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Driven by curiosity I have successfully navigated multiple niche career opportunities. From motorcycle mechanics to fashion modeling, fine art to blockchain technology, I have always been rooted in a need to create. This specialized skillset navigating emerging markets has led me into web3 consulting where we deliver in-house onboarding, education and strategy for creative brands to establish themselves confidently in web3.

HOW PATRONAGE IN WEB3 HAS SPARKED A NEW RENAISSANCE

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What exactly is Web3 and how has it changed the winds in favor of artists? The best way I've found to explain this is looking towards history to inform the present. In this article we will give a brief explanation on all those buzzwords you've been hearing like "NFT", "crypto" and "blockchain". While those terms might call to mind a certain exclusionary archetype, I am writing this in hopes you will soon know why you should not only care about these terms, but be excited about the opportunity to create a more even playing field for artists and creatives.

'Web1' was the invention of the internet as we know it. Beginning in 1989 this era of the internet is widely viewed as "read only". The majority of people using the World Wide Web at that time were using it for educational purposes. You could publish, read and send articles, papers, and reading material across the globe like a digital library. This met the growing demand for information-sharing between scientists in universities and institutions around the world. You did not, however, get published easily, this was serious stuff after all. Then in the 2000's the popularization of social networks and a new age of how we interact with the internet was born. 'Web2' can be categorized as "social participation". We now put our thoughts, feelings, food, and love lives online with no need for a peer review. The internet shifted from being used predominantly for

education, to being a tool for socializing. This is where we are now, at the end of the 'Web2' era. Now that we are all here on the internet, interacting, googling, dating, sharing... How do we update the ways in which we are online to be safer, more private and scale back how openly our data is shared and exploited? Enter 'Web3' where we have "participation with ownership". Web3 is the natural evolution of the internet and it's already begun.

This is where we get to our first buzzword; Blockchain! The blockchain is a public digital ledger that records transactions and data on a decentralized peer to peer network. There are several blockchains, but the most popular ones you've probably heard of are Bitcoin and Ethereum. Blockchain is key to how we can implement Web3 principles. 'Simply Explained' on Youtube has great videos breaking this down further if you're interested. However, for the purpose of this article just think of an unbreakable string of beads, each bead holds data, that data could be a digital currency (like Bitcoin) or a certificate of ownership of an artwork. The term 'NFT' stands for "Non-Fungible Token". When art is minted as an NFT the data of when, how and by whom that token was created is logged on the blockchain as a unique permanent record. Of course you could always "just screenshot" an NFT but it's the difference between owning a postcard of the Mona Lisa and having the original. And that difference is supporting living artists in a way the industry hasn't seen since the 16th century.

Jumping back just a few millennia, a new age for artists flourished. The word "Renaissance" is French for "rebirth" and during this massive shift in social thinking, patrons were at the center.

Historically, patrons either hired artists and commissioned them work by work, or they fully took them into their estates and provided them with housing while the artist was “on-call” for all artistic needs. As the population began to concentrate into cities, the wealthiest of the group whether they be merchants, Popes or kings began commissioning artists and craftsmen to build and inspire. Art was the crux of the visibility of wealth and with growing tension between crown and church, “patronage became the social mechanism and economic engine that elevated the anonymous practices of mechanical crafts to the realm of the liberal arts.” A work of art was a reflection of a patron’s status and therefore a great deal of responsibility was placed on the artists they chose to work with, encouraging a type of relationship where one had to know and trust the other.

Fast forward to today’s fine art market and you will find barrier upon barrier between artist and collector. Unless you come from a certain background with exclusive connections you would rarely, if ever be in the same room as an influential collector and you certainly could not show up at the gates of a wealthy patron’s home to show your work (plus that’s creepy). Those who determine which artists will receive exposure in the market may be as selective as it always has been, but your access to those at the top has never been more heavily gated. Enter Web3 and the age of the digital art market.

Social media has given everyone with access to the internet a voice (with 37% of the world population still excluded from this privilege according to the UN’s International Telecommunication Union (ITU)). That voice for creatives is the opportunity to share their

work with people across the world. Fueled by technology and a curiosity of the contemporary and creative, new developments such as social audio on Clubhouse and Twitter have evened the playing field for those looking to connect across the world. A DM to a collector might be ignored but the opportunity to get onto a "space" (a live audio conversation happening over social media) and actually speak with and connect to another human has really shaken things up. The ability to create a truly personal connection with collectors and fellow artists alike has deepened relationships and propelled unknown artists into the spotlight. It's interesting to note, on the other side of the spectrum, we've seen some well known players enter the space relying on their connections and traditional marketing and completely fail to make a lasting impression. Emerging artists who are creating and sharing their work as NFT's have found a way to let their art, and their story, reach the eyes and ears of some of the most protected names in art curation. Web3, and the ability to keep one's personal information private, has allowed those protected names an opportunity to engage with and invest in these spaces without the worry of being doxxed (personal information being leaked). With this open access to people from varying levels of influence within the fine art world, emerging artists have the chance to network in a way that was previously barred from them. The fine art market for digital works is still very small but it's developing in a way that honors what you're creating far more than who you know.

Art has always been influenced by the technology around it whether obvious or not. The invention of the tin paint tube in 1841 made Plein Air painting possible, just as the invention of the locomotive

train gave way to the Impressionist movement. Both allowed artists to freely explore their surrounding environments and break convention both in their subject matter and style. Blockchain technology is our 21st century steam engine and should be regarded by artists as a monumental opportunity to enhance their usual sphere and explore.

Just like someone stepping onto a great steel beast for the first time in the 1830's, starting out in Web3 can be overwhelming and incredibly disconcerting. However, cautious thinking is not something to be taken for granted. As we begin the evolution from Web2 into Web3 we need people questioning the practices, asking the tough questions, and everyone doing their own research to make sure they are well informed on how to safely participate. But that skepticism should also not be accepted without curiosity and before you write off digital collectibles completely, think about the great things we have achieved as a society when art was the central force behind change.

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