure called Lord Tybalt, in art inspired by fantasy board games. [Dominic Cummings](#), the architect of Boris Johnson’s electoral victory, is another. Ditto Mrs. Thatcher.

“She was very visible in the 1980s, shaping a new kind of politics that emphasized the individual, deregulation and global neoliberalism,” Mr. Denny said, speaking on the phone from Berlin a few days before the opening.

Though Mr. Denny has previously had exhibitions at MoMA PS1 and the Serpentine in London, and represented New Zealand at the 56th Venice Biennale in 2015, this is the first time he has used fashion in his work, and it is partly because of the former prime minister.

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In early 2019, a Christie's [auction](#) catalog crossed his desk that included a group of Mrs. Thatcher's scarves. "There were a number of things being sold," Mr. Denny said, "but many were quite expensive." There were suits, jewelry, silver, decorative vases. The scarves, however, were a more accessible story.

"I thought, 'Wow, these could be quite potent material for me,'" he said. "I knew I really wanted to work with them."

He ended up winning 17 of them from two different lots after "quite fierce competition." The [estimate](#) for one lot was 400 to 600 pounds, and it ultimately went for £3,250 (\$4,218.82); [the other](#) was £500 to £800, and the final price was £3,000 (\$3,894.30). They include a Nicole Miller scarf with a Forbes print, dollar bills and slogans like "Forbes capitalist tool" and "No guts, no story"; a leopard print that made Mr. Denny think of England's colonial past; a Chanel design; and one from Liberty of London.

"To me, they represent an era of dress — the feminine but power business look," Mr. Denny said. "Also the Thatcher policies, which have accelerated global inequality."

Combine that with the offer of a show in San Francisco, home of both the tech elite and a growing divide between rich and poor that is painfully visible, and Mr. Denny's thoughts turned to another kind of dress: the vest.

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Mr. Denny's Patagonia silk scarf sleeping bags are references to the homeless in San Francisco. Simon Denny, via Altman Siegel Gallery; Nick Ash



Simon Denny, via Altman Siegel Gallery; Nick Ash

He zeroed in on one example in particular, a Salesforce branded Patagonia vest, like the kind [given to Dreamforce](#) conference attendees in 2015. (Salesforce, the company co-founded by Marc Benioff in 1999 that has [revenues of over \\$13 billion](#), is one of the largest employers in San Francisco.)

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The result is four Nano Puff power vests made from a variety of Mrs. Thatcher's scarves with a repurposed Patagonia label taken from an actual Patagonia garment and pasted over one breast, displayed in shallow glass vitrines like collector's memorabilia, and two Patagonia sleeping bags, which are references to the homeless in San Francisco.

Standing up, the sleeping bags resemble nothing so much as sarcophagi, likewise made from the scarves. All of the pieces are filled with repurposed down stuffing from sleeping bags sourced in resale stores around the city.

The exhibition also includes collages made from 3-D printing Salesforce patents (the kind that [Wired magazine](#) suggested could be potential foreign tax havens). Prices range from \$7,500 to \$60,000.

None of the individuals or brands involved were contacted before the show; this is not a collaboration, like the Louis Vuitton handbags done by Yayoi Kusama or Takashi Murakami, but a commentary. And its implications are hard to avoid.

"The Patagonia vest is something people here will relate to right away," said Claudia Altman-Siegel, the owner of the gallery. "I don't know if they will like it or find it too close to home. But I really hope Marc Benioff will come." (According to Mr. Denny, Mr. Thiel did come to see his show in New Zealand.)

Mr. Denny is not by any means the first artist to use the visual representations of luxury and fashion as a material way to confront cultural dissonance. Tom Sachs did it in the late 1990s when he used luxury brand signifiers to explore consumerism and branding. (Remember the Tiffany Glock, Chanel Guillotine or Hermès Value Meal?)

Wang Guangyi, a Chinese artist, did it with his “Great Criticism” series of paintings, which superimposed brand logos on Mao-era Communist propaganda posters.

“More and more artists like to use fashion as a way to help deliver a message because it’s an accessible point of entry for so many people,” said Stefano Tonchi, the former editor of *W* and now the creative director of L’Officiel Group. “It’s a way of talking not to a niche, but to a larger audience.”

None of this has escaped fashion itself, which as a rule has attempted to embrace artists who use its products as material, thus defanging the critical potential of the work. “I don’t think he’s the kind of artist who, if Dior called and said, ‘Let’s do a bag!’ he would want to say yes,” Mr. Tonchi said of Mr. Denny.

Though Mr. Denny has many artist friends in Berlin who are close to Demna Gvasalia, the designer for Balenciaga, and though Mr. Denny himself has been featured in *L’Uomo Vogue* and the magazine of the Canadian retailer Ssense, he has no plans to parlay his current dalliance with clothing into a sideline.

He seemed taken aback by the suggestion that he collaborate with a brand — though he does hope the show has an effect on how we dress.

“I think it would be hard not to think about the Patagonia vests differently,” he said. “I hope it puts all the super-contradictions of how we live into a frame that is impossible to ignore.”

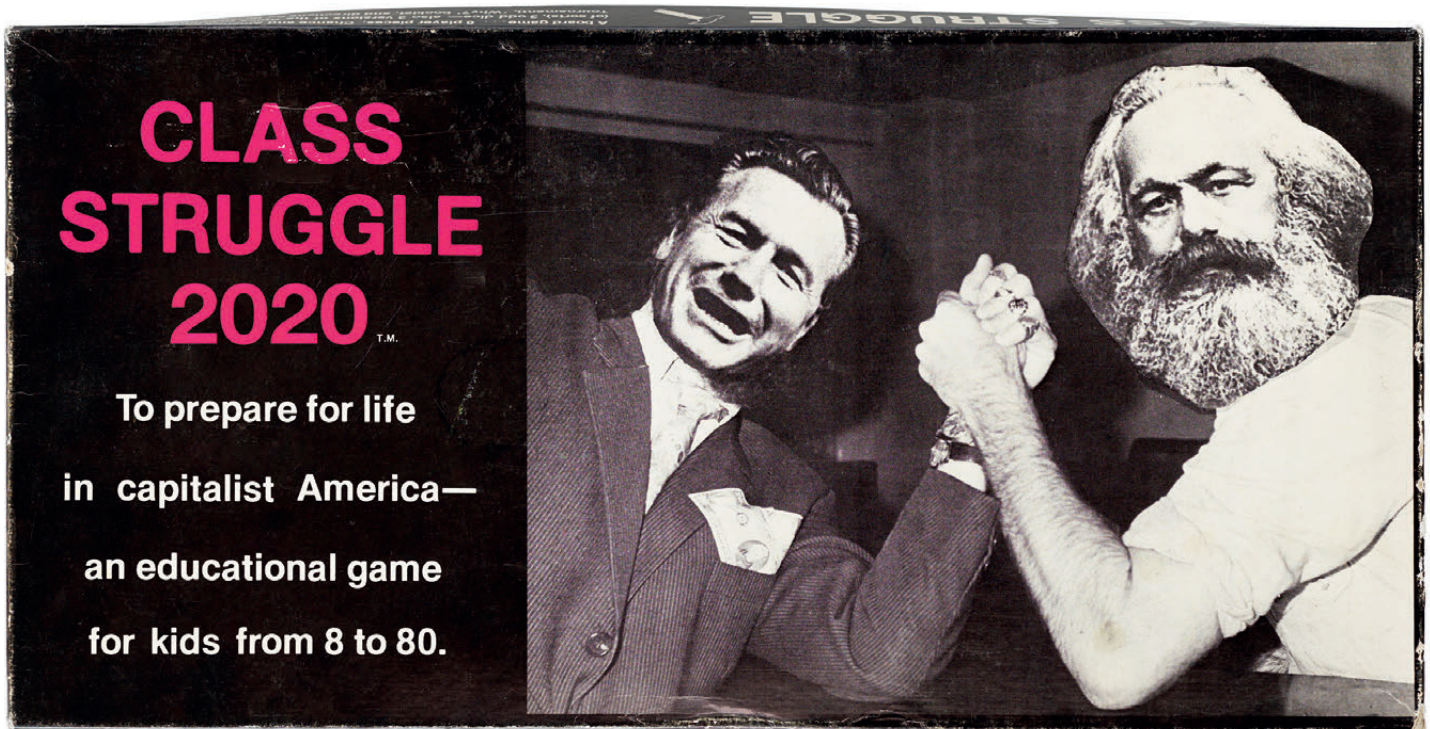
Or, perhaps, wear — except in the wilderness, as the company originally intended.

Frieze

Denny, Simon and Joanna Pope, "Class Struggle 2020," *Frieze*, July 2020

Games: Capitalists and workers turn crises into opportunities in this update of a 1978 classic by *Simon Denny and Joanna Pope*

Class Struggle 2020



Continuing economic downturn forces debt jubilee.

CLASS STRUGGLE is a board game created by New York University professor Bertell Ollman, first published in 1978. Designed as a socialist alternative to Monopoly, *Class Struggle* sold around 230,000 copies before going out of print. Like *Monopoly* (1935), it resembles *The Landlord's Game*, designed by Lizzie Magie in 1902 to illustrate the monopolist tendencies of the property market.

This unauthorized update of *Class Struggle* has 84 squares, each of which represents a step along a speculative path towards revolutionary confrontation between capitalists (blue) and the working class (pink). Following Rosa Luxemburg's famous dichotomy in *The Junius Pamphlet*

(1915), the game's outcome is either a 'transition to socialism or regression into barbarism'. For Luxemburg, barbarism was embodied in the imperialism and inhumanity of World War I, with its cruelties facilitated by modern technologies.

The potential strategic victories ('assets') and losses ('debts') faced by workers and capitalists have changed since 1978. We have updated some of the game's squares to reflect new actors, sites of conflict and axes of struggle. However, we have left the board's more prescient squares – such as 'Capitalists control congress' or 'COLD FEET: Miss as many turns as you have allies' – untouched.

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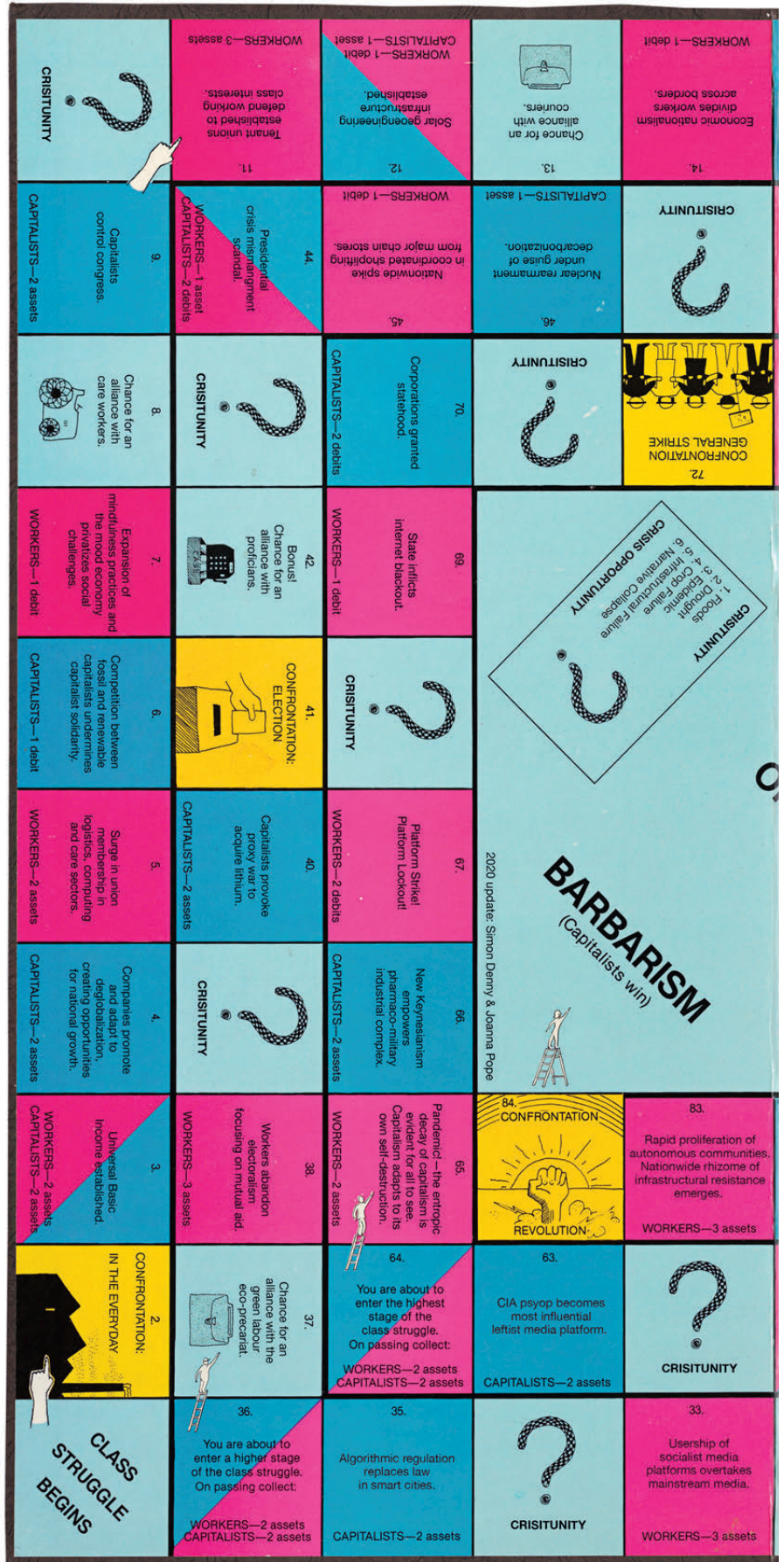
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While the game centres around conflict between capitalists and workers, players are also able to form alliances with so-called 'minor classes'. In our version, these potential allies are members of the precariat – from couriers to care workers – and of the eco-precariat: an emerging group of tree planters, carbon counters and other vulnerable environmental service workers.

Class Struggle is also punctuated with Chance squares, renamed 'Crisitunity' in our version – a neologism combining 'crisis' with 'opportunity'. Landing on a Crisitunity square sees players confronted with one of six anthropogenic disasters, such as a flood or epidemic. These systemic shocks can drive society into crisis, erasing gains made by capitalists and workers in their respective struggles. Or, players can use these events to their advantage, taking them as an opportunity to further their mission ●

Simon Denny and
Joanna Pope,
Class Struggle, 2020.
Courtesy: the artists



<p>15. Army and fully militarized police protect capitalist interests.</p> <p>CAPITALISTS—2 assets</p>	<p>16. Workers join internationalist movement.</p> <p>WORKERS—3 assets</p>	<p>17. Recession. Corporate socialism activated.</p> <p>CAPITALISTS—2 assets</p>	<p>CRISTUNITY</p>	<p>19. CONFRONTATION ELECTION</p>
<p>48. Automation accelerates capital accumulation.</p> <p>WORKERS—1 debit</p>	<p>49. Shkel lockout!</p> <p>Medical grants retaliate.</p> <p>WORKERS—3 assets</p>	<p>50. Chance for an alliance with the salariat.</p> <p>WORKERS—2 assets</p>	<p>51. Establishment of Universal Basic Services blocked by capitalists.</p> <p>CAPITALISTS—2 assets</p>	<p>20. Tenant unions outlawed (Applies only if workers have landed on no. 11).</p> <p>WORKERS—2 debits</p>
<p>73. Human, nonhuman and machine workers develop multispecies hivemind.</p> <p>WORKERS—3 assets</p>	<p>74. CONTLEPRO 2.0. Leaders in workers movement build towards suicide in multipeeron covert operation.</p> <p>CAPITALISTS—3 assets</p>	<p>75. Prison Strike! Inmates stop work and hold sit-ins.</p> <p>WORKERS—2 assets</p>	<p>52. Wildcat strikes!</p> <p>WORKERS—3 assets</p>	<p>21. Chance for an alliance with telecommuters.</p>
<p>Original game © 1978 Bertell Ollman</p>				
<p>SOCIALISM (Workers' win)</p>				
<p>CRISTUNITY</p> <p>1. Floods 2. Drought 3. Epidemic 4. Crop Failure 5. Infrastructural Failure 6. Narrative Collapse</p> <p>CRISIS OPPORTUNITY</p>				
<p>76. Final chance for an alliance with any precariat class.</p> <p>CRISTUNITY</p>				
<p>77. Disinformation! Coordinated smear campaign turns public against workers.</p> <p>WORKERS—3 debits</p>				
<p>54. Workers' revolutions abroad reinvigorate internationalism. Collapse of the nationalist 'left'.</p> <p>WORKERS—2 assets CAPITALISTS—1 debit</p>				
<p>23. Re-nationalization of health and transport. Support for economic planning grows.</p> <p>WORKERS—2 assets CAPITALISTS—1 debit</p>				
<p>55. Anti-nationalist decolonial coalition ousts centerists in workers' party.</p> <p>WORKERS—3 assets</p>				
<p>CRISTUNITY</p>				
<p>79. COLD FEET</p> <p>Miss as many turns at the dice as you have allies.</p>				
<p>56. Chance for an alliance with any of the precariat classes.</p>				
<p>25. Capitalists control the Supreme Court.</p> <p>CAPITALISTS—1 asset</p>				
<p>82. Capitalists convince neo-cosmist left to break away from workers' movement, and pursue space colonization.</p> <p>CAPITALISTS—3 assets</p>				
<p>81. NUCLEAR WAR</p> <p>GEOENGINEERING TERMINATION SHOCK</p>				
<p>80. Capitalists start another mineral war, met this time with backlash and civil unrest.</p> <p>CAPITALISTS—2 debits</p>				
<p>57. Presidential crisis mismanagement is forgotten.</p> <p>WORKERS—1 debit CAPITALISTS—2 assets</p>				
<p>26. Chance for an alliance with students.</p>				
<p>61. Continuing economic downturn forces debt jubilee.</p> <p>WORKERS—1 debit CAPITALISTS—1 asset</p>				
<p>60. Human and nonhuman workers unite to fight anthropocentrism.</p> <p>WORKERS—3 assets</p>				
<p>CRISTUNITY</p>				
<p>58. CONFRONTATION RENT STRIKE</p>				
<p>27. Strike! Food workers stage walk-out protest.</p> <p>WORKERS—3 assets</p>				
<p>32. Chance for an alliance with content creators.</p>				
<p>31. Post crisis-stimulus deflation.</p> <p>WORKERS—1 asset CAPITALISTS—1 debit</p>				
<p>30. Disinformation! Worker internationalism hit by smear campaign. (Only applies if workers have landed on no.16)</p> <p>WORKERS—2 debits</p>				
<p>CRISTUNITY</p>				
<p>28. Capitalists control what is taught in the schools.</p> <p>CAPITALISTS—2 assets</p>				

Simon Denny is an artist. In September, he will have a solo exhibition at K21, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf, Germany. He will also participate in the 7th Athens Biennale, Greece (25 September–29 November), and Belgrade Biennial, Serbia (opens 16 October). In March 2021, he will have a solo exhibition at Petzel Gallery, New York, USA. He lives in Berlin, Germany.

Joanna Pope is a researcher and composer. She is a contributing editor of *Uneven Earth*, a regular contributor to *he Syllabus* and communications officer at the non-profit Promoting Economic Pluralism, London, UK. Her debut EP *Fantasias for Lock-In* was released on TT in 2019. She lives in Berlin, Germany.

The Guardian

Convery, Stephanie, "From giant board games to Amazon's worker cage: Simon Denny's dark arts," *The Guardian*, June 11, 2019

Art and design



Stephanie Convery

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Tue 11 Jun 2019 23:57 EDT



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From giant board games to Amazon's worker cage: Simon Denny's dark arts



▲ 'I'm a cerebral kind of guy': artist Simon Denny inside Mine, his new exhibition at the Museum of Old and New Art (Mona) in Hobart. Photograph: Jesse Hunniford/Mona

Mona's new subterranean exhibition from the New Zealand sculptor drills down on the ethics of mining for minerals and data

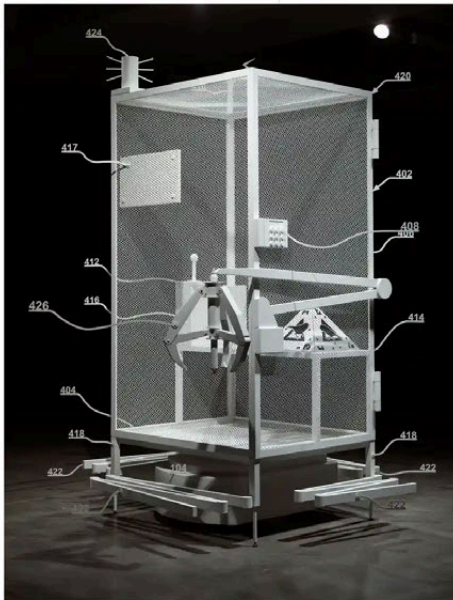
Last year, two academics revealed that in 2016, tech and retail giant Amazon had patented a metal enclosure for transporting workers around its warehouses. The news generated shock and horror internationally - that one of the largest companies in the world with some ethically dubious labour practices had designed an actual cage for its workers seemed positively Orwellian.

Amazon never pursued the device, and even the company's executives called it a "bad idea". Artist Simon Denny, meanwhile, made it.

The white sculpture of the worker cage sits alone in a cavernous wing of Tasmania's Museum of Old and New Art (Mona). It is not a functioning prototype but a 3D model of the diagram from the circulated blueprint, replete with reference numbers hovering around it. Inside the model cage is an augmented reality (AR) marker in the shape of a bird. Scan it, and your device emits a melodic tittering - the song of the critically endangered King Island brown thornbill.

What does a tiny, nearly extinct bird with a sweet song have to do with the labour practices of a monolithic global corporation? Everything, says Denny.

The bird and model cage are part of the 37-year-old artist's major new exhibition, *Mine*, which opened in Hobart on Friday. Enormous in its intellectual scope, *Mine* is the New Zealander's attempt to collapse observations about some of the world's most complex and intricately connected systems - capitalism, colonialism, labour relations, technological development and environmental catastrophe - into something digestible, three-dimensional and immersive.



▲ Simon Denny's 3D model of a blueprint of an Amazon worker cage. Photograph: Jesse Hunniford/Mona

The bird in the cage is in part a play with the idiom, once a reality, of the canary in the coalmine: the bird as a non-human, uncompensated worker that gives its literal life to its labour. At the same time, the plight of the King Island brown thornbill, due to habitat destruction, is not a metaphor at all. "You have this non-human being who is giving its life to the process of industrial expansion and it's sending us a very clear message," Denny tells Guardian Australia.

It's a metaphor that's very apropos, especially with the current debate around the Adani Carmichael coalmine in Queensland, the mechanisation of labour and its effect on jobs, and the way that a bird - in that case, the black-throated finch - has become a symbol of political resistance to the rapacious and destructive nature of resource extraction.

Adani was front of Denny's mind during the development of *Mine*, but he said he realised along the way that he wasn't the right person to make a show about that specific issue. He decided to make something broader instead, something that sat adjacent to the Adani issue and allowed people to see themselves and their own roles within the systems that made the mine possible.



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Something like, say, a board game.

The lonely white worker cage in the cavernous black space is in stark contrast to the room that follows it. Tall, brightly coloured cardboard sculptures of machines, like giant Tonka trucks, are scattered about the room. Underfoot is a giant playing board from *the game Squatter* - a kind of Australian version of Monopoly based on sheep farming.

Instead of the traditional exhibition catalogue, Denny has created his own completely playable version of *Squatter* for gallery guests to take home. Called *Extractor*, it takes the principles of sheep farming and applies them to data mining. Players start out as "a small startup, desperate for a leg-up". Instead of hitting obstacles such as flooding or fencing repairs, you face diversity training and staff walkouts due to military contracts. The game is the heart of the exhibition, and the metaphorical hinge that connects all the ideas Denny is playing with.

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▲ Denny's giant reproduction of the board from the Australian game Squatter. Photograph: Jesse Hunniford/Mona



“The show is about systems. It’s about how systems organise people, and the game is the perfect diagram,” says Denny. “My aim is to give people a very visceral experience of these interrelated ideas which I think are very important. To give them something tangible to walk away with, to hold on to.”

Social media and personal data might seem a long way from minerals being ripped from the earth, but “the viewer themselves is really implicated in this story”, says Denny. “You are being extracted from ... and you are extracting something from the show. You are seeing yourself as a resource and a user at the same time.”

The significance of this exhibition on extraction, being buried in Mona’s underground galleries, is far from coincidental. “While we’re in a mineshaft of a museum, we’re also in a data-mining business at the same time,” he says.

Mona’s O - a portable touchscreen device that serves as the museum’s map, information centre, exhibition pamphlet, wall text and more - is integral to the work. AR markers peppered throughout the exhibition allow you to access an extra layer of the installation, such as real ads made by mining and service companies using technology for things like surveillance, monitoring workers’ sleep patterns or replacing human workers entirely.



▲ Game Boys is Patricia Piccinini's hyperreal sculpture of two children playing console games (centre). Photograph: Jesse Hunniford/Mona



All the while, the O collects your data for the museum's use - or abuse. In the third and final room of the show are sculptures borrowed from more than 20 different artists - including Patricia Piccinini, Fiona Hall, Li Liao and more - each of which represent a different interpretation of the concept of a worker. They sit on platforms above portals to real-time information about Mona's data collection: what it knows about you, what you like and don't like, what kind of device you use, and more.

Denny cheerfully admits he's "a very cerebral kind of guy who likes to pack a lot of ideas and information into shows", but equally important, he says, is sparking an emotional response in his audience - "making moving experiences that tell us something about how we feel and where we are in the world".

"We are living in and implicated in these different layers of extractive behaviours," says Denny. "Some of us are the thornbill, who is about to check out of that game, and some of us are far further up, about to harvest the win. But what's really going on is an organisation of things that doesn't need to be organised in that way."

● *Mine by Simon Denny is showing at the Museum of Old and New Art, Hobart, until 13 April 2020*

● *Guardian Australia was a guest of Tourism Tasmania and Dark Mofo*



THE ART NEWSPAPER

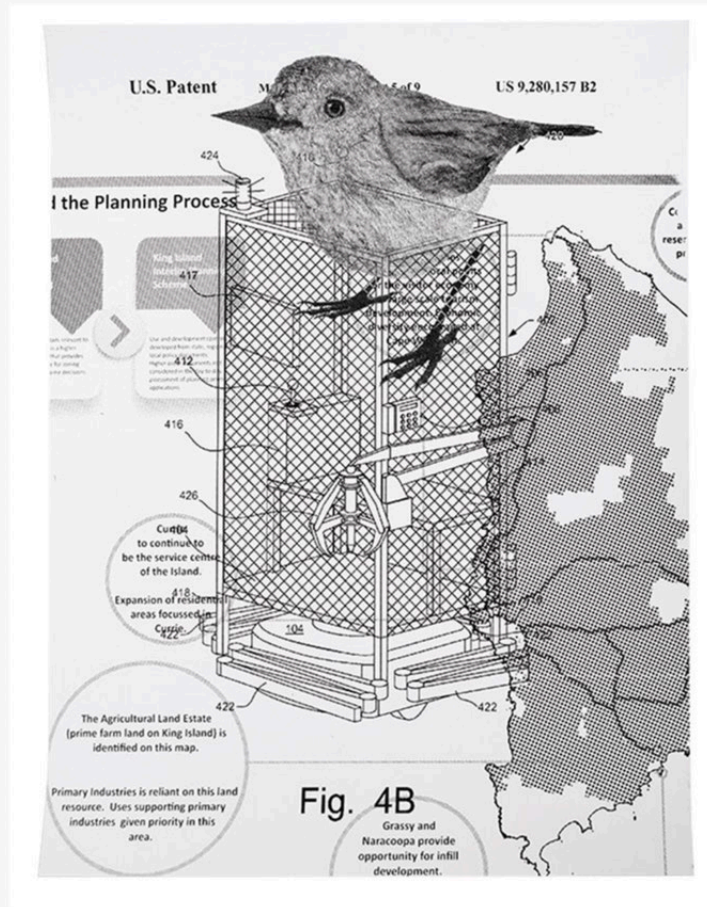
Stone, Tim, "Canary in the coal mine: Simon Denny on his new show about mining data and minerals," *The Art Newspaper*, June 5, 2019

[PREVIEW](#) → [EXHIBITIONS](#)

Canary in the coal mine: Simon Denny on his new show about mining data and minerals

Exhibition by New Zealand-born, Berlin-based artist opens at the Museum of Old and New Art in Hobart

TIM STONE
5th June 2019 08:05 GMT



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An exhibition about both the mining of minerals as well as data will open at Hobart's Museum of Old and New Art (Mona) this weekend, a museum which itself is carved into the sandstone of the Berriedale Peninsula.

The exhibition by the New Zealand-born, Berlin-based artist Simon Denny aims to interrogate the business models of both resource extraction and data collection, and their impact on human labour through sculptures, augmented reality and a giant board game. "It's a theme park to extraction as an exhibition," Denny tells *The Art Newspaper* from his studio in the Berlin suburb of Wedding.



Simon Denny in his Berlin studio © Photo: Tim Stone

In conceiving the exhibition, which is titled *Mine*, Denny was partly inspired by the Tasmanian museum's subterranean setting and the data the museum collects via The O, a digital visitor guide that tracks engagement across the gallery spaces. "The museum and the medium all came together to present a very particular opportunity," Denny says. "The O is a huge part of my exhibition."

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Mine is the most technologically ambitious show to date for the 37-year-old Denny, who represented New Zealand at the 56th Venice Biennale in 2015 and has had major shows at MoMA PS1 in New York, the Serpentine Gallery in London and Christchurch Art Gallery in New Zealand.

“All of the objects in the show and all of the experiences are enhanced by the augmented reality”. One of those experiences is a King Island brown thornbill—a Tasmanian bird species facing imminent extinction—that will “live” on The O throughout the exhibition. “[It is] kind of like a canary in the mine of the Anthropocene,” Denny says. The irony of today’s mining for resources that power digital devices is not lost on Denny.



Simon Denny's Extractor 2019 © Simon Denny

“What I’m trying to do in this show is find an experience and imagery that talk to this new paradigm of [resource] extraction.”

The exhibition is curated by Jarrod Rawlins and Emma Pike.

• [Simon Denny: Mine](#) ↗, *Museum of Old and New Art, Hobart, 8 June-13 April 2020*

TEXTE ZUR KUNST

Denny, Simon: "Face the market on your own / Dem Markt alleine gegenüberreten", *Texte zur Kunst*, June 2017, pp. 124-133

SIMON DENNY

FACE THE MARKET ON YOUR OWN



Huaqiang Road, Shenzhen, 2016, in Simon Denny, „Real Mass Entrepreneurship“, 2017, Videostill

For the past few years, my work has focused on tech-related business practice as a powerful mainstream cultural influencer: how Samsung's new management strategy reflected the corporation's (and South Korea's) adoption of globalism in the 1990s; how Berlin's political landscape is changing with the growth of a significant startup scene; how the same narrative that paints blockchain as an alternative to corruption-prone free-market currencies is nevertheless predicated on a logic of free-market libertarianism. I'm interested in how seemingly ephemeral elements (management systems, currency channels, the aesthetics of communicational strategies) take material form, the potential in these models, and, also, the threats they may pose (positive and negative) to the existing order. This past year, I was asked to make a show for OCAT Shenzhen – Shenzhen

being China's first designated Special Economic Zone¹ and, with the shortcuts such a jurisdiction offers, now an epicenter for the manufacturing and increasingly the R&D of many of the world's popular electronic devices.

While preparing this project, it became clear to me that Shenzhen is not just a crossroads of innovation and production but also, it would seem, of ideology regarding how states might be moving forward, globally, in terms of social security in an age of disappearing labor. This is to say that we live in a world of increasingly efficient automation across all sectors, a world where a handful of private global platforms (Google, Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Uber, Airbnb, Tencent)² have centralized resources and profits, with increasingly fewer people participating in the conception, production, and distribution of



„Simon Denny: Real Mass Entrepreneurship“, OCAT Shenzhen, 2017, Ausstellungsansicht / installation view

the core products that serve us all. In turn, jobs are disappearing. And due to greater reliance on global zones of exception (as well as a global finance system that is essentially beyond the governance of nation states), even relatively stable countries are less and less able to ensure employment or care on a significant scale. If progressive values tend to be underwritten by Marx's labor theory of value, this dramatic shift in the way labor and society are correlated seems particularly fundamental to any consideration of what an effective Left might look like now.

To be sure, this decline in labor is as much a problem of meaning-making as it is one of money – I need to work to get money, but I also work because it provides structure and meaning to life. In the West, Universal Basic Income (or UBI, wherein either governments or corporations would provide a “basic” living wage to “all”)³ is at least being talked about as a possible economic solution. Yet it is still far from being adopted by most major governments (the theme of technological unemployment is often avoided

in populist narratives like Trump's, or in the supposed neoliberal narratives of Hillary).⁴ But even were UBI to be implemented, there would still be the matter of yesterday's shared stories being no longer capable of narrating today's practical realities: that which we are promised, experience, and imagine, societally.

Arriving in Shenzhen, I learned that China has already proposed an alternative answer: mass entrepreneurship. In researching my show (titled “Real Mass Entrepreneurship,” about Shenzhen's tech ecosystem), I had conversations with many leading voices in and around the city's technology business community, ranging from people working in data and policy analysis to service providers to founders of hardware incubators and DIY hardware platforms. Many of these individuals were in dialogue with figures from both central government and the grassroots, “maker”-influenced⁵ hardware scene, emblemized by the sprawling, zero-regulation, “Shanzhai”-inspired⁶ open electronics markets in the city's central Huaqiangbei district.⁷ What became clear through



Simon Denny, „Real Mass Entrepreneurship“, 2017, Videostill

this dialogue was a macro narrative of the future of work in China (and by extension, perhaps, the world) wherein the notion of a centrally planned social safety net was demonstrably untenable.

As the Chinese government sees it, there is no way to create a state-supported buffer for its population of nearly 1.4 billion (compare to the EU's 510 million) or to ensure growth of large-enterprise-generated jobs (indeed prediction models point to their decline). Rather, China aims to encourage self-sufficiency via a program of mass entrepreneurship: a meritocratic system wherein everyone has access to the tools for creating their own business, and thus a means of supporting themselves. In short, this could feel like Thatcherism on steroids. And Huaqiangbei stands as a key example, a place where anyone can be a "maker" (of electronic devices, or components that make better devices), selling niche products to international passersby and global markets with the help of Kickstarter and Taobao.

Sound problematic? Yes, and not least in the way that, as with Thatcherism, China's strategy shifts not just profits but also risk away from a collective body and onto the individual – the self

as micro-corporation in a market of a billion-plus entrepreneurs. As Shenzhen tech visionary David Li remarked to me, the policy requires that each of us assume a mentality of "having to face the market on one's own." On the other hand, he asks, "What, really, is the alternative?" Mass redistribution systems seem increasingly hard to implement as government agency weakens and businesses grow evermore influential, with little incentive to support policies aimed at limiting their profits and power.

But there is another factor to consider when it comes to China's conception of mass entrepreneurship, especially as it plays out in the SEZ-enabled hardware ecosystem: copyright. In Shenzhen, patent restrictions upheld in Silicon Valley are virtually impossible to enforce, rendering intellectual property itself open-source. In turn, the author function – that which generates value via the subjectivity of the creative star company, the founder on the stage with a beautiful story, or by extension the artist-genius marking his canvas – has far less agency. To be an entrepreneur in this environment is not to be a "financialized self" but, rather, to partake in a (perhaps newer) spirit

of capitalism wherein the self is given back to the individual, whose being (subjecthood) is ostensibly now buffered from the market by a productive shell. Without effective copyright enforcement, as is the case in Huaqiangbei, everybody has access both to the ideas⁸ and to the revenue these ideas garner – a setup that stands in contradistinction to the Silicon Valley model (which echoes the art market model), where both ideas and revenue are aggregated by a few powerful groups at the top, validated by an elite set of individual “creatives.”

In Huaqiangbei, “imitation, innovation, iteration”⁹ is a frequently invoked maxim. And it’s one that, (bearing relation to Confucian ideals, Chinese landscape painting and language learning, etc.), has a culturally significant historical precedent.¹⁰ Huaqiangbei follows the logic that if you drop legal barriers to imitation – and note that while copyright laws might be intended to protect small operations from big businesses, they are disproportionately used by big businesses to defend against competitors – everybody is able to innovate their own version of whatever (be it a programmable LED strip, a selfie-stick with a fan, or a smartphone with a built-in garage door opener); in Shenzhen, anyone with a good idea can have access to the means of production and sell to the global market. But moreover, the success of any one “maker” is necessarily indebted to the innovation of those around him or her, thus incentivizing community as a requisite part of securing individual wealth. Further, it is much more difficult for corporate monopoly to take hold in an environment like this. For example, Shenzhen (home to Foxconn’s biggest factory) remains the world’s largest producer of iPhones. Yet without protected access to the Chinese market, Apple wields far less power over consumers

in China comparative to elsewhere in the world.¹¹ China’s markets are, of course, much more complicated than just the Mass Entrepreneurship initiative though. At the top end, big China tech does embrace a form of protectionism that drives domestic growth (a market of some 1.4 billion consumers is not nothing), enabling the success of very large, monopolistic companies like Tencent. And as a strategy, mass entrepreneurship has its pitfalls too. For one, it greatly privileges well-educated urbanites, providing scant infrastructure for the nation’s less educated population to be integrated.¹² Moreover, it deepens the nation’s problem of precarity (a new precarious management class compounding that of the already precarious factory-employed). In addition, government funding often fails to reach the small businesses it is intended to support.

Perhaps we’ll find a better answer in a system that combines both an open-copyright environment and some form of carefully implemented Universal Basic Income. Even if a mass entrepreneurial program like the one promoted in China proves to be part of a credible answer to the future of the labor-value-meaning equation, platform-based market leaders are still likely to control a lot of money and power. Will the combined income of the world’s mom-and-pop shops be able to politically oppose the might of these platforms without more democratic implementation of regulations on markets that otherwise tend toward monopoly? Or is this precisely a place around which the voice of a new New Left might be cohered?

Notes

- 1 A Special Economic Zone (or SEZ) is a jurisdiction assigned financial regulations that differ from the norm of that state. Intended to incentivize growth, job creation, and

international investment in the country at large, SEZs often demonstrate disproportionate growth in comparison to the rest of the state, thus in turn creating new norms and accelerating deregulation. A SEZ like Shenzhen is an entire city, including both business and residential programs.

- 2 For example, Apple Inc. (as of May 2017) lays claim to 91% of the smartphone market. To put that in economic terms, the company (as of December 2016) reported cash assets of \$246.09 billion USD (predominantly held in offshore accounts), making gains, in the last three months of 2016, at a rate of roughly \$3.6 million an hour. See Tripp Mickle, "Apple's Cash Pile Is Set to Top \$250 Billion," <https://www.wsj.com/articles/apples-250-billion-cash-pile-enlivens-hopes-fuels-expectations-1493566748>. This tendency is engendered by Silicon Valley standard practice systems – such as venture capital for funding platform start-ups, where wealthy investors who can afford to lose billions of dollars over long periods offer services at a loss, undercutting existing markets in price and convenience, therefore gaining effective monopolies (Uber, Amazon).
- 3 How UBI is implemented and what is considered "universal" (i.e., national or fully global? refugees inclusive? undocumented immigrants?), and "basic" (i.e., how much income is a fair base) would determine the merits of such a system. One could imagine, as a negative example, a scenario where UBI becomes an excuse for unfair economic restructuring which replaces more targeted welfare systems.
- 4 Across the West, scapegoats such as immigration policy or asylum for refugees tend to replace the fact that it is an increase in automated labor that is chiefly reconfiguring employment. Repatriating automated factories to the US, for example, is something that would benefit corporations, not the would-be workers who will no longer be necessary.
- 5 The "maker" movement is a DIY electronics hardware subculture framed by Dale Doherty's "Make" magazine in 2005 and popularized by Chris Anderson in his 2010 *Wired* article "Atoms Are the New Bits." China's maker movement has adopted many of the mainstays of US maker culture, but has been further shaped by the Chinese government's investment in the sector vis-à-vis, not least, its policy of Mass Entrepreneurship.
- 6 "Shanzhai" is a counterfeit item; in the context of Shenzhen, often electronics hardware. Shanzhai has been talked about in this ecosystem as an open-sourcing of intellectual property, and is a term that has increasingly positive connotations in China, implying not theft, but a spirit of access and innovation.
- 7 Huaqiangbei has become nearly mythic in its status as a global hub for the maker movement and is idealized as a space of genuine grassroots innovation in electronics hardware.
- 8 The most scalable examples being selfie-sticks, hoverboard scooters, and Bluetooth-speaker-equipped karaoke mics, all of which are products with no founder, no inventor, no patent, and therefore no monopoly.
- 9 By imitating something, one first comes to intimately understand this object's mechanics; once this is mastered, innovation can happen on top of that initial form; and then finally, various versions of that development can be iterated.
- 10 See, for example, Jonathan Ocko, "Copying, Culture, and Control: Chinese Intellectual Property Law in Historical Context," in: *Yale Journal of Law & the Humanities*, vol. 8, no. 2, 1996.
- 11 "For 2016, Apple experienced year-on-year decline in China with the tech giant's shipments volume to China falling from 58.4 million units in 2015 to 44.9 million in 2016. Meanwhile, its market share dropped 4 percentage points to 9.6 percent, even as the Chinese smartphone market grew 9 percent for the full year, according to the latest IDC Quarterly Mobile Phone Tracker." <http://www.cnbc.com/2017/02/06/apples-market-share-in-china-falls-for-first-time.html>.
- 12 Although initiatives like Tat Lam's Shanzhai City is working to close these gaps with data literacy-focused metrics across wider sectors and demographics.

The Guardian

Sayej, Nadja: "Simon Denny: the artist explaining blockchain with Pokémon," *Theguardian.com*, August 26, 2016

Simon Denny: the artist explaining blockchain with Pokémon

His 'fan art' exhibition tells the story of blockchain visionaries, bitcoin and the future of cryptocurrency through the mediums of cartoons and board games



Simon Denny: 'It's a dense idea and it puts a lot of people off.' Photograph: Guy Bell/REX Shutterstock

New Zealand artist [Simon Denny](#) doesn't look like a stereotypical bohemian artist. Donning a navy blue T-shirt with matching track pants and jacket with clean sneakers, he could easily be mistaken for a corporate banker on his day off.

Even in the way he talks about money - he throws around business jargon like "global governance", "distributed ledger" and "blockchain" - Denny could easily pass as a startup founder or business analyst, even a finance reporter. But the truth is, he is a technology finance groupie, and what he really makes is fan art.

“I make fan art. I’m like a geeky fan,” says the 32-year-old, over a cappuccino on the 24th floor PanoramaCafé in his adopted home of Berlin.

His forthcoming exhibition - Blockchain Future States - opens 8 September at Petzel Gallery in New York City and puts his geeky “fan art” on view. The gallery will be used as an altar to worship three blockchain visionaries (blockchain is the [decentralized transaction database](#) for the cryptocurrency bitcoin and has been described as even the “[the future of the internet](#)”), or tech finance celebrities, who could potentially shape the future of how we send and receive money.

“I thought making fan art would be a more simple way to tell the story I want to tell,” Denny said. “I’m hoping to give people a wider and easier understanding of different visions of the future.”

But how does one artist go about explaining “blockchain” to art gallery goers? The term is certainly abstract and the art world loves abstraction, [albeit usually of a different kind](#).

Denny’s interest in the concept dates to 2008 when bitcoin was invented as a non-national cryptocurrency after the global financial crisis. “Some of us don’t trust nation states and central banks to make our global systems work,” he said. “That’s our start; the birth of bitcoin.”

Denny, who often apologizes for the complexity of his work during interviews, gets easily excited and almost giddy when explaining how much fun he has making art out of dense, financial jargon. “It’s a dense idea and it puts a lot of people off because of its language but it’s really something that’s moving things,” he said.

To break it down, Denny has created an exhibition that explains blockchain through games - specifically the Risk board game and Pokémon cartoons. “I tried to make it accessible to people who haven’t heard of a cryptocurrency in a fun and easy way,” Denny said.

The exhibition features a giant Pokéball alongside a cut-out of the Pokémon protagonist Ash Ketchum as a starting point to explain the lingering bitcoin mystery: who really invented bitcoin?

The Australian computer scientist [Craig Wright](#) claims to have founded the cryptocurrency under the fake name “[Satoshi Nakamoto](#)”, or so he said [in a recent interview](#). Apparently, Wright’s pseudonym takes its origins from

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Pokémon. “Satoshi” is the Japanese name for [Ash](#), and the last name “Nakamoto” is named after 17th century Japanese [philosopher Tominaga Nakamoto](#), who criticized Confucianism.

It provides a wealth of metaphors for the artist. “‘Ash’ rises from the ashes of the current currency system, he becomes the savior of how the cryptocurrency saves us,” says Denny.

The exhibition also features three different versions of the 1959 war-based board game [Risk](#), which Denny created to show three blockchain enthusiast’s view of the future; that includes economist Blythe Masters, CEO of blockchain tech company [Digital Asset](#), investor [Balaji Srinivasan](#), CEO of Bitcoin startup [21 Inc](#), and [programmer Vitalik Buterin](#), co-founder of a cryptocurrency called ether and its company, [Ethereum](#).

They’re all revolutionary, as well as controversial, in their own different way: Masters, who was incorrectly called the woman who built the “[financial weapon of mass destruction](#)” in 2008, is an English economist attempting to bring blockchain to global markets. Denny has designed her Risk game to replace the world’s countries with financial centers and a dice made of the world’s different currencies.

Srinivasan, a Silicon Valley scene stalwart [who has blocked a journalist who tried to start an argument with him on Twitter](#), believes bitcoin will give the world a free market separate from government regulations. So his Risk game has a shore and offshore territories where people can build clouds in an island in the middle of the ocean.

As for 22-year-old Russian programmer Buterin, who Denny calls “the Luke Skywalker of the cryptocurrency circuit”, Denny has created an intergalactic version of the Risk board game that takes place in outer space with network-to-network paths and players. In real life, Buterin is often painted as a fantastical savior figure for his crowdfunding venture capital firm Ethereum (until it recently fell victim to a [\\$50m hack](#)).

Each game design reveals how Denny interprets each blockchain visionary and their agenda for world domination; and what blockchain can do for the world. In a time when bitcoin’s power is often doubted and [it does has a volatile past](#), including the recent \$78m hack in Hong Kong which caused a 20% drop in the cryptocurrency’s value, Denny remains optimistic when making fan art about

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each blockchain visionary. And that's a quality he seems to admire.

“At least people are dreaming and seriously building a global financial system that is more fair to people,” Denny said. “They’re keeping the hope alive and moving forward to fairer global future, which is what I’d like to see the world go into.”

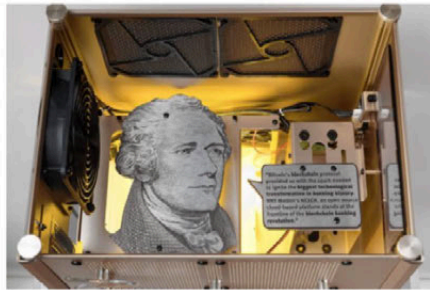
THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Norton, Steven: "Blockchain Art Exhibitions Explore the Bitcoin Technology's Future", *The Wall Street Journal*, September 7, 2016

ARTS | ART

Blockchain Art Exhibitions Explore the Bitcoin Technology's Future

Two shows by artist Simon Denny, in New York and Berlin, look at competing views on how the little-understood technology underpinning the digital currency bitcoin should develop—and helps translate them for viewers



Simon Denny uses cultural references like computer cases to explore blockchain. PHOTO: JOERG VON BRUCHHAUSEN

By STEVEN NORTON
Sept. 7, 2016 11:39 a.m. ET

Pokémon, postage stamps and the strategy board game Risk. Simon Denny uses everyday objects like these to illuminate how technology shapes the way we live and work. In his latest exhibition, the Berlin-based New Zealand artist explores blockchain, the little-understood technology underpinning the digital currency bitcoin.

Opening Thursday at New York's Petzel Gallery, "Blockchain Future States" looks at competing views about how the technology should evolve. Large cutout images of the leaders of three leading blockchain companies—Digital Asset Holdings LLC, 21 Inc. and Ethereum—stand near globe-like structures meant to highlight how new currency systems could challenge traditional forms of statehood. A Risk board for each firm lays out the company's strategy to create a new world order. A similar installation, "Blockchain Visionaries," is at the Berlin Biennale until Sept. 18.

That contemporary artists are exploring blockchain further suggests the technology has reached a level of cultural significance beyond bitcoin's initial hype. Today, companies from global banks to auto makers and blue-chip tech firms are experimenting with blockchain to find new ways to speed up financial transactions or create safer supply chains.



Blockchain Risk board game prototype by Simon Denny PHOTO: JOERG VON BRUCHHAUSEN

For many, though, the technology remains an obscure subject. Encountering it in a gallery setting can help audiences look beyond digital coins or lines of code and address broader questions about how technology shapes future societies, Mr. Denny says. Seeing the technology through the lens of everyday objects like a Risk board creates a cultural entryway into a highly technical subject (a decentralized transaction ledger) that might bore the average viewer.

"Pretty much everyone who walks into that room will have some relationship to Risk," says the 33-year-old artist.

Mr. Denny first encountered blockchain in the context of bitcoin. It didn't interest him much at first. "Friends were just buying drugs with it," he says.

RELATED READING

- [Bitcoin-Tech Firm Thinks This Name Can Unify Wall Street Behind Blockchain \(Aug. 24, 2016\)](#)
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- [What Blockchain Is and What It Can Do \(June 19, 2016\)](#)

But a "2.0 moment" came around 2015, as banks and other firms spent more time and money figuring out how to build upon the underlying technology. "I became interested in how different people with different types of agendas are invested in the future of what this could be," Mr. Denny says.

"Blockchain Future States" sets out his observations. His Risk board for Digital Asset replaces countries with financial capitals—reflecting the fact that the firm, led by former J.P. Morgan Chase & Co. executive Blythe Masters, is creating a platform geared toward financial markets. The board for 21 Inc., which focuses more on bitcoin, eschews traditional geography for nationalist lands and technologist clouds, while Ethereum, an open software platform, is set in outer space.

To acquaint visitors with the foundations of blockchain, Mr. Denny intersperses popular icons—Pokémon protagonist Ash and a giant game box—with the mythology surrounding bitcoin creator (or creators) Satoshi Nakamoto.

While the Berlin show doesn't include the Risk boards or digital monsters, it benefits greatly from its location: a former East German State Council building that's now part of a management school. Mr. Denny says the space highlights a physical meeting point of different systems of governance, which encourages new ways of looking at markets and sovereignty.

The artist says his goal isn't to come to a solid conclusion about which blockchain future is better, but to tease out the possible opportunities and obstacles of each. "When people come across new technologies like this, they're just not sure," he says. "I'm coming in as a fan and optimist, but not as a blind publicist."

Greenberger, Alex: "Bitcoin Is for Winners. Simon Denny's Crash Course on Cryptocurrency", *The Village Voice*, September 20, 2016



Bitcoin Is for Winners: Simon Denny's Crash Course on Cryptocurrency

BY ALEX GREENBERGER

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2016 AT 9 AM.



Courtesy the artist/Petzel, New York

At the opening for Simon Denny's latest show at Petzel Gallery, "Blockchain Future States," a colleague and I stood in front of a vitrine devoted to the tangled origin story of Bitcoin. My colleague read the first few lines of text UV-printed onto it and gave up. "I feel like I'd have to read about this forever to understand it," he told me.

It's an apt comment, since seeing a Denny show often feels like a crash course in Silicon Valley culture, without anyone to explain the technospeak. Emulating the mise-en-scène of product launches and tech stores, his installations rely on screens, collected data, and text-ridden sculptures. Words like "blockchain," "API," and "cryptocurrency" are thrown at viewers, as are dioramas, games, videos, economic charts, emails, inspirational quotes, and various doodads. Denny's exhibitions are exhausting, but they aren't tiresome — his shows consistently feel fresh, as though the young Berlin-based artist were tearing open digital technology's clean exterior and, each time, revealing something new about the people who control it.

Denny takes Bitcoin as his subject in a mostly smart look at how information, ideas, and money flow online. He's created what effectively feels like a three-act play with an ingenious overture. The main section of the show explores three Bitcoin-related start-ups, starting with Digital Asset (democratic in theory), moving to 21 Inc. (questionable), and ending with Ethereum (mildly terrifying).

But first, Denny wisely provides an introduction: an exploration of the myth of Satoshi Nakamoto, the founder of Bitcoin. Through a series of Plexiglas vitrines devoted to the currency's pioneers, we discover that Nakamoto, once treated as an inspirational figure by the tech-as-freedom cadre, was possibly just the alias of Craig Steven Wright, a businessman (or at least, so Wright claims in an email reprinted here). Nakamoto himself is represented as an oversize Alucore cutout of a Pokémon character — in the process turning him into an identity that can be traded in a larger game of control over Bitcoin. The goal is to own every aspect of it.

Likewise, each start-up gets its own larger-than-life, personalized version of Risk, the board game in which world domination is the goal. (Digital Asset's edition replaces countries with financial centers; 21 Inc.'s focuses on offshore territories; Ethereum's sets players against anarchist cryptocurrencies.) Risk unfurls a somewhat obvious metaphor: Bitcoin is simply a game in which the start-ups' founders are the preordained winners; Bitcoin users are just pawns.

As usual, Denny employs the optimistic language tech companies use to describe their products. He also appropriates the visual language of Silicon Valley culture: The exhibit is installed like a trade show, with pristine surfaces and flashy signs. Digital Asset's installation, for example, comes with a promotional backdrop. (It reads, in part, "Blockchain for Efficiency, Security, Settlement speed, Compliance in existing markets.")

But that trade-show aesthetic gets punctured by the show's end. Behind the installation for Ethereum — a platform that can store not just Bitcoin, but also lots of other kinds of data, including birth certificates and various forms of ID — the gallery drywall has been ripped open. Ethereum's logo is emblazoned under the gash, with the slogan "A SAFE DECENTRALIZED SOFTWARE PLATFORM" beneath it. But someone (is it Denny?) has crossed out the word "SAFE" and spray-painted, "Don't trust the network." It's a warning worth heeding.

Simon Denny: "Blockchain Future States"
Petzel Gallery
456 West 18th Street
212-680-9467, petzel.com
Through October 22

e-flux

Denny, Simon/Pitego, Eli: "Blockchain Future States", *Eflux*, October 21, 2016

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What would a future geopolitics powered by the technology behind Bitcoin look like?

Simon Denny with Eli Pitegoff

Oct. 21, 2016, 8:17 PM ▲ 146,266 ○ 3

In 2008 a mysterious figure(s) released a paper under the pseudonym Satoshi Nakamoto describing blockchain protocol, a peer-to-peer system of trade underpinning the digital currency Bitcoin. Since then, it has come to light that the applications of the blockchain protocol are potentially far-reaching.

For one thing, it could render "trusted third party" verification (currently facilitated by governments, banks, accountants, notaries, and fiat currencies) obsolete with direct peer-to-peer transactions, disrupting huge swaths of the financial services industry. But even beyond disrupting how transactions are carried out, some people see in blockchain technology a blueprint outlining the digital infrastructure for an entirely new model of nationhood.



Detail of painting depicting Ethereum blockchain founder in front of a fantasy world powered by their token Ether. Behind the earth, the spirits of Austrian economists Friedrich A. Hayek and Ludwig von Mises.

Blockchain nationhood could amount to a post-geographic alternative to the nation-state system, whose infrastructure has the striking quality of being developable alongside (i.e. without being an immediate challenge or obvious threat to) current nation-state governments. As a result, such initiatives are in a uniquely advantaged position for takeover if certain, specific factors align.

This slide show uses sculptures as visual metaphors to define some of the more radical visions of a blockchain future, and describes the conditions of possibility for their implementation.

It's a possible technologist's answer to some of today's urgent problems. Take a look »

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Blockchain's origin: Satoshi Nakamoto and the peer-to-peer answer to a seemingly corrupt financial world

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In October 2008, in the wake of the Lehman Brothers crash, a mysterious figure named "Satoshi Nakamoto" released a white paper describing a peer-to-peer electronic money system. The money system, known today as the crypto-currency "Bitcoin," is based on a distributed network that prevents double spending and replaces the need for "trusted third party" verification. Verification of transactions instead occurs automatically by using a single ledger distributed across the entire network, which timestamps all transactions and creates the infrastructure for consensus across all nodes; a chain of identical blocks – the "Blockchain." In the following years, the idea scales to an unignorable number of users, propelled in part by the gripping founder narrative. To this day the identity of the person(s) behind the pseudonym Satoshi Nakamoto, a reference to a Pokemon character and a Japanese iconoclast merchant from the 1700s, remains unclear.



"Our current system needs to be burned down and remade. Cryptocurrency is the phoenix, and Satoshi is ash from which the phoenix rises... and the name of a silly Pokemon character. In Japan the name of Ash is Satoshi." – Craig Wright, one of many figures allegedly behind Bitcoin creator Satoshi Nakamoto.

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Blockchain's potential and classical economic liberalism

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As has been noted by both critics and proponents alike, the blockchain is a multi-faceted instrument – a story and a technology – that resonates with a political history. The after-image of thinkers like Friedrich Hayek is preserved in visions of market systems as self-regulating totalities.

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What could the blockchain threaten? part 1: trusted third-party elites

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Entrepreneurs in the banking industry are exploring the use of the blockchain as a way of automating much of the labor involved in the most fundamental operations of capital markets. From settlement to security, the blockchain could replace many of the services currently provided by banking industry professionals and make the sector faster with lower overhead costs – continuing the tendency in the industry towards accelerating trade and consolidating power.

< 3/8 >



A cutout of banking superstar and blockchain entrepreneur Blythe Masters in a trade fair style booth promoting a prototypical banking application for the protocol.

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What could the blockchain threaten? part 2: the nation-state model

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The blockchain protocol has the potential to mint digital currencies outside of the jurisdiction of a central bank – the institution that the state has vested with the authority to issue and regulate money. However, the disruptive potential of the blockchain need not only apply to creating alternative systems for money. The blockchain also has the potential to index and protect what could be called a kind of proprietary identity – the mechanism used to identify individuals and legitimize their participation as economic and legal subjects in a state system. Establishing proprietary identity enables people to own property or be taken to court, for example, and is typically associated with citizenship. By giving people the capacity to establish and enact alternatives, the blockchain as a tool could be seen to challenge existing sovereignty models.



An edition of the boardgame RISK exploring the post-geopolitics of Silicon Valley blockchain startup 21.Inc. The founder, Balaji Srinivasan, is exploring alternative money systems and sovereignty models using Bitcoin's blockchain as its basis. He envisions Bitcoin as the money protocol for a third kind of internet — the "internet of value," enabling a post-national free market world where latency is zero in financial transactions between machines and geography is redefined following the cloud.

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The emergence of post-geographic nationhood, part 1

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As commentators have long claimed, we are seeing the beginnings of a schism between community and location. Since the growth of the internet in the early 1990s and more recently with filter-bubble-generating social media people have been able to form international communities based on mutual affinity. Community is no longer necessarily borne out of geographic proximity.

⏪ 5/8 ⏩



Detail of the 21.co edition of RISK showing a vertical offshore cloud infrastructure being built and populated by visionary founders, hardware and networks. The act of constructing post-geographic communities is enacted in game form – underlining the role of markets and competition in establishing the ubiquity of a proposed Bitcoin protocol for accelerated commerce.

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The emergence of post-geographic nationhood, part 2

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The blockchain affords location independent communities the infrastructure to realize new, post-geographic models of nationhood. If two fundamental components of a state are a legal apparatus and financial infrastructure, the blockchain has the potential to technologically underpin both. Initiatives like Ethereum have built digital ecosystems addressing exactly this potential. Ethereum has given rise to projects like Bitnation, the DAO (Decentralized Autonomous Organization) and other self-organizing groups who are able to define their own rules and automate compliance. Using immutable encrypted code distributed across all nodes in an opt-in network, people have newfound agency in their ability to choose and/or construct new systems of governance.



Sculptural detail showing the ambitions of Bitnation, a fledgling initiative hosted on the Ethereum blockchain platform. Bitnation aims to provide the digital infrastructure for a new borderless society. Among the services the company wants to facilitate are an education network, a public notary, refugee emergency response system and an ambassadorial network. One of the most visionary projects being built with the blockchain, it proposes infallible trust across a community.

The perilous (nation) state

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The blockchain's potential for disrupting governance emerges at a time when many urgent forces can be seen threatening the stability of existing sovereignty models. Scientific predictions around the impact of climate change suggest the possibility of a refugee crisis at a scale we as a civilization have yet to have seen. The re-emergence of nationalist movements and a reanimated appetite for authoritarianism has bred a volatile geopolitical climate prone to escalating conflict. Massive stores of arms, recently understood as largely symbolic or dormant, now seem more likely to be pulled from the arsenal. Not only do these threats mark instability, but also a perception that the systems in place are corrupt and in need of radical change. At a time when retreats into nationalism and trust in strong men as leaders are being proposed as fixes to a broken sovereignty system, one can understand the interest in alternatives.



Detail of a sculpture exploring a pioneering app built on the Ethereum platform. A distressed tombstone supports diagrams mapping transitioning sites for government. A post-national tech victor emerges at the present/future end of the timeline.

Blockchain future states

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If the blockchain emerges and scales up enough, it could provide a viable alternative to existing economic and legal infrastructures and become a default protocol for future power. If there continues to be a disenfranchised voice calling for radical change to the world's existing sovereignty models – if reactionary forces implode in the face of inflammatory border conflicts and devastating ecological inevitabilities – then the blockchain's adaptive solutions may provide, by default, the most robust answer to the speculated imminent chaos. A technocratic solution to governance like the visions proposed by blockchain-laced dreams could be seen as a way of circumventing the nation-state system and all of its geopolitical instabilities. It could also, by the same token, be seen as a way of circumventing its checks and balances and pave the way for an extended reinvestment in the unabated power of the self-regulating free market.



The Ethereum "frontier" as a special edition of the board game Risk. Decentralized apps form a radically new network of intersecting self-governing entities that offer services currently provided by nation states. The free-market development of this ecosystem irradiates the necessity of depending on many of our incumbent hierarchies by default.