

Curative!



The No-Nonsense Guide to Your Own Backyard / Pop-Up / Punk Digital Art Exhibition

by crcdng

version 0.3.2

The Switch

Three minutes before the opening of my well-planned and well-organised NFT art exhibition, I am down on my hands and knees, fumbling with a keyboard and a mouse to boot up four small computers that power the four screens the exhibition was named after.

It all had started too well for "4 screens" on this evening in September 2022, in the small space we turned into a pop-up gallery, a few meters from the infamous Admiralsbrücke in the heart of Berlin Kreuzberg. Guests have arrived, enjoying themselves outside, drinks are flowing, the place is well-prepared in a common effort of a small and dedicated team, and we have amazing art to show. I thought I had taken care about almost every conceivable possibility on the technical side, gone through every eventuality. But now someone had found the [switch](#). And pressed it.

The button switched off the power in the whole gallery. The music mixed by two of the hottest DJs in Berlin stopped. The lights went out. The screens went black.

A second later I switched the power back on and went down down on my hands and knees to restore the exhibition.

This was the moment I got the idea for this booklet.

Why this Booklet

There are three reasons why I am writing this booklet.

The first reason is the enormous impact NFTs, and digital art in general, have made since 2021. Some People tend to attribute this to the (in-)famous 69 Million USD Beeple sale on March 11 2021, but there are many [other stories to be told](#). Despite all the rollercoaster of web3, sometimes dreadful experiences with "crypto-bros" or "NFT-sceptics", what has stayed is a vibrant, evolving ecosystem that has boosted the world of digital art to a new level.

The ways we encounter and enjoy are rapidly changing. The DIY spirit that is prevalent in web3 asks us to break boundaries, to introduce new ideas and to experiment with creation in every possible way. In other words: even without noticing it, we are right inside of a new avant-garde.

A second reason is the central importance of exhibitions, events that bring people together with art. However the social part of the Metaverse will play out, people want to meet IRL – "in real life". This means that there is an enormous appetite for events that provide a mix of virtual and physical. Labels are not important here – call it theatre, art gallery, urban game, club night, poetry reading. A live minting experience by [Bright Moments](#), an interactive performance by [Operator](#) or a DJ set by [Richie Hawtin](#) combined with visuals from [Joëlle Snaith](#) are examples for digital art and NFTs in exciting settings.

A third and most important reason is that I want to encourage you to produce your own digital art exhibition. Whether you identify as an artist, collector, curator or none of the traditional roles really doesn't matter. Whether you have a huge budget or zero budget doesn't matter either. What matters is the wish and the vision, a love for art and respect for artists.

In the first chapter about **4 screens**, our exhibition in Berlin, I am sharing my own experience going from idea to opening in 10 days. It not meant as a blueprint, rather to provide inspiration for your own journey. This becomes more clear in the very short discussion about fundamentals in **chapter 2**. With the practical sections covering **before**, **during** and **after** the exhibition and the **additional resources** and **further reading** materials I hope to provide useful information.

Thus there also are three ways to read this booklet. The first one is from start to finish. This will make the most sense. If you are interested in the practical part only, skip ahead to section **Setup**. Or maybe you are in a hurry, looking for a handy checklist. Then go directly to the **TL;DR**. I hope you will return to the other sections later.

Whatever path you choose, do your exhibition.

I'd love to hear from you, discuss your experiences. The quickest way is to reach out via Twitter, I am [@crcdng](https://twitter.com/crcdng).

A Note to Professionals

To outsiders, the art world certainly presents itself as a strange space. What the hell am I doing here? was my reaction the first time I entered a gallery. And I was not the only one¹. Later I was able to relax a bit and it became a sport² to spot the vernissages and finissages in Munich, New York or London, in terms of art (of course), drinks (essential), and food (sometimes). Later it became clear to me what I was searching for in these places, and that was the people surrounded by the art – the latter giving reasons for interesting and stimulating conversations between the former.

Over time I learned to appreciate – as well as worry about – not only the surface of art but the more invisible aspects of the art system. As such I contend that the curation of art is a respectable and serious profession, taught in art schools and universities, requiring deep knowledge, meticulous research and intense work to succeed. Nothing in this booklet is intended to take anything away from that.

Yet I believe there is a space for experimentation that must originate from beyond the established gallery or museum space. To open new doors, disrupt and engage and thereby creating room for conversation, friction and controversy. We can expect mistakes, misunderstandings and scandals and we can ask ourselves what the art world would be without them. It attempts a balance between respect for the existing while at the same time encouraging the new. It is written for someone who never curated an exhibition but has the motivation to do so.

The best I can hope for is to encourage someone to break the existing rules and continue the conversation.

¹ As described in Don Thompson's "The 12 Million Dollar Stuffed Shark", merely entering a gallery can be an intimidating experience.

² A phenomenon that is called 'art ligging'.

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Additional Resources

Additional resources for this booklet include a list of exhibitions and technical setups for Raspberry PI and Windows computers. The materials as well as the latest version of this booklet are available online at <https://github.com/crcdng/curative>.

A curated Crypto Art and NFT reading list is available here <https://github.com/crcdng/nft-reading-list>.

The 4 screens exhibition

Timeline

March 2021

[Hic et Nunc](#) (HEN) goes live on the [Tezos blockchain](#).

April 2021

I discovered the vibe on Hic et Nunc and [became part of the community](#), now Teia.

September 2021

First meeting of the local HEN community in Berlin, facilitated by Diane Drubay.

End of 2021

I started telling everyone that I want to exhibit digital art. Talked to local NFT communities and to some art galleries.

December 2021 / early 2022

Got in contact with despace / TZConnect. In the following months, I helped with technical setup for the pop-up exhibitions Sonarmática by Tezos and fxhash.

July 2022

Got the word that I would be able to use [dekabinett](#), the pop-up exhibition space in Kreuzberg.

July 27, 2022

Contacted [Taís Koshino](#), one of the founders of the DiverseNFTArt initiative in Brazil, [Michelle Brown](#) in Melbourne, and [Viola Lukács](#) in Berlin.

July 29, 2022

Green light from despace. The next 10 days fly by preparing the exhibition with the support of despace. Selecting art, preparing tech, caring about venue, catering, music. Communication, communication, communication.

August 09, 2022, 4.57pm

The power in the gallery [goes off completely](#) .

August 09, 2022, 5pm

4 screens exhibition [opens](#), with a wonderful crowd.

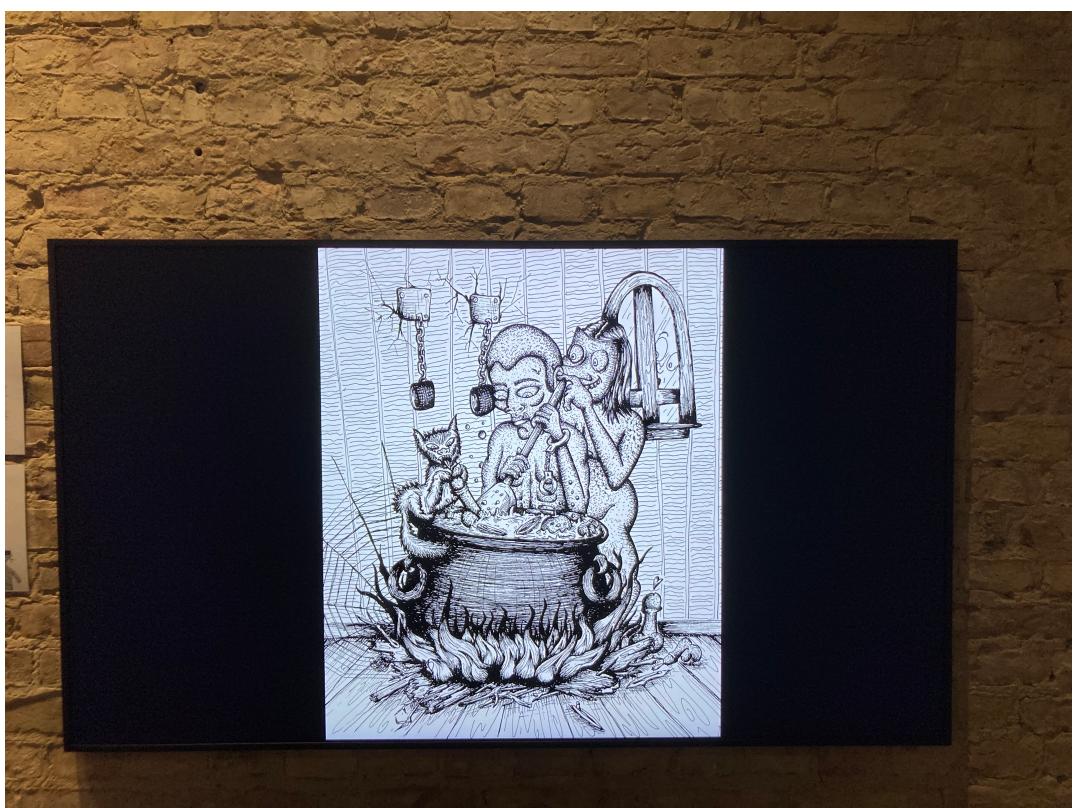
August 19 2022

We are closing the exhibition after 10 days, with another fabulous event.

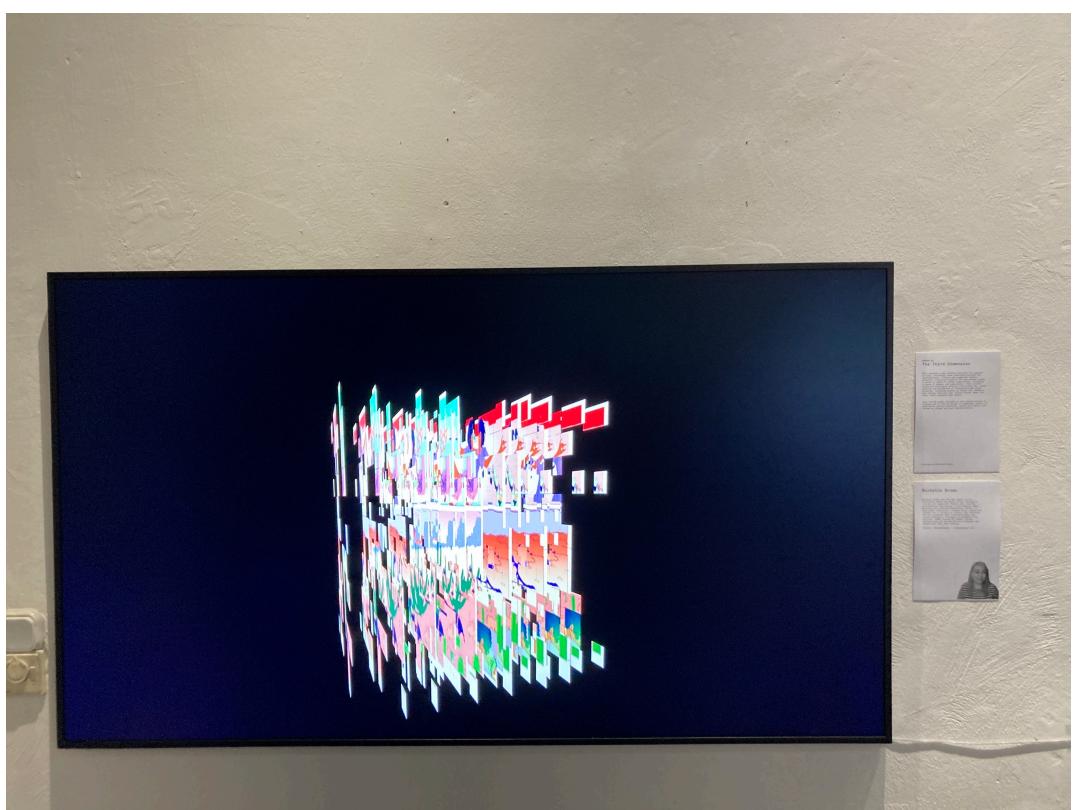
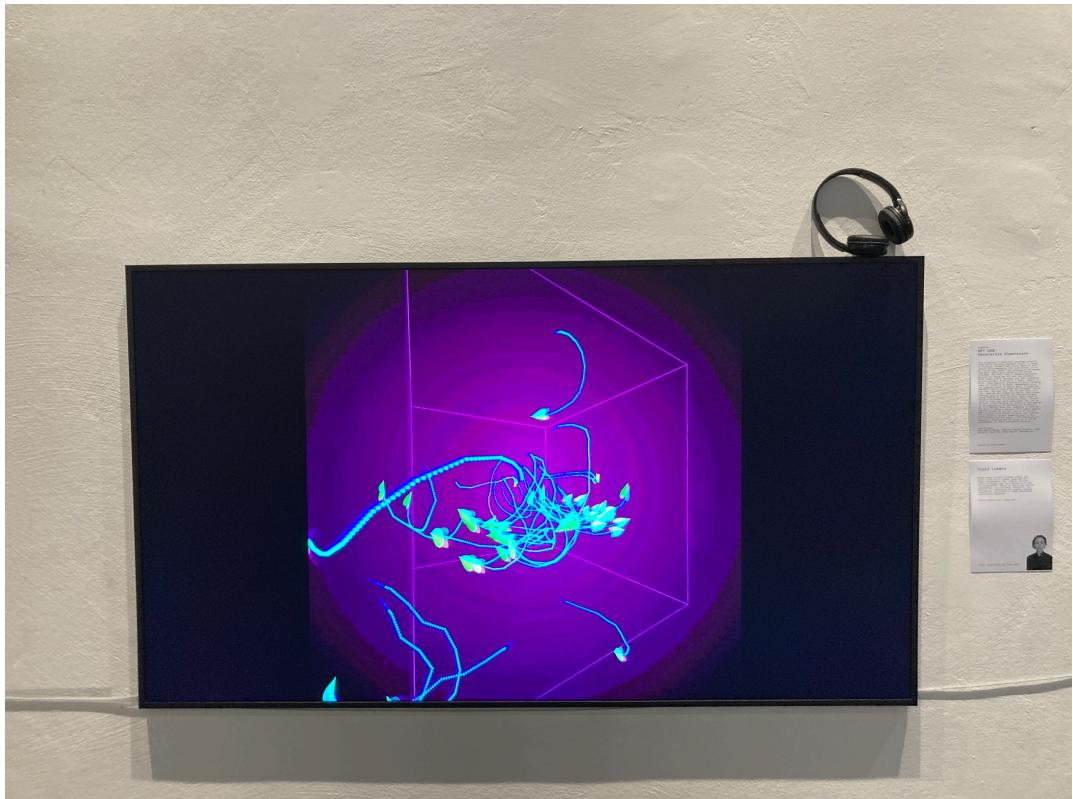
Impressions



Impressions 2



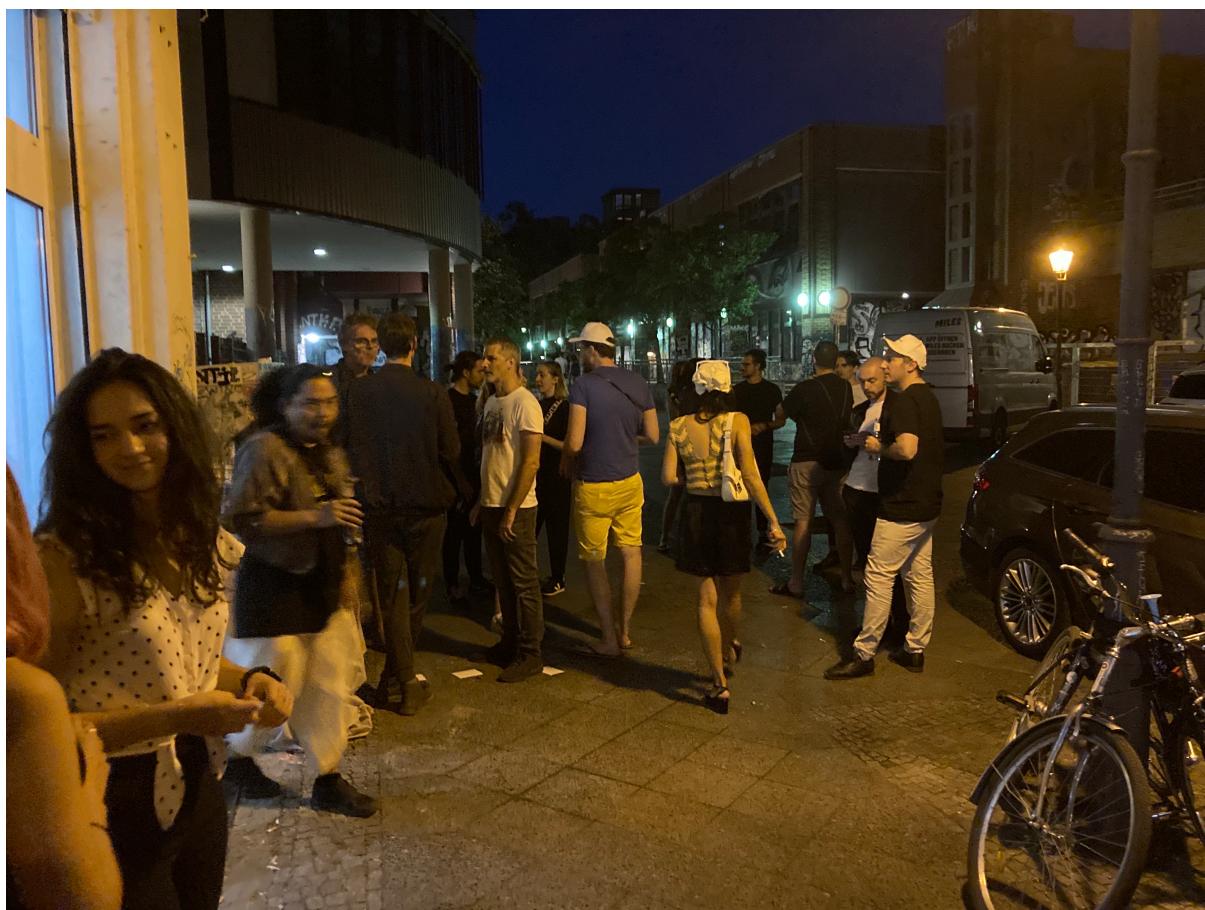
Impressions 3



Impressions 4



Impressions 5



Impressions 6



About 4 screens



[4 screens](#) was a co-curated pop-up exhibition in Berlin running between August 9 and 19, 2022.

It started with the observation that most of the NFT exhibitions I visited in late 2021 focused on generative art. I do believe that within the next generation, generative digital art will become the mainstream of art. And while I enjoy this genre immensely, my personal approach to art is a bit different. I thought "there is so much variety of art out there. It is time to show a different selection."

In Summer 2022 I helped to set up two exhibitions at dekabinett – a temporary pop-up gallery in Berlin operated by despace / TZConnect, which was located near the legendary Admiralsbrücke in Kreuzberg. "[Symbiocene: a Preview of Sonarmática by Tezos](#)", the preview of an exhibition to be shown at Sonar+D in Barcelona, took place in June. Then, in late July, came "[fxhash: bridging the gap](#)" with generative art platform [fxhash](#). Finally, I got the opportunity to use the space myself. Dekabinett is quite small, therefore I named the exhibition "4 screens", a statement of what to expect in terms of size.

An idea that I urgently wanted to try out was co-curation³. Therefore 4 screens, 4 curators. I previously had met Viola and Michelle in Berlin while I knew Taís via her work in the [DiverseNftArt](#) initiative – we all had backgrounds in the [Teia](#) community, [formerly known as Hic et Nunc](#). Each curator was free in selecting the artworks, while the NFTs should be available on [Tezos](#). I would coordinate and set up the exhibition in dekabinett. I asked each of my friends to provide a short bio and a curator's statement.

³ This was inspired both by Teia's community curation <https://twitter.com/TeiaArt> and by the remarkable approach of documenta fifteen <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/>.

Screens and Curators

screen 01
the third dimension
curated by michelle brown

nfts provide a new creative platform for digital artists, including those experimenting with 3d, interactivity, virtual and augmented reality artworks. innovative digital 3d experiences create a sense of depth to screen based works, providing a sense of whimsy and exploration. this curated selection highlights artists from around the globe pushing the boundaries of interactive web based artworks, including pieces by aloner one, masbaco, new yellow, katrina iosa, violet forest, mumu the stan, pearl hyacinth and others.

michelle brown aka the bad lament is an australian based new media artist focused on virtual and augmented reality and creating storytelling experiences in the digital space. michelle has produced documentary series for australian television, created music videos and visuals for a variety of artists and festivals and has exhibited work internationally and around australia, including at sundance film festival, sxsw, cannes xr, cadaf, github universe and she has worked with snapchat and google plus many more.

screen 02
world-sensing
curated by taís koshino

from memories that were denied to us, from tales we heard. we demand to feel the world. we created our forceful signs, our path to find our gold. we need to delink from imposed precepts, free ourselves from the illusion that there is only one way of thinking, living, and doing. it's urgent to elaborate on other possibilities, and trace dispersion routes for the de-hierarchization of senses, affections, sensorial fields. there is a necessity to go beyond what is said to be universal, face nature, and search for sites that were violently demoted, exterminated, erased, veiled. it's vital to make it visible, horizontalize the senses, trace dispersion routes, build possible structures to exist. we rescue technologies and knowledge, manufacture possibilities, create visualities. from within our singular world-sensing, we enunciate and propose a way to transform.

taís koshino is a brazilian visual artist, researcher, and curator. her practice and poetic research are around contemporary drawing and are permeated by her japanese ancestry. she investigates the borderland's territories and explores it in physical and digital media. she is co-founder and curator of diversenftart and worked at hic et nunc's artistic and communication projects team. she participated in group exhibitions and fairs in brazil, chile, portugal, the usa, and germany. her most recent work, jardim, was featured at art basel miami 2021.

screen 03
nft deb generative dimensions
curated by viola lukács

this collection of human/data engineered artworks takes aim at the avian migration crisis. a tragedy is unfolding. europe's most iconic migratory bird species are disappearing like never before. in the uk, turtle dove numbers have declined by 95% between 1992--2017. nightingale numbers by 56% between 1995--2018. and these kinds of dramatic population declines are being seen all over the continent. birds simply aren't returning from their wintering grounds any more. from cyprus to egypt, lebanon to syria,

these beautiful creatures are being illegally taken and killed on an almost unimaginable scale. in the famagusta region of cyprus alone, a staggering 400,000--1 million individuals will disappear forever this year. and next year. and the year after that. this, combined with widespread habitat loss through shifting land use patterns and unchecked climate change fuelled by human activity, means europe is facing a full-blown environmental crisis. the hard truth is: this just isn't sustainable. but, all is not lost. a new frontline has opened up. one powered by the intersection of technology and creativity, and it's offering fresh hope. unwilling to stand by and watch as europe's migratory bird numbers dwindle away to nothing, an all-star cast of nft artists and scientists from around the world came together to say enough is enough. something must be done. the seven artworks are the result of nft deb generative dimensions exploring how the design of ai and nft technologies can drive sustainable solutions. featured artists: daïm aggott-hönsch, nina kov, nikita freeboid, judit navratil, gergő sós, péter weiler, barabasilab.

viola lukács is a berlin-based curator and writer using art to unravel human and non-human entanglements. her research revolves around artificial light as a medium of art and its psychosomatic effects on inbuilt and natural environments. as a strategic consultant, she develops art collections and supports museums, foundations, and artists in their sustainable digitization processes.

screen 04
danger! nfts! (preview 2)
curated by crcdng

no other phenomenon is more controversial, exciting and present in the current art system than nfts. at the moment, exhibitions often focus on generative art, pfps or early crypto artists. this selection from the crcdng collection is different -- it presents a number of fresh, wild and dangerous voices: the nightmarish humor of bloody halley. the ironic pastiche of bugdem yener. the political voice of burka bayram. the iconic video game art of estelle flores. the empowering trash of jessy jeanne. the sex-positive feminist stance of kinky karrot. the ascii gesamtkunstwerk of mikado koko. the punch-in-your-face style of miwako. the haunting imagery of psychedemon. the enigmatic girl power of sandy. the mesmerizing collages of thais silva. and the gonzo hallucinations of tornado rodriguez.

crcdng is a transdisciplinary theorist and practitioner with a focus on systems theory, playful design, and posthuman positions. since april 2021, crcdng has been involved with teia, an art-focused nft community on the tezos blockchain that evolved from hic et nunc, where he acts in various roles as collector, artist, curator and hacker.

The Artworks

These are the 67 artworks from 41 artists that were on display at the 4 screens exhibition. You can visit the individual artworks through the links.

Screen 01, curated by Michelle Brown:

Masbaco	Sector #3
Mumu the Stan	Accept Love
Aloner One	The Tribute
Violet Forest	Winged Harddrive
New Yellow	Room of Infinity
Katrina Iosa	Bubble Gum Pink
Marissa Noana/Eduardo Moreira	a portal is a force field
Metehan Korkmazel – MMK	Voyager I
Syberweerd	Albergo a Roma_005
Sky Goodman	Experiment X, Standing in the Garden
Gaby Schulze	Heartbeats
Pearl Hyacinth	Collage Creature #1
the bad lament	Coral Flowers
the bad lament	Banksia cuneata
the bad lament	Strelitzia

Screen 02, curated by Taís Koshino

Caroline Ricca Lee	phantom memoirs
svtvnvmvn	"Pelanduk di Cerang Rimba"
Cyshimi	Forceful Signs
Rayan Elnayal	"Hoashna/ حوشنا", Collecting Gold
Lídice	Khárites
Riniifish	Brainbug
Cibelle Cavalli Bastos	tunnelvision
Mirjam Dalire	The Fish Is Present
biarritz	auto absorção I (self absorption I)
Marissa Noana	receptáculo
Yacunã Tuxá	Caminhos encantados
Linda Dounia	Flame of the Forest
Taís Koshino	amanhecer 04

Screen 03, curated by Viola Lukács

Nina Kov	Grus Grus Dance
Judit Navratil, Agoston Nagy, Zoltán Szabó P.	SOLASTALGIA
BarabasiLab	Crane migration in Europe according to the Vicsek model

Screen 04, curated by crcdng

Bloody Halley	On her period
Bloody Halley	Haunted Attic
Bloody Halley	Halley and Her Puss
Estelle Flores	245 My Beta
Estelle Flores	258 Metamor
Estelle Flores	280 Link
Jessy Jeanne	Jennyfer, the cutie trashy!
Jessy Jeanne	Baddie on Xtasy
Jessy Jeanne	F*ck the society Baby!
Kinky Karrot	Sexy is a Mindstate, not a Waist Size SE
Kinky Karrot	Unicorn
Kinky Karrot	Female Sexual Liberation
Burka Bayram	Fear of the Landlord
Burka Bayram	Hyperinflation Panic
Burka Bayram	Punch a fascist (pong)
Miwako	just kiddin
Miwako	heroes
Miwako	sweet dreams
Tornado Rodriguez	A recipe for success
Tornado Rodriguez	Homeoffice is getting complicated
Tornado Rodriguez	It was supposed to be a playdate
Mikado Koko	Glitch Boy
Mikado Koko	Louis Wain's Cat 03
Mikado Koko	Text Mode Woman 01
psychedemon	SEX ROBOT MALFUNCTION!!!
psychedemon	ROTTEN///INSIDE
psychedemon	EVIL///WOUNDS
Sandy	Extinction
Sandy	biggirlsdontcry#5
Sandy	gangsta's paradise#2
Thais Silva	Amadurecer
Thais Silva	Cores
Thais Silva	AFROFUTURISM
Bugdem Yener	Jus a Lady
Bugdem Yener	Lady Love
Bugdem Yener	Lady S #3

Planning

Art

What exactly is art? This has been dubbed "the art question" and it has been discussed a lot. Short answer: despite many attempts, there is and there will be no final definition what is and what isn't art.⁴ For our purpose here, art is what the person or group (or algorithm?) that sets up the exhibition decides. That is the practical perspective. The discussion then can take place in the context set by the exhibition.

Besides this apparently binary distinction, a useful angle is another question: What does art mean to you personally? This view can be much helpful in order to make meaningful decisions for your exhibition.

As an example, I want to share my own perspective on art which can be somewhat controversial. Certainly I have offended some artists mentioning it. I believe that art, while serving its own purpose, ultimately connects people while fostering meaningful conversations.

That is any kind of art, in any kind of medium such as theatre, performance, fine art or games, art communicates and it enables further communication. This isn't a unique feature of art: people don't need art to come together. But – and here is the distinction – art enables different conversations. To me this is what I was searching for in these places and that was people surrounded by and engaging with art – the latter giving reasons for interesting and stimulating conversations between the former.

Motivation

Curator Hans Ulrich Obrist speaks about his approach to help realize artists' projects "they could not realize under existing conditions".⁵ Artist/avatar LaTurbo Avedon mentions their motivation to "create records of the moment, and how artists have chosen to respond to this junction of art and technology".⁶ Researcher and curator Gaia Tedone describes an interest in the social dimension of art and creative practices, and "to contribute through reflection on debates concerning real-world issues".⁷

These are all quite different motivations and you will have your personal reason to create an event and showcase art. As mentioned, my own motivation which comes from the desire to connect people over the topics and concerns raised by art and artists. And I believe there is a need for it, as each of us has their own particular individual perspective and through conversation we can learn from each other.

Before going into the specifics of the exhibition, take a pause and ask yourself "why am I doing this"? It can be to enrich culture, to connect

⁴ (Warburton, 2003) provides examples for attempts at defining art.

⁵ (Obrist, 2015, p.10)

⁶ (Dekker and Arreola-Burns, 2021, p. 163)

⁷ (Dekker and Arreola-Burns, 2021, p. 96)

people, love of art and thousands more. Answers to this question are different and individual, however having an answer gives you a reason for what you are set out to do.

It makes sense to write the idea down in a curatorial statement. Our statements for the 4 screens exhibition are [here](#). The short bios and texts describe each person's background and shine a light on the individual reasons that went into their curation. The curatorial statement will guide you through the [decisions](#) and help to convey your concept to others.

Curation

Now let's talk about the curation and selection of artworks for an exhibition. There is a trope of "curators as gatekeepers" that misses the point that in theory there is almost infinite space for digital artworks in the Metaverse, yet for any particular exhibition there is a limitation on space, time and budget. Therefore you have to make decisions, based on what you want to show and what you can show.

I assume you have some idea what you want to show, such as:

- a particular artist (including your own works)
- a diverse group of artists
- a theme, message, debate
- a particular motif
- a specific medium or genre
- a period of time

These are examples; it is completely up to your imagination from which criteria you select. Blue and red pieces only? Why not?

The second question is which artworks can you show? To avoid navigating a difficult ethical and legal territory, I would refrain from any other option than these three cases:

Case A: it is your own artwork. Let's assume you haven't signed away the rights to exhibit it yourself, no problems here.

Case B: You have permission from the artist to display the artwork. This includes so called "open calls", where artists submit their pieces for a group exhibition. In any other case you must contact the artist individually and directly and get their written permission. In my experience artists are happy if you exhibit their works. However this can be different if the artist is well-known or represented by a gallery for example. If the artist doesn't know you they might ask questions about the context and the other artworks in the exhibition. It is also crucial to manage mutual expectations about sales facilitated by the exhibition (in general the expectation is that an exhibition would raise an artist's value). A draft of the [curatorial statement](#) is useful here.

Case C: You have collected the artwork. In the traditional art world the right - sometimes even an obligation - to display the art is conferred by a selling contract. If you collect digital artworks today then it is likely in form of NFTs. Lets discuss what that means for setting up an exhibition.

NFTs

In this guide I am focussing on digital art only. Curating, exhibiting and handling physical artworks would introduce another level of topics and concerns.⁸ A relevant distinction is between NFTs and non-NFT digital art, for three reasons. I assume you already know about NFTs⁹, therefore I focus the discussion on the relevant aspects for setting up an exhibition.

Here is a brief characterisation of NFTs by curator Anika Meier: "NFTs are a proof of authenticity for digital files and turn them into originals someone can own."¹⁰ Being able to provide authenticity and ownership has turned out to be a game changer for digital art. Although in the art world some deals reportedly are still made over a handshake, the ownership and rights to exhibit normally tend to be agreed in written contracts.

If you plan to show digital artworks that aren't NFTs, you would have to obtain the piece accompanied by some written contract signed by the artist or their representatives (as described previously in "[Case B](#)"). The main difference is in "[Case C](#)", that by collecting an NFT you are allowed to show the artworks that are part of your collection.

The second difference are some technical issues to be aware of. To display NFT art, we are dealing with media files such as images, animations or film. Many NFTs have their media hosted on a distributed storage like [IPFS](#), [Arweave](#) or [Filecoin](#) which means they are more resistant to "[link rot](#)", but can be slow to load when not properly cached. A small subset of NFTs is stored on a blockchain itself ("on chain") and some of them are hosted on a traditional server. You need to research and understand the location of the artwork, which become relevant for the [technical setup](#).

A third aspect comes into play when artists are creating artworks specifically for your exhibition. Let's say you have agreed on splitting revenues and you might expect relevant sales from the exhibition. In that case you can use a collaborative contract, for example this one on [objkt.com](#), that can automatically pay out the percentages.

This brings us to the topic of money.

Production Setup

To give you an example I describe the production arrangement for 4 screens below. It is important to note that our setup was significantly different from a traditional gallery situation, where:

- * the gallery ultimately must make an income (many gallerists say "in the red" for years).
- * the gallery, if well-known, might be able to attract significant collectors.
- * artists may expect significant sales from the exhibition.

⁸ This is in now way meant to discourage you from mixing physical and digital art in your exhibition. Just the opposite - I believe such a mix can be terrific. I just don't have experience with the handling of physical artworks.

⁹ For more information you can consult my NFT reading list: <https://github.com/crcdng/nft-reading-list>.

¹⁰ (Weidinger et al., 2021, p. 76)

- * gallerists and artists have agreed on a revenue split for artwork sold. This is called "consignment", laid down in contracts between artists, agents, galleries or auction houses.
- * artists might bear part of production costs, e.g. materials
- * Professional, hired curators and event staff may be involved, in particular in the case of a pop-up exhibition.
- * any kind of imaginable deals take place.

In contrast, for our exhibition:

- * 4 screens was planned as an experiment without commercial background. I wanted to show art and it took months until the opportunity manifested.
- * I proposed to the other curators up front that we all work for free (we all knew each other beforehand).
- * We did not charge artists to be exhibited, nor had a revenue share with them. I personally don't consider "vanity galleries", places that charge artists for exposure as an option.
- * I was hoping some of the works would sell but did neither expect nor was able to promise significant sales
- * Our costs were covered by despace, who were able to provide resources and reuse equipment and space in a number of exhibitions over several months.

Your situation may vary and ultimately it boils down to your environment, resources and motivation.

Budget

From a planning perspective, some people would place budget considerations at the beginning. I rather encourage you to think about the exhibition you want to achieve first, and how to achieve it second than the other way around.

In any case, you need to write down up a production budget which is essentially a calculation of expenses and how to meet them.

	Item	Amount	Source
1.	Location		
2.	Team / Staff		
3.	Tech Hardware (Screens, Computers...)		
4.	Exhibition design		
5.	Printing / Signage		
6.	Materials		
7.	Food and Drinks		
8.	DJs		
9.	PR		
10.	Insurance, Fees, Taxes		
11.	Cleaning		
12.	Buffer / Extra		

This a simplified table¹¹ does not include events such as artist talks or workshops. It needs to be adapted to your specific situation: the higher the budget, the more detailed. Your physical environment might require to

¹¹ Available online with the materials for this booklet: <https://github.com/crcdng/curative>

hire security or you might have to pay for permits. I recommend to calculate an amount for each expense and to put everything into the budget, even if you do not actually pay for an item, because it is provided "in kind". Having an overview over the budget at all times is useful. Keep all invoices for bookkeeping and taxes.

Preparation

People and Communication

Curating and preparing artworks, securing a location, decorating the space, tech setup, staffing the gallery, caring for food and drinks, music, social media ... there are lots of roles involved and tasks to be done. Except for the ultrarare case where you tackle every aspect of your exhibition by yourself (respect), you will deal with other people.

Assuming you are not on a lush budget and do a lot yourself the people you work with can be a mix of friends and professionals (or professional friends). You should consider the blurry line between people who volunteer to help because they like your idea and the exploitation of free labour. Navigating this area can be tricky and it is therefore crucial to communicate expectations clearly and in advance. Regardless if you work with a team of 5 or 50, communication is the key.

This is why the first thing I create in any project is a storage for information and efficient ways to communicate.

This includes:

1. Shared calendar and task list
2. Contact info
3. Planned meetings
4. Shared drive for documents (texts, Budget table, list of artworks)
5. Channel(s) to communicate efficiently
6. Agreements, paperwork
7. Invoices

There are many tools for this, and people have different preferences. It's best to discuss and setup at the beginning. Make sure that everyone involved knows where to find information and has the proper permissions to create, edit, comment or read documents. Another important point, regardless if you work with professionals, volunteers, or friends is to agree on expectations about availability, such as evenings and weekends.

Even if everyone involved is a friend, your project will require some form of documentation, written agreement, paperwork and invoices. Keep these resources at hand and secure.

These points may sound trivial, but in practice, I have seen quite a few established organisations incapable of communication. Having to chase people, waiting for someone to call back, receiving messages when you don't want to, getting stuff done last minute or not at all is an avoidable waste of time and effort. Choose the tools, agree on ways to document and to communicate and stick to them.

Location

"The solution could be in my own flat [...] my kitchen."¹²

When I started looking for opportunities to make 4 screens a reality, I went into a handful of galleries in Berlin and told them I would like to stage my own exhibition. The reactions were polite, but I never heard back. And I still have to fully understand how the traditional gallery system works. Therefore it might save some time to sidestep the traditional system completely and talk to:

- Cultural institutions that are open to innovation
- Organisations that work with digital art
- Your local web3 community
- Organizers of NFT and web3 events
- Art collectives or artists who can provide studio space for exhibitions
- Small galleries that willing to take risk
- Management of empty warehouses
- Your local city council
- Anyone who can offer a free room, cellar, garage or backyard

As a first-time art exhibition organizer, it might be tempting to jump at the first offer you get, especially when it fits your **budget**. Questions you should ask yourself before signing a contract are: is the space accessible? Does it vibe with the art or can it be transformed into a place that does? Does the area attract people that are likely to visit the exhibition or do they have to travel?

In most cases a written agreement, where the conditions of the rental or use of the place are laid down, is advisable. Before you sign anything make sure you are completely aware of the fine print, in particular the clauses about payments, cancellation and liability in case of damage.

Duration

The other fundamental resource to manage besides space is time. Hard fact: Don't expect people to turn up in masses every day. Therefore focus on a great vernissage (opening) and finissage (closing). And be prepared to have a lot time with yourself as a new temporary gallerist in between.

Especially for your first exhibition, it makes sense to keep the duration rather short. However, because there is a base cost and effort for preparation and setup regardless of its length, your task is to find a sweet spot for the duration.

Exhibition Design

Securing the place and committing to a duration for the exhibition are crucial for determining the physical layout and arrangement of the pieces

¹² (Obrist, 2015, p. 83)

you can show. Before you go to work in the space it makes sense to revisit the [curatorial statement](#). I am using the umbrella term "exhibition design" which in our context can mean to clean up your backyard or prepare a 10000 m² industrial area.

From the beginning factor in the environmental footprint: avoid buying new stuff, rather borrow, rent, salvage whatever you can, ask around, and reduce, re-use and recycle everything. All the materials used in the exhibition should have meaning and [spark joy](#). I tend to be in general on the minimalistic side. Often removing stuff helps, and we made good use of that practice for 4 screens.

I have similar thoughts about light and sound: they should add to the experience but not distract from the art. Most problems I have seen in exhibitions are related to sound. Sound carries through the space, reverberates, echoes or gets damped where it shouldn't be. Artworks interfere with each other and they also interfere with the visitors exchanging thoughts about the art. Often it would take a huge budget and a squad of professionals: architects, sound designers and audio technicians to mitigate all the problems. Be aware of these challenges, place the artwork accordingly and carry out a sound check as early as possible.

Another big focus has to be on health and safety (electricity, fire extinguishers, emergency exits). Also consider the impact on the neighbours, especially with noise.

Check if you have covered these areas:

- * Exhibition space
- * Bar / food and drink area
- * Wardrobe
- * Toilets
- * Entrance

You want to spend as much time as possible with the placement of artworks. During the setup, ask yourself: how does the art communicate with you, how will it communicate to the audience, how do artworks communicate to each other. Create a story, a [living exhibition](#).

[Bright Moments](#) for example are creating experiences that reflect their respective environment. This is one option, by taking into account the vibe of the city or place you are in. Or – break conventions and take your visitors on a journey into a completely different dimension. More inspiring examples of exhibitions can be found in [the materials for this booklet](#).

Signage, Flyer, Catalog

To print or not to print? That is the question.

For 4 screens, I wanted to print a little. We had a poster in the window and the curators' statements taped to the wall. The "tombstone" information for each artwork was shown on the [screens with the art](#):

- * The name of the artist
- * The title of the artwork
- * The date of the artwork, usually the year it was created
- * A link to the artwork on [teia.art](#), [objkt.com](#) or [versum.xyz](#)

- * A QR code with the same link.

While the "tombstone" information is essential, QR codes are a trade-off: they are aesthetically challenging, yet they make it easier to collect the artworks. Therefore I recommend to include them. Curators statements and other texts that accompany the exhibition can be printed or published in digital form.

If you build a [website for the exhibition](#), you can host materials and links there, and re-use some of the content. You can then decide to stay 100% digital and publish all materials online, as downloadable PDF and/or use extra screens. Alternatively you can print flyers, use hand-written business cards, print posters, make a photocopied zine and exhibition catalogue or use lettering in the space.

PR and Social Media

There are four essential pieces of information to be conveyed and to my surprise it is sometimes difficult to find them:

- * What is shown? This can be kept brief to arouse curiosity.
- * Where is the exhibition and how to get there?
- * When is the exhibition, when are the opening and closing events?
- * Any restrictions such as ticketed, invitation only or 18+ events.

That's all that must be communicated. The rest is up to you – you can distribute [flyers](#) in clubs and cafes or deploy, produce viral videos or deploy an elaborate guerrilla marketing strategy. If you are the main organiser for the exhibition it is of enormous help to have someone in your team focusing on PR and social media.

For the vernissage, finissage and other [events](#) that take place during the exhibition it makes sense to use ticketing websites such as [meetup.com](#) or [eventbrite](#). They can also help spread the word around, in combination with social media platforms like Twitter (essential for the NFT space), Instagram (essential for sharing images) and other messenger / social channels and groups. It boils down to who and where your potential audience is. If you are able connect to the local digital art scene beforehand, if there is no such scene already, congratulations, you will become its founder.

Artworks

How do you want to present digital art / NFTs?

My approach was based on four goals:

Goal 1: The art is front and center. It should be shown in the best possible quality we can afford.

Goal 2: For our exhibition we will have more artworks than screens so we need some sort of seamless loop without any visible artefacts when the artworks switch.

Goal 3: To reduce printing the "tombstone" information is shown on the screens (not printed next to it on the wall).

Goal 4: The computers must boot up and run the exhibition automatically without any manual action necessary¹³.

Here is the workflow that came out of this:

1. Make a checklist with all the artworks.
2. Download the files in the highest resolution possible from IPFS. Here I assume images (formats PNG, JPG), animations (GIF) or movies (MOV, M4V). Interactive works would be a different story as they would require their own screen and controller setup.
3. Import the files into Keynote, the Apple presentation software. For each artwork prepare three pages: 1) tombstone information (name of the artist, title of the work, date of the work, link to the work), 2) the artwork and 3) the QR code.
4. Set slide transition timings: 5 seconds for the tombstone pages, 40 seconds for the artworks and 5 seconds for the QR codes (I arrived at these numbers after looking at the screens looping for some time). If the artwork is a movie, take the length of the movie.
5. Set a "Fade through Colour Transition" on each slide with a length of 1 second.
6. Render the presentation to export as a movie in 4k resolution.
7. Set the movie up to loop on [VLC player](#) as described in the [online materials for the booklet](#). There you can find two sets of instructions: one for Raspberry Pi and one for Windows PC.

This procedure fulfils the goals above and it worked well in the exhibition. There is no one-for all solution though. I encourage you to experiment, maybe you need a very different setup.

¹³ I had done this with a Raspberry Pi variant before but – as it happened – this didn't quite work out for the Windows PCs during the opening. I was able to fix that over the next days.

Tech Setup

Screens

Most screens used in art exhibitions are "smart" TVs.

This is actually bad news. It means that the first thing you need to do is to go through every single setting and disable / deactivate anything "smart" that otherwise can and will interfere with the exhibition:

- * Sleep Mode / Energy Saver (I have seen screens shut off, show warning messages in AAA art exhibitions)
- * Screensavers
- * Automatic color, brightness, contrast adaption. Find a manual that highlights the artwork.
- * Automatic software updates (!)

...and potentially lots of other settings. Make sure to complete that procedure for every single screen and save the settings (sometimes they don't remain after switching off the device). If possible, select the HDMI port where your computer is connected as default input, otherwise the TV will scan for connected devices more or less successfully. Another caveat, if you have 4 screens in a small room, any of the remote controls you use will work on any number of screens and you need to make sure

Projectors provide an alternative, however they bring additional challenges with them, especially regarding colors and interference with the light in the space, temperature issues and the backdrop to project on. Projectors will complain from time to time that their filters need to be cleaned. Otherwise, projectors can be great to create immersive spaces. An example is the interactive installation made by Alida Sun for the Bright Moments show in Berlin. It is included in [the materials for this booklet](#).

Other hardware such as analog TVs can make for engrossing display of digital art. Some older Raspberry PI even have an analog video out port, but you can also get cheap HDMI-to-AV adapters. Make sure the artworks are compatible with the idea of low resolution and glitchy displays.

Audio

As mentioned [in a previous section](#), setting up audio in an art exhibition can be surprisingly difficult. It might sound like just have to put some speakers in the room and turn up the volume. Wrong.

The architecture and material of the space, the quality of the sound equipment, and the requirements of the artwork have to be considered. If the location already has a professional grade PA and you can make it work, excellent. If not, plan early and run sound checks.

Dedicated audio interfaces take the signal conversion task off the computers and can improve sound quality. For the output the two options are speakers and headphones. Without a splitter, cable-bound headphones allow only one visitor at a time to engage with an artwork. Bluetooth

headphones can be difficult to set up and maintain working throughout the exhibition, also because the headphones need to be recharged in regular intervals. In both cases, placement of the headphones needs to be considered carefully, especially in places where you can't just put a hook into the walls. With headphones you also have to be aware of hygiene issues and provide protection covers for example. Sometimes headphones are places where visitors don't see them.

I also have seen exhibitions who ask you plug in your own headphones, good for people who still use and bring their cable-bound ones. In 4 screens I opted for Bluetooth and it kind-of worked, but presented additional headaches because the Bluetooth connection did drop off from time to time. In the future I probably would use cable-bound headphones, possibly with a splitter in a small room and speakers in spaces that allows for them.

Computers

Let me reiterate two of the goals for setting up the artworks: First, you want the exhibition, for example [after a power outage](#), to boot up and run automatically without any manual interference. Second, if you want to show more artworks than there are screens, you need to prepare some sort of loop.

The [online materials for this the booklet](#) contain instructions for two concrete setups that solve these tasks. The most cost effective setup is based on a [Raspberry Pi](#). For a slideshow of static images or a movie, a Raspberry Pi 2 should be sufficient. If you have interactive works you might consider a model 3 or 4. For interactive pieces (for example on [fhash](#)) at higher resolutions, a small, fan-less Mini PC leaves some headroom for performance. The instructions provided are for Windows 11. If you use Linux the procedure should be similar to the Raspberry Pi version. A Mac mini is an alternative that is already in a different price range.

Both solutions are decentralised, which in our context means that each screen has its own computer. This setup provides stability (if one computer goes down, the rest of the exhibition still works) and flexibility (you can run images, movies, interactive pieces, even [online art](#) and use different kinds of projectors and screens).

Here are some possible alternatives:

Alternative A: If the SmartTV/screen supports it, serve the art directly from a USB stick. Certainly the cheapest version; we tried it, and I am not convinced. This doesn't mean it won't work for you, therefore you might want to give it a try and check if it displays in the proper resolution and quality. It probably works if you have one static image.

Alternative B: Use a powerful computer with a multi-head graphics card, multiple graphics cards or a video wall / hardware splitter. This scenario is used in big commercial productions. It is costly and works best for a scenario where the screens display parts of a connected larger image. Then you can use a software such as [Touchdesigner](#) to construct a large canvas and render it.

Alternative C: There are [commercial solutions](#) that offer a readymade setup. If you setup could maybe negotiate a good deal. Or maybe you can ask your local hackspace if they have built an open-source alternative you can use.

Network?

In my experience, there are three "golden" rules for exhibitions regarding a network.

1. Don't do it.
2. If you must use networked computers, use a wired network. Avoid WiFi and Bluetooth as much as possible.
3. Do not rely on anything from the internet (the obvious exception here is if you exhibit live Net Art).

Exhibition

Food and Drinks

I come from the perspective that art is **inherently social**. And as hosts of an event, our job is to care for the well-being of our guests. Therefore it is essential for an art exhibition to provide food and drinks, at least at the opening (vernissage) and closing (finissage).

Have a non-alcoholic option for people who don't drink alcohol. Have a vegan option for people who don't eat animal products.

If your **budget** does not leave any leeway, the option to get a few drinks and charge at cost price is better than nothing.

Music

On the topic of social events I will answer the question of music / DJs at the opening and closing with a clear "yes". If you exhibit **audio based work**, this may be in conflict with the art. In case you can start the party at a later time.

Events

This is a symbolic timeline for a traditional art exhibition:

Vernissage (Opening): 

Day 1: 

Day 2: 

...

Day n: 

Finissage (Closing): 

But it doesn't have to be like this. In between there is ample opportunity to use the space and organise some events such as:

- * Artist talks
- * Panel discussions
- * NFT minting meetings (we did one during 4 screens)
- * Art workshops for kids
- * Documentary movies about the artists
- * Dinners with artists
- * Fundraisers
- * Raves and Partys

Just be aware that managing these activities requires organisation, energy and often additional budget. Don't overdo it. Less is more.

Proof of Attendance

When the artworks in your exhibition are NFTs, it makes sense to also offer an NFT to your visitors. This concept is known as "Proof of Attendance¹⁴". Either an artist creates a special artwork for the occasion or you can mint a badge or photo of the event. Then people can receive an NFT as a memory and as well a token of connection for future events.

¹⁴ There is an app called POAP on Ethereum that does that.

Aftermath

Sustainability (again)

I have seen too many events where things ended up in a big heap of garbage bags. You can do better by reducing, re-using and recycling the materials used in the exhibition.

Communication (still)

Communication doesn't have to stop abruptly when the exhibition closes. This is the time to thank everyone involved, to send photos to friends and artists who couldn't make it to the event and to update your Social Media. Planning this well ahead of time makes it possible to get these messages out effectively before you take a well-deserved break.

And Beyond?



Done. Over. Vorbei.

After the euphoria of a successful event, organisers often experience an emotionally slump, come down with a flu or just want to spend the next weeks on the couch. You and your team have deserved a break. Plan for it.

If you value the collaboration with your team, a post-event meeting can do wonders. Talking about the lessons learned, the problems solved, the conflicts that broke out during the stress of the event can be transformative.

When I closed down *dekabinett*, the space that had become our home for the last time, I felt a lot of relief, but also a bit of "I want to do another one". Your conclusion might range from "once and never again" to "the next one will be bigger and better".

Whatever the outcome is, cherish the moment. You done it. There is no second first time.

TL;DR

The booklet in a nutshell:

1. Not only **professionals** but anyone can organise their own backyard / pop-up / punk digital art exhibition.
2. One way to make things happen is **to tell everyone** of your plans.
3. Come up with a **concept** driven by **motivation**, then plan for **location**, **time**, and **budget**.
4. NFTs have some particular properties to be aware of.
5. Art can be understood as inherently social, make people feel **comfortable** and welcome.
6. Invest time setting up **artworks** and **tech** to make your life easier during the event.
7. Be a **good citizen**.
8. There is always a **switch**, embrace it ;)

Further Reading

Association of Registrars and Collections Specialists (2021) Code of Ethics and Professional Practices for Collections Professionals. American Alliance of Museums. Available at: https://www.aam-us.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Code_Ethics_Collections_Professionals_2021_02_24.pdf.
Valuable guidelines that apply to collecting in general.

Dekker, A. and Arreola-Burns, P. (eds) (2021) Curating digital art: from presenting and collecting digital art to networked co-curation. Amsterdam: Valiz (Making Public).
A timeline and insightful collection of interviews with designers, curators and artists focused on digital art.

Oberender, T. (2021) The living exhibition: Berliner Festspiele/Immersion. Edited by P. Rabe et al. Leipzig: Spector Books.
Full of engaging examples, interviews and essays around the idea to create interesting and engaging exhibitions.

Obrist, H.U. (2015) Ways of curating. London: Penguin books.
A collection of inspiring essays, insights into the mind of one of the most prominent curators worldwide.

Taylor, G.D. (2014) When the Machine Made Art: The Troubled History of Computer Art. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing.
Gives a background on the difficult past of computer and digital art which helps to understand present developments.

Thompson, D. (2010) The 12 Million Dollar Stuffed Shark: the Curious Economics of Contemporary Art. London: Aurum Press.
Provides valuable clues for understanding the current art world and its protagonists: artists, galleries, collectors, art fairs, auction houses. Highly recommended for everyone who wonders why someone would pay horrendous sums for an NFT (or a shark).

Warburton, N. (2003) The Art Question. London; New York: Routledge.
Gives a concise overview of some of the art-historic and philosophical attempts to answer the question "what is art?"

Weidinger, A. et al. (eds) (2021) Proof of art: a short history of NFTs, from the beginning of digital art to the metaverse. Berlin: DISTANZ Verlag.
Beautiful "coffee table" book. Catalog, essays and artworks from the 2021 NFT exhibition at Francisco Carolinum Linz.

Online Resources

<https://github.com/crcdng/nft-reading-list/>
A curated NFT reading list.

<https://on-curating.org/>
On Curating, an "independent international journal (both web and print) focusing on questions around curatorial practise and theory".

<https://www.rightclicksave.com/>
Right Click Save (RCS), "the online magazine that seeks to drive critical conversation about art on the blockchain".

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The Switch

