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Tokens of Appreciation

A guest post by Autonolas' Brand Visual Designer @kameha_san



A Christmas surprise...

Christmas — that time of the year when most companies think about what to give to their customers and employees/contractors. Way back in my advertising days, there was a colossal challenge to come

up with the most creative gift ideas for our clients. And of course, everything fell on the creative department. Needless to say, it's good to be out!

But what about crypto projects? When you have team members in 12 countries, shipping them each a physical gift can be tricky. Also, working in crypto, tokens are one of the first things that comes to mind. Tokens are digital assets and there are two types: fungible tokens (tokens which are interchangeable and can serve as money, like Ethereum or Bitcoin) and NFTs (or non-fungible tokens; tokens which are unique and not interchangeable, like ownership deeds or an ID).

We decided to gift everyone NFTs for two reasons:

1. The founders felt that each NFT would serve as a unique public record recognizing individual team members for their early contribution to the protocol. What could be more fitting than weaving this recognition into the public history stored on the blockchain? In the end, David Minarsch and Oaksprout minted these with a custom contract on a low-cost chain.
2. As an NFT can point to an image, the founders thought it would be an incredible opportunity for the team to own unique artwork, like the work I had already created for our brands. I thought this was a great idea, but I was keen to not create just any bulk, same-thing-just-a-different-color NFTs, but actual custom NFTs for each person. Sure, it sounds like a huge amount of work but let's be honest: who doesn't like a present, custom-made for them? Plus, it could be a great design and creation experience, so, with the list of everybody's passions in front of me, I embarked on one of the best design projects I've worked on.

So how did you do it?

First, let me say this was the second time I made NFTs. I wanted to make them as pieces of individual art for all my team members. I believe a custom, one of a kind piece of digital art is a lot more appealing to a person. With this in mind, I started to work on the first image.

In the beginning of every design project I have to do, I look for fonts. This is the basis for the piece. It was no different for the NFTs I was about to create. However, given that each one was different and should reflect the personality and passions of each individual, there weren't enough fonts to choose from. The natural next step was to create the type from scratch, according to the elements of the art piece.

With the type in place, I had to look for imagery and create symbols related to everyone's personality. Of course the colors also played a big part — from the very beginning, I decided on using a dark background. Why's that? Because all of my elements would look better, I would have more contrast and I already had a vague idea of using some chromatic elements in the pieces. Also, since our companion lore takes place on a planet, the overall style was influenced by this setting. I wanted to keep a bit of the Autonolas vibe and add some of my own style, just to experiment and see what the results might be.

Now the interesting part begins! A lot of people have asked me how I came up with the visuals. It wasn't a very long thought process: as I design, ideas keep popping in my mind. I took bits from each person's interests and mixed them together. For example: coding, sailing and theatre. They don't seem to have anything in common, but finding the right graphic and balance can surely create the desired effect. Lastly, I didn't look for references because I believe these can influence the final design a lot, and I prefer to see where the work takes me.

I believe having boards with 50+ images of other people's work is not the best option for me, and I tend to stay away from such things. However, I do look at pieces of digital art or art from sci-fi and gaming for the purpose of creating the atmosphere that I want to showcase.

How many? And all different?

18 different NFTs! It might seem a lot to do in a short amount of time, but once a couple were done, the others came naturally.

Yes, all different from elements, to color, to photography treatment. Each one has its own idea and design. You can ask how one managed to get so many iterations on the same basic thing: I tend to say it comes with practice and time.

They loved them!

After about 3 weeks of work in total secrecy, it was time to give the presents — and just in time for Christmas. I didn't know what to expect, and was a bit nervous but everything turned out really great. Everybody loved them!

My tiny bit of remaining anxiety about my designs went away, and I am happy I could be part of this project. I believe this is the new way: to let go of all design principles and go wherever imagination takes you.

You can check them out in the virtual gallery below, and feel free to draw inspiration from them for your next design project.

So there you have it, a perfect gift for a distributed crypto team: something unique and individual, that reflects both the recipient, and the project's overall vibe. The project was a huge success, and I hope it can inspire you the next time you're looking for a special way to engage your early team members. Interested in learning what else we're working on? Follow us on Twitter, and join the Discord!