

Sitting Here, Collecting Dance. Choreography's affect and value in the Crypto Landscape

-- L. Archer Porter

(UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA, LINCOLN)

ORCID ID: 0009-0002-4145-5266

This essay explores the emerging phenomenon of dance as a collectible within the crypto landscape, exploring how blockchain technology is reshaping the way dance is valued and experienced. Through the lens of non-fungible tokens (NFTs), the essay examines how dance is being transformed into a collectible object, complicating conventional paradigms of commodification. Focusing on the work of the Chilean dance duo CryptoMoves and the practices of collectors like Anna Condo, the essay highlights how the blockchain not only enables the commodification of dance but also introduces new affective dimensions and knowledge production avenues. By tracing the historical context of dance as both commodity and gift, the essay argues that the NFT marketplace catalyzes a new paradigm where the role of the collector becomes central in defining the cultural and economic value of dance in the 21st century. This shift, as the essay suggests, has profound implications for the future of dance, its cultural identity, and its place within the broader digital economy.

Keywords: blockchain and performance; dance NFTs; digital choreography; dance collectibles; media and embodiment

In your home is a shelf, a shelf where some of your favorite knick-knacks, keepsakes, souvenirs, and trinkets reside: perhaps a photo of a loved one that somehow perfectly epitomizes their character, a tchotchke that reminds you of your youth, an heirloom from a family member who has now passed. Adorned amidst these objects of fancy and nostalgia is a frame that plays your favorite short-form dance over and over, perhaps a work by Chilean dance duo CryptoMoves. Every now and then, you glance toward that video and cannot believe you were able to purchase it, own it, call it your own.

This scenario —while it may not be commonplace, or even imaginable in present circumstances— is made possible by blockchain technology, as well as products like *Infinite Object*, a photo frame that ceaselessly displays a non-fungible token (NFT) from your collection. Through these technologies, an individual can purchase a dance NFT, perhaps on a platform like OpenSea, objkt.com, Foundation, or SuperRare, and then load it onto this new frame to hang on their wall or place on their shelf. While the more common mode of displaying and appreciating an NFT is on an online platform (i.e. on a digital shelf), the scenario above makes tangible the idea of dance as a *collectible*. It captures the affective dimension of not just owning a dance, but feeling towards it the way one might feel toward any other keepsake or personal belonging. Through such an experience, individuals may come to know dance differently, come to assign it value in a way that has not been previously feasible, and come to cultivate a new life for it next to other objects of preference, fancy, and longing.

This affective dimension of the dance NFT is often disguised by the more overtly transactional nature of NFT trading. The experience of buying and selling a dance, in other words, often commands the narrative around the dance NFT, obscuring both the collector's sentiments towards the NFT and the relational dynamics between artist and collector. The NFT marketplace is, after all, how a collector would come to acquire a dance, and how a dance artist would come to list their work. While the meaning of the point-of-sale of a dance NFT, the use of cryptocurrency to both create and purchase it,¹ and the wallet addresses used to acquire it certainly underscore the commodification of dance, these apparent novelties have historical corollaries that portray dance as a commodity. The *experiences* of dance that these technologies enable, however, are remarkably novel and continue to expand as more dance artists enter the NFT space

and explore new modalities, media, and technologies.² Focusing on how the blockchain enables dance to become a collectible captures its unique contribution to the historical trajectory of dance.

Indeed, conceptualizing dance in the twenty-first century, as well as understanding how new technologies map onto the history of dance, requires a reframing of dances as not just ownable but also *collectible*. This essay considers the significance of dance as a collectible in order to unpack the meaning of dance and performance on the blockchain. In it, I trace the genealogy of dance as both commodity and gift, drawing comparisons and identifying contrasts with the dance NFT collectible. I then place dance in a wider discourse on collecting, wherein I tease out how collecting NFTs and collecting dance extend and depart from aspects of collecting in general. Through a historical perspective on commodities, gifts, and collectibles, I argue that the notion of collecting dance not only launches a new paradigm but also informs a new affective dimension and a new mode of knowledge production for dance at large. Certainly, dance already taps into the pleasures and conceits of being exchanged as both commodity and gift, as well as being turned into an object via digital technologies. Yet, the blockchain's catalyzing forces for the future of dance and performance are grounded in its ability to create and track the social, cultural, and economic life of dance as a collectible. The figure of the collector moves to the foreground in this process. That is to say, the aesthetic, intellectual, and curatorial perspective of the collector of dance NFTs—as opposed to that of the dancer, the choreographer, the audience member, or any other previous meaning-maker of dance—will shape the meaning and value of dance in the twenty-first century.

Considering the work of CryptoMoves, and a particular collector of their work, Anna Condo, becomes incredibly instructive to this argument. Not only is CryptoMoves creating work that may be collected, but they are also shaping their oeuvre by describing the work on the NFT platform, social media sites, and other outlets of communication as a way to initiate the dance NFT's journey toward knowledge production and meaning-making. And then, once it is collected—by Condo, for instance—the dance NFT takes on a new meaning and life. Both sides of this meaning-making endeavor thus demonstrate how the nature of collecting, as opposed to experiencing dance as an audience member, comes to define the digital dance artifact.

This treatise on dance as a collectible is part of a larger project, grounded in a digital ethnography of performance on the blockchain (not just dance, but also performance art, works of theater, and other art that centers choreography and/or the moving body). In this project, which began in 2021, I participate in the creation and exchange of NFTs, engage in dialogue with other dance and performance artists on X and Discord, and interview curators and artists affiliated with NFT platforms like Foundation, SuperRare, and TEIA (previously Hic Et Nunc). One of the major themes of my conversations with interlocutors is how the blockchain opens up opportunities for dance artists that the offline dance market does not (and cannot) afford.³ At the same time, there are obvious limitations and drawbacks to NFT culture, such as scams that might occur, the high volume of bots involved in both discourse and transactions and the existence of a “casino culture” surrounding cryptocurrency markets (Dixon). This dimension of the NFT not only shapes the experience of dance artists creating NFTs, but also leads to a wider public distaste for the blockchain and its NFT. The arguments presented in this essay present a particular, yet integral slice of my larger project as a way to move toward a critical rendering of NFT culture, from the perspective of dance artists and collectors of dance NFTs.

The Blockchain

Central to dance’s new life as a collectible is the advent of the blockchain. This technology represents an ever-expanding, shared ledger that is distributed across locales of activity called “blocks”. These blocks are linked together, forming a “chain”, which builds in a way such that each block contains data from a previous block. This constant referral to previous blocks means that the data on the blockchain are unalterable and the transactions are irreversible. The data that are recorded and continually referred to include timestamps of transactions as well as the address data of the sender and recipient.

The blockchain was developed in 2008 as a way to record the movement of digital currency (“cryptocurrencies”) across digital spaces. Because of this origin, the technology is often conflated with currencies like Bitcoin or Ethereum. Indeed, the birth of the blockchain as a currency ledger is undeniable; however, it is important to acknowledge the ways in which the blockchain became a technology

to also authorize and trace the circulation of digital objects. It was not long after the creation of the blockchain that this new way of record-keeping began to be used to create, or “mint”, digital artifacts, which later became known as NFTs. An NFT is, in essence, a record of a unique digital asset, whether it be an image, video, audio, or text file, to name a few. Since the NFT is created through the intricate ledger system of the blockchain, it can be authenticated and verified, giving it its unique, or “non-fungible”, status. The first work of digital art minted on the blockchain in 2014 thus launched a new paradigm of digital objects that would be created, authorized, and traded on the blockchain (Wu and Wu).⁴ This paradigm of decentralized digital objects is part of a wider movement referred to as Web 3.0, which includes blockchain activity as well as artificial intelligence, augmented reality, and virtual reality.

The blockchain’s ability to create ledgers for NFT creation and trading has led to transactions that are not financial in nature. For instance, NFTs may be transferred between accounts without any exchange of currency. It is fairly common in the NFT space for artworks to appear in a user’s “wallet” (again, the financial origins are unavoidable) without any exchange of currency or factual communication between involved parties. These objects may take the form of unwanted spam or welcomed gifts, depending on the context. In other situations, an artist might send an NFT to a recipient who is expecting the artwork based on a communicated agreement. For whatever reasons an NFT may appear in an account, the movement of these digital art objects is constantly being recorded on the ledger, a fact that highlights a different, non-financial sensibility to the blockchain than its original impetus as a record for exchange through currency.

While the blockchain is culturally and historically associated with cryptocurrencies, they are separate innovations with distinct functionalities and thus have very different logics to them. This point is primary in understanding the technical foundations of NFT culture: a space that is shaped not only by commodity systems of exchange but also by gift systems of exchange. It also grounds a scene in which dance NFTs acquire an affective sensibility that is not solely defined by the buying and selling of dance.

Dance and Value

Dance has a long history of commodification that predates the advent of the blockchain (Dodds; Dunagan; Foster; Kraut; Weisbrod). Thus, in order to understand how the blockchain extends, complicates, or departs from that history, it is critical to consider the role of the marketplace in the circulation of dance prior to the advent of the blockchain. Indeed, dance has already been price-tagged and transacted through many other avenues prior to the first dance NFT: through ticket prices at concerts and other performances; funding schemes for artist grants, residencies, and fellowships; technique classes at a studio; awards at dance competitions, not to mention the cost of any dancer entering a competition (a much higher price than any trophy or prize money for placing at the top); the cost of dance in advertisements; tuition for university training; and the role of dance in film and television (including dance competition reality shows), among many other modes of transaction.⁵ Through such means of exchange, dance, choreography, and the dancing body become lines on a balance sheet, oftentimes quantified with actual dollar amounts.

The above list of historical modes of price-tagging dance captures a breadth with which dance may be part of monetary transactions, thereby demonstrating how the form is no stranger to financial marketplaces. In fact, it may be argued that the dance NFT simply makes *overt* what has previously been *covert* about the circulation of dance through systems of commodity exchange. While some instances of dance reflected in that list may evade the grasp of the capitalistic marketplace, their mere incorporation into a system of a monetary value, likely on some spreadsheet noting the costs of immaterial labor, underscores how dance has operated, and continues to operate as a commodity in a capitalistic marketplace.

Although dance has a vitality that may seemingly exclude it from many markets of commodity exchange, it nonetheless circulates through and is exchanged within those systems, as Susan Foster articulates in *Valuing Dance* (1-8). At the same time, dance also circulates through gift economies, wherein its transaction does not prompt an immediate reciprocation, but instead establishes a social relationship for any gifts that may be reciprocated at a later time. This distinction between dance as a gift and commodity articulates two

modalities through which dance may be exchanged. However, objects of exchange are inherently mutable and may oscillate between commodities and gifts, and back again to commodities. To demonstrate this point, Foster draws upon Anna Tsing's study of the matsutake mushroom circulating through both gift and commodity systems, as well as Jean Baudrillard's example of how a singular system of exchange hosts the transactions of both gifts and commodities (14). Through this work, Foster unpacks how dance circulates through distinct systems of commodity and gift exchange, while also gesturing toward the slipperiness of these categories altogether.

Central to Foster's discussion of dance as both a commodity and gift is the alignment to paradigms of scarcity and abundance, respectively. That is to say, dance's incorporation into commodity exchanges primarily revolves around its perception and utilization as a resource of scarcity. "According to the scarcity paradigm", Foster writes, "dance's energy is never the product of fun, nor is it enjoyed without benefit or profit. In many contexts, dancing becomes a form of work with clear goals, measurable benchmarks, and short and long-term strategies for improvement, all based in notions of energy control" (78). Dance's abundance, on the other hand, operates on an energy that is "plentiful", "always available, ... widely given and reciprocated", so that dance gifts may be given without suggesting a resulting lack of energy in the giver (21).

Under Foster's terms, dance on the blockchain overtly operates within a paradigm of scarcity. This paradigm is grounded in the notion of the edition. When minting a dance NFT, the artist determines the number of copies they would like to create for any given piece. Some dance NFTs are minted as a one-of-one, meaning that there is only one authorized copy of that work that may live in one wallet. The artist may instead decide to create multiple editions of the same dance NFT so that more collectors might acquire it. An edition of 500, for example, may be acquired by up to 500 collectors (though the same collector might acquire multiple editions of the same work). Structured much like screen-print or photography editions, the quantity of the NFT edition is often proportional to the value of that NFT (Whitaker). Theoretically, the smaller the edition is, the more valuable the NFT. So, in the example above, a one-of-one would be more valuable than a single piece from an edition of 500 (Belk, "Art Collecting").

The structure of the NFT edition may seem like rudimentary economics, yet a review of it indicates how the blockchain both extends and departs from dance's previous, pre-blockchain paradigm of scarcity. Specifically, the minting of dance as an NFT meets several of the characteristics Foster outlines for dance's paradigm of scarcity: it accentuates work with clear goals; it opens the dance out to measurable benchmarks, emphasized through the market for NFTs and curation sites; and it facilitates strategies for improvements, via the metrics on the platform, dialogue on social media sites, and the mere indication of whether it sells, or how quickly it is sold. In many ways, the blockchain does not just extend but *exaggerates* dance's paradigm of scarcity found in other modalities of its commodity exchange (ticketed performances, dance in commercial advertising, and dance's role in "influencer" economies on social media, for instance).⁶

The blockchain, with its focus on editions, unavoidably places dance within an economy of scarcity. At the same time, this technology introduces dance to a new language and technique for regulating value. Not only does the ledger track edition sizes, sequence order, and transactions across time—so as to authorize the existence and trace the circulation of a piece—but it also gives the artist an instrument through which to control the relative abundance or scarcity of their work. As in the example above, a dance artist might choose to mint a certain number of editions, or they may decide to create an "open edition" that has no limits to the number of authorized copies that might exist. While this way of moderating value through editions is distinct from Foster's discussion of dance's energy and how it circulates through systems of exchange, the comparison nonetheless helps conceptualize the blockchain's impact on the commodification of dance.

It may be premature to debate whether the blockchain is refashioning an existing system of capitalistic exchange, or perhaps cultivating a new way of commodifying dance. Less overt and perhaps more critical is how the blockchain might extend and modify the movement of dance in and out of commodity status, vacillating between commodity and gift, and back to commodity. The logic of the ledger as a record-keeping mechanism for the sending and receiving of NFTs, without any payment associated with them, is already part of the fabric of NFT culture. NFT gifts come in the form of tokens

of appreciation for existing collectors, art delivered to admired artists, “swaps” of work between artists who relate to one another, and sometimes even NFTs sent in an anonymized, random fashion.⁷ This dimension of NFT culture reveals how NFTs can acquire value in a way that is linked just as much to sociality and relationality as to investment and profit. For the dance NFT, in particular, the blockchain is able to contour in unforeseen ways the gift-giving logic that is already inscribed in dance’s energy, as detailed by Foster.

The logic of dance as both a commodity and gift sets the stage for its new life as a collectible, which is distinct from but overlaps in many ways with commodities and gifts. Discourses on collecting demonstrate how the collectible cuts through the logic of both gift and commodity. Russell Belk makes this perspective clear:

Both collecting and gift-giving elevate the importance of selected goods and make them objects of heightened attention as vessels of special symbolic meanings that transcend their normal functional meanings outside of ritual contexts...In these processes, they are decommo­ditised, sacralised, and invested with extraordinary meaning. But in a money economy, these ritual possessions never entirely erase market value from these objects and in certain ways even seem to celebrate their monetary meanings above all moral meanings (Cheal 1988, Gregory 1982). Thus, every Christmas season there are perceptions of numerous excesses in gift-giving and gift-seeking, giving rise to cries of rampant materialism and greed (Belk 1993). Similarly, in collecting, there are frequent popular, metaphoric, and literary references to rapid acquisitiveness, possessiveness, and selfishness of collectors (Belk 1997; Danet and Katriel 1994; Olmstead 1996; Rogan 1997). Collections and collected objects are evaluated in both esteem and monetary value by virtue of their rarity and perceived quality. But the high price paid for certain collected objects like Van Gogh’s “Sunflowers”, is itself seen by many as the reason for revering the object. Collectors compete with one another for these prizes as avidly as any business rivals and often even more intensely. It seems therefore that collecting, like gift-giving, has a double nature: both sacred and profane; both

opposing and celebrating the market; both materialistic and anti-materialistic. (“The Double Nature of Collecting” 7-8)

Through this comparison, Belk emphasizes that both the collectible and the gift share an “uneasy relationship with money and monetary value” (8). Although he does not mention the commodity or systems of commodity exchange, such notions are suggested in the reference to money and consumption. Thus, the uneasiness that Belk points out articulates a cozy adjacency to systems of commodity exchange, thereby underscoring how the collectible, like the gift, oscillates between different systems of exchange and spheres of value.

Igor Kopytoff aptly captures a similar uneasiness of the collectible when describing “future collectibles”, such as “leather-bound editions of Emerson, bas-relief renditions of Norman Rockwell’s paintings on sculptured plates, or silver medals commemorating unmemorable events” (81). The advertising rhetoric of these objects, Kopytoff elaborates, demonstrates how such collectibles blur categories of value and principles of exchange. “The appeal to greed in [the advertising of future collectibles] is complex: buy this plate now while it is still a commodity because later it will become a singular ‘collectible’ whose very singularity will make it a higher-priced commodity” (81). Like Russell’s discussion of the competitive nature of collecting, Kopytoff’s future collectible highlights the slippery nature of the collectible, revealing the life of the collectible as an investment and underscoring its status as both gift and commodity.

Under these terms, the meaning of the dance NFT’s value as a commodity may be complicated as it is drawn into a discourse on the gift-commodity relationship, and the dynamic nature of the collectible. Nonetheless, with the emerging possibility of this new life, dance gains a new affective register via its status and life as a collectible. To call a dance an heirloom, knick-knack, treasured artifact, or keepsake prompts a shift in how we might frame this ephemeral art form, how one might *feel* toward it, and how it may be valued in the wider public consciousness. Before turning to illustrations of the dance collectible on NFT platforms, however, it is critical to review dance’s relationship to objecthood, as the notion of a dance NFT relies on a conceptualization of dance as a *thing*.

Dance and Objecthood

Indeed, the blockchain did not initiate the commodification of dance, nor its exchange as a gift; however, the discourse on dance as both gift and commodity helps shape an understanding of the form as a collectible. What the blockchain *is* responsible for is instantiating the conditions through which dance may be collected, in effect creating somewhat of a cross-section of its life as both commodity and gift. In this way, Web 3.0 paves a path for dance to more readily enter into the sphere of objecthood.

Undergirding any discussion of dance as a collectible, or consideration of it as adjacent to tangible culture, is the notion of dance as a *thing*: something that not only accrues value through economies of exchange, but also circulates through pathways of exposure and gains a social life, and even metaphysical existence as an object. Over the last few decades, amid advancements in digital technologies, as well as the conceptualization of theories like object-oriented ontology, dance has garnered greater consideration as an object.⁸ Notably, James Leach, Sarah Whatley, and Scott deLahunta coin the notion of a *choreographic object*, examining how digital technologies have, according to Hetty Blades and Scott deLahunta, the capacity to “make explicit aspects of choreographic practice for others to access” (34). Leach (2009; 2018) extrapolates this notion to posit how digital creations position dance at large as a knowledge-producing endeavor. Information and communication technologies in particular, Leach argues, enable dance to enter into “new relational forms”, including “experiments in building new groups, new constituencies and new audiences” (460). Leach, Whatley, and deLahunta draw on the work of choreographer William Forsythe, among other choreographers, to illustrate how, in Leach’s words, “there is knowledge and intelligence inherent in choreographic practice and appropriate ways of recording, visualising, and teaching dance that make [the desire to preserve dance] apparent” (463). The choreographic object, then, eases the gap between, on the one hand, the rich processual experience of choreographic praxis and, on the other hand, viewers who might not otherwise experience dance through a choreographer’s lens.

Distinct from choreographic objects, Harmony Bench proposes the concept of the *embodied object* as a way to capture both the common and corporeal dimensions of dance and choreography. Defined as

“nonmaterial, corporeal objects that assume a bodily shape or sequence and are transferable across the bodies that are their primary medium” (*Perpetual Motion* 161), embodied objects emphasize how dance might move from body to body. Bench elaborates: “Gestures, steps, moves, movement phrases, dance routines, somatic practices, choreographic scores: all of these exist as movement ideas that take shape through corporeal instantiation and interpretation. They travel contagiously and accrue affective weight and meaning as they travel across the bodies that come to perform them” (161). In this way, the embodied object highlights the threads of movement that link bodies together.

If the choreographic object emphasizes knowledge production, the embodied object underscores how that knowledge is transmitted across bodies, perhaps cultivating some sense of *common knowledge*. While distinct in their characterizations of the object, both of these theories offer a clear distinction between the dance and the object: the latter being a representation of the former. Without rehearsing any debates on the ontology of performance, via its relationship to documentation, recording, or other modes of transmission (evident in the distinct positions of Peggy Phelan and Philip Auslander⁹), the fact of dance as an object becomes evident through an understanding of NFT culture and the wider Web 3.0 lexicon. The term “NFT” is often used interchangeably with “token”, which references a physical object and thus establishes a likeness between the digital artwork and a material thing. “Object” is also the namesake of a widely-used NFT platform, *objkt.com*, further embedding the notion into the NFT vocabulary. This sense of the NFT as an object highlights a genealogical linkage between the blockchain and the Digital Object Identifier (DOI) system, an international protocol for providing unique identifiers for digital materials like eBooks, journal articles, reports, data sets, and government information. The extent to which the DOI influenced NFT vocabulary remains to be seen. Nonetheless, the fact that objecthood is embedded in this culture directly relates to the name, frame, and concept of the *non-fungible dance object*. Born from the logic of the digital object, the non-fungible dance object continues to be conceptualized and exchanged as a thing, without hesitation or debate regarding the status of its objecthood.

Aside from the relationship between the dance and the object, there are other important distinctions between, on the one hand, the

non-fungible dance object and, on the other hand, the choreographic object and embodied object. First of all, the non-fungible dance object suggests a separation of ownership and intellectual property. The NFT artist mints their work, and through the technology of the blockchain, they create their signature of authenticity that verifies the origin and authorship of the art object (Whitaker 33). However, once the object is collected, it is then *owned* by another individual or entity. That collector may choose to keep it “on display”, or perhaps resell it at a later date, thereby relinquishing ownership to someone else. The discourse on dance objecthood, however, suggests that even though dance may be transmitted via some object, both its authorship and ownership still reside with the creator. This distinction gestures toward the already-complex nature of the intellectual property of choreography (Kraut; Waelde and Whatley), as well as the nuances of dance’s digital transmission across time and space (Bleeker; Bench, “Dancing in Digital Archives”; Bench, *Perpetual Motion*). Complicating this discourse, the non-fungible dance object effectively cleaves ownership from authorship, propelling it into a distinct logic of copyright.

Second of all, the ways in which this object engages with knowledge production both extend and depart from the aforementioned notions of dance objecthood, i.e. those of the choreographic object and the embodied object. As described, the dance NFT does not offer much distinction between the dance and the object, and thus does not inherently promote a means through which the audience might interpret or come to know the dance. Once the non-fungible dance object becomes *collected*, however, it re-enters into a sphere of knowledge production. The discourse on collecting demonstrates how knowledge is embedded in the act of collecting, as well as the resulting collection of objects themselves. Literature on the history of collecting often defines the phenomenon as a mode of capturing, extending, and preserving human systems of knowledge (Elsner and Cardinal; Pearce; Geraghty). Susan Stewart, in *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, aptly expresses this thrust of the collection when writing:

One cannot know everything about the world, but one can at least approach closed knowledge through the collection. Although transcendent and comprehensive in regard to its own context, such knowledge is both eclectic and

eccentric. Thus, the ahistoricism of such knowledge makes it particularistic and consequently random. In writing of collecting, one constantly finds discussion of the collection as a mode of knowledge. (161)

Whether historic or ahistoric in its posturing toward temporality, collecting, according to Stewart's discussion of it, is characterized by a sense of order and a thrust toward knowledge, yet in a way that is "eclectic and eccentric".

Stewart's notion of collecting as an eccentric act of knowledge production shapes the meaning of the collected non-fungible dance object by imbuing it with an intelligibility that might not be embedded in other instances of dance. Evident in my use of the *collected* non-fungible dance object (rather than simply the uncollected object), however, is the sense that it is not the *creator* of the object that imbues the object with knowledge, but instead the *collector*. Once the dance NFT is in the collection of the person who acquired the work, the object may become available to forms of categorization based on genre or other systematic orderings. At the same time, the collector operates on taste and subjectivity, commanded by desire, and determined by experience and previous exposure. Thus, the meaning of the dance NFT may be derived from the collector's narrative around what it is, what other objects reside in their collection, and what "shelf" (digital or otherwise) it might sit on. These two affective sensibilities—on the one hand, objective categorification and, on the other hand, subjective desire and fancy—shape the ways in which the collected non-fungible dance object might be involved in knowledge production.

Of course, it is worth noting that the acquisition of the dance NFT takes place on the Internet, and thus results in a different social life than the collectibles Stewart discusses. While the intellectual history of modern collecting certainly positions the collectible in a constellation of knowledge and preservation, the act of collecting in the age of the Internet has a different affective and economic tinge to it. Pre-Internet collecting often takes on a linear view of the collection, pointing specifically to the proposition that nineteenth-century collections were instruments of *conservation* (Blom; Elsner and Cardinal). Collecting online, however, reshapes this dynamic by allowing the collected objects to continue to circulate (Koppelman

and Franks). This pivotal distinction means that a collectible in the age of the Internet is no longer an intimate thing that is taken out of circulation and brought into interiority (Dilworth). Instead, collectibles on the Internet, including digital objects like NFTs, may still be experienced by others whilst residing in a collection. Even with sites like eBay, collectors can access records of collectibles and images of the object, creating somewhat of a public log of various transactions for a given collectible (Trodd; Cahill). Collecting on the Internet, however, goes beyond auction sites like eBay, and expands into digital ephemera and the sharing of collections via images (Smith Feranec). Internet collecting is also impacted by the discourses around objects that tend to take place online (Geraghty). Once acquired, the collector might thus tap into what Koppelman and Franks discuss as the Internet's ability to "[provide] the most amazing display cabinet" (5). Displaying and/or exhibiting one's NFT collection online may take the form of social media posts about the merits of an object, or group of objects, which has become a common avenue of discourse for collectors; exhibitions on the sites on which NFT collectibles may be acquired, like the NFT platforms of OpenSea, objkt.com, or Foundation; virtual 3D galleries like OnCyber, or 2D galleries like Deca.Art; and display on whatever other image repositories or forums the collector might initiate or take part in. Collecting in the age of the Internet, regardless of how or where the work is displayed, not only acquires a character of *exploration* rather than conservation but also cultivates a historical record that might point to the economic and social history of a collectible.

As suggested through this review, the nature of collecting on the Internet indicates how a collector might possess a different affective sensibility toward their online collectible, possibly acquiring things with greater abandon or speculation, than they might do in pre-Internet times. This characteristic is especially the case for the NFT collector. They might find themselves instinctively drawn to a particular work of digital art—perhaps due to its aesthetics, or maybe its technical virtuosity—and purchase it on a whim, swept up in the energy of an auction. Alternatively, they might keep the tab open in the browser for several weeks, returning to it periodically to imagine how the work might add to their collection, while also researching the artist's oeuvre. These experiences may be defined by a range of emotions. On the one hand, the collector may find pleasure and delight in either the energy of the auction or the slow

and methodological process of determining if an NFT is “worth it”, while on the other hand, the collector might find themselves struck with “buyer’s remorse”, wherein they purchased an NFT but regret doing so and cannot return their item. The ease with which one might click a few buttons to purchase a work of digital art, alongside the nature of Internet research helps shroud the act of collecting on the Internet in an affect of exploration, speculation, and eccentricity.

NFT Platforms, broadly

The notion of the collectible is tightly linked to that of the “collection”, a term that is widely used in the NFT landscape. Among the many NFT platforms that facilitate minting, selling, buying, and curation of NFTs exist two uses of the collection, and thus two ways of conceiving the collectible. The first use refers to a series of works that an artist creates, which may coalesce into a shared aesthetic, theme, or concept. This use may be seen on sites like Foundation and Objkt.com. The second use refers to an assortment of NFTs that have been acquired through a singular wallet address, evident on platforms like SuperRare and fx(hash). The former centers on the experience of the artist, whereas the latter centers on the experience of the collector.

This difference in meaning demonstrates how NFT culture as a whole is still negotiating a lexicon for a new paradigm of digital art collection. It also represents the convergence of different subsets of the art market into the same space: museums negotiating the meaning of preservation in Web 3.0, blue chip galleries looking to capitalize on emerging digital artists, smaller galleries aiming to stay current, curators looking to tell a different story, venture capitalists taking advantage of a new modality of investment, and artist collectives aiming to blaze their own trail. These various factions not only occupy different orientations toward the collectible/collection, but also harbor divergent interests, are patterned through different ways of working, and in some cases also possess contradicting worldviews. With such distinct histories, affiliations, and codes of conduct, these factions independently navigate a new terrain while writing a new playbook, even as the blockchain itself undergoes updates. Amid shifts, collaborations and coalitions certainly form amongst individuals representing different factions. The result is the emergence

of numerous platforms devoted to the buying and selling of NFTs, each with its own flair, mission, and market leanings.

The ways in which a platform orients itself toward the wider art market impact its conception and framing of a collection. For example, a platform founded by individuals connected to a blue-chip gallery, or a premiere art auction house would have different affiliations and economic sensibilities than a platform founded by artists, art curators, or other individuals connected to the sphere of art-making. A *collection* in the case of the former might focus on the experience of the collector, whereas a collection in the case of the latter might focus on the experience of the artist. While affiliations to certain industries, conventions, donors, and other aspects related to the buying and selling of art are not foregrounded on a platform's webpage, these covert ways of operating manifest in how a platform relates to artists, both emerging and established, as well as how they define and mobilize a "collection".

Competing sensibilities toward what a collection is and who owns it also inform platform orientations toward dance and performance. Many of the positionalities and scenarios for NFT platform affiliations mentioned above do not include a framework for dance and performance. This is not surprising, considering how the notion of the dance collectible is historically novel. After all, dance and choreography have seldom, if ever, appeared up-for-auction at auction houses like Christie's or Sotheby's, as opposed to countless paintings, sculptures, photographs, and other works of visual art. NFT platforms thus have nothing to inherit, culturally and economically speaking, when it comes to the buying and selling of dance, even though the field of screendance has established a discipline and discourse for video-based choreography and movement art. As a result, platforms may not have a particular position on the prospect of hosting dance and performance NFTs, or including choreographers, dance artists, and performance artists in prominent curations on their sites (such as featured works on the homepage). Dance, in this way, is often omitted from the prospect of being collected.

Despite the uncertainty around the dance NFT, dance artists, as well as curators on NFT platforms, are adapting to an emerging system with values and affiliations largely inherited from a market that has historically accommodated *visual art*, as opposed to *performance*.

Dance artists, for instance, may select a platform based on how amenable it is to performance, specifically through the technical support for video formats. Similarly, curators and other affiliates for certain platforms may decide to promote more performance NFTs, recruit more dance and performance artists to their site, and tune their servers to be more video-friendly. These subtle, yet critical positionalities inform not only how dance is valued in NFT spaces, but also the diversity of genre and form that a platform might have for the NFTs on its site.

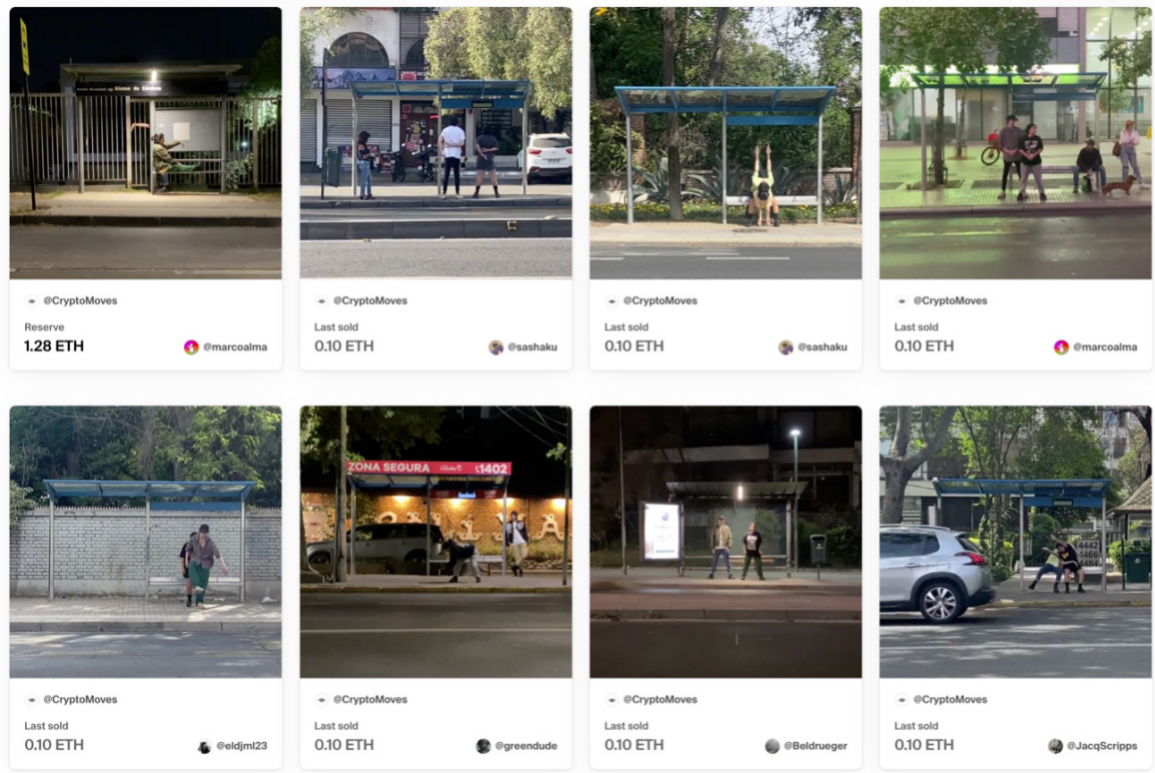
Dance Collectibles

Indeed, platform orientations toward dance impact the ways in which dance NFTs can even become available on the market, not to mention how collectors acquire them. Together, dance artists and platform decision-makers determine what our new dance collectible is, what it looks like, and how it might act in a market that is largely shaped by the economics of visual art. It is most helpful in these regards to consider how the dance collectible manifests for the artist, as well as for the collector. In this endeavor, I turn to the work of CryptoMoves, the moniker for the work of Chilean artists, Beatriz Castañeda and Nicolás Gatica. Castañeda and Gatica have been active in the NFT space since 2021, and have minted dance NFTs on both Foundation and SuperRare. An analysis of their work on Foundation will demonstrate what the non-fungible dance object is, how it circulates, and how it might come to live on the shelf of the collector.

On the profile page of their Foundation site, the bio CryptoMoves reads: “Award winning dancers based in Santiago, Chile. Our movement explores concepts like human connections, minimalism and geometry. We are from the first wave of dancers in the NFT space”. Just below their bio is the number of collectors who own their work, as well as several tabs to view the various NFTs in their repertoire: curated “worlds” they have created, individual pieces they have minted, works by others that they now own, pieces they have collaborated with others on, collections they have created, and NFTs that they have acquired from other artists. At the time of writing this essay, CryptoMoves has sixty-one NFTs on the site, eight collections through which they package a series of NFTs, twenty-two collectors of their work, and four NFTs by other artists that *they* have collected.

When drilling down into the collections of their work, you see the eight series of NFTs that they created, each with a different theme and aesthetic. The collection “Connections” consists of thirty works and is described on the page as “a raw production about minimalistic movements and social connections through public transport”. All of the NFTs in this collection are set in a different bus stop—presumably in or around Santiago, Chile, where CryptoMoves is based. Filmed in a continuous wide-angle shot, the two dancers perform in the small covering of the bus stop, moving arms and heads in a geometric fashion while cars and buses cross the frame (see Figure 1). Another one of their collections, “Conversations Through Alter Ego”, has a different aesthetic and semiotic sensibility. The three NFTs in this collection utilize a similar video technique in which

Figure 1. Screenshot of CryptoMoves’ collection, “Connections” (2023)



Conversations Through Alter Ego

@CryptoMoves

Collection of	Owned by	Floor Price	Total Sales
3	1	0.50 ETH	0 ETH

Share
Earn 1%

NFTs Description Activity

Live Auction Buy Now Reserve Price Active Offers

Most Active



@CryptoMoves
Reserve
0.50 ETH



@CryptoMoves
Reserve
0.50 ETH



@CryptoMoves
Reserve
0.50 ETH

Figure 2. Screenshot of CryptoMoves' collection, "Conversations Through Alter Ego" (2023)

the moving image of the dancers sits within a still image (Figure 2). The effect is that it appears that a human figure in the still image is carrying, holding, and otherwise framing the dance piece.

These two collections, along with the others in the duo's oeuvre on Foundation, enable CryptoMoves to curate their non-fungible dance objects and better frame their work for audiences and collectors. The fact that they have eight collections with distinct aesthetic and semiotic sensibilities articulates how this feature is an instrument for the dance artist to shape the meaning of their work—to produce knowledge around it—before the collector acquires it.

This element of the NFT scene tests the ways in which a non-fungible dance object might produce knowledge, and how its meaning is constructed. As articulated in previous sections of this essay, however, much of the social, cultural, and economic life of the dance collectible takes place in the hands and on the shelf of the collector. So, while CryptoMoves is able to shape the meaning of their work through their collections and descriptions of their collections on and off the platform, the meaning of the dance collectible is also shaped by the collector. Delving into the collection of a particular collector of their work, Anna Condo, will illuminate the new life of the dance object on the blockchain.

The Foundation collections of Anna Condo are separated into two accounts (or “wallets”): ACECollections-1, which contains 592 objects, and ACECollections-2, which contains 479 objects. First, I focus on ACECollection-1, since that is the wallet with the dance NFTs. Indeed, while this collection consists of pieces representing a wide range of art genres and forms, from photography to mixed media collage to performance art, the number of dance NFTs stands out. That is, within the repository of ACECollection-1 are thirteen NFTs created by CryptoMoves, along with several works by other dance artists (three works by dancevatar, one by Cesar Saavedra Nande, one by Irin Angles, one by befe, three by Marco Alma, and two by shu). Evident in this collection, Condo appears to be one of the most avid collectors of dance NFTs. From what can be seen of her ledgers, Condo does not “flip” the NFTs she acquires.¹⁰ Instead, she holds onto her acquisitions, growing her collection over time, and therefore articulating her preference for these objects.

With such a large collection, it is difficult to identify a particular theme or conceptual leaning among her objects in ACECollections-1. However, evident in the apparent lack of animation NFTs in this wallet, as well as the prominence of the human body throughout the collection, is an apparent interest in the corporeal. Indeed, across the various genres represented in this group of collectibles, is the centrality of the human figure. Even in pieces where that figure is absent, its life is suggested by the objects or spaces within the frame (Figure 2). Perhaps Condo’s interest in dance NFTs revolves around the ways in which dance foregrounds the body, movement, and even the imbrication of the human in the ordinary facets of existence. In this way, Condo is producing a particular strand of knowledge

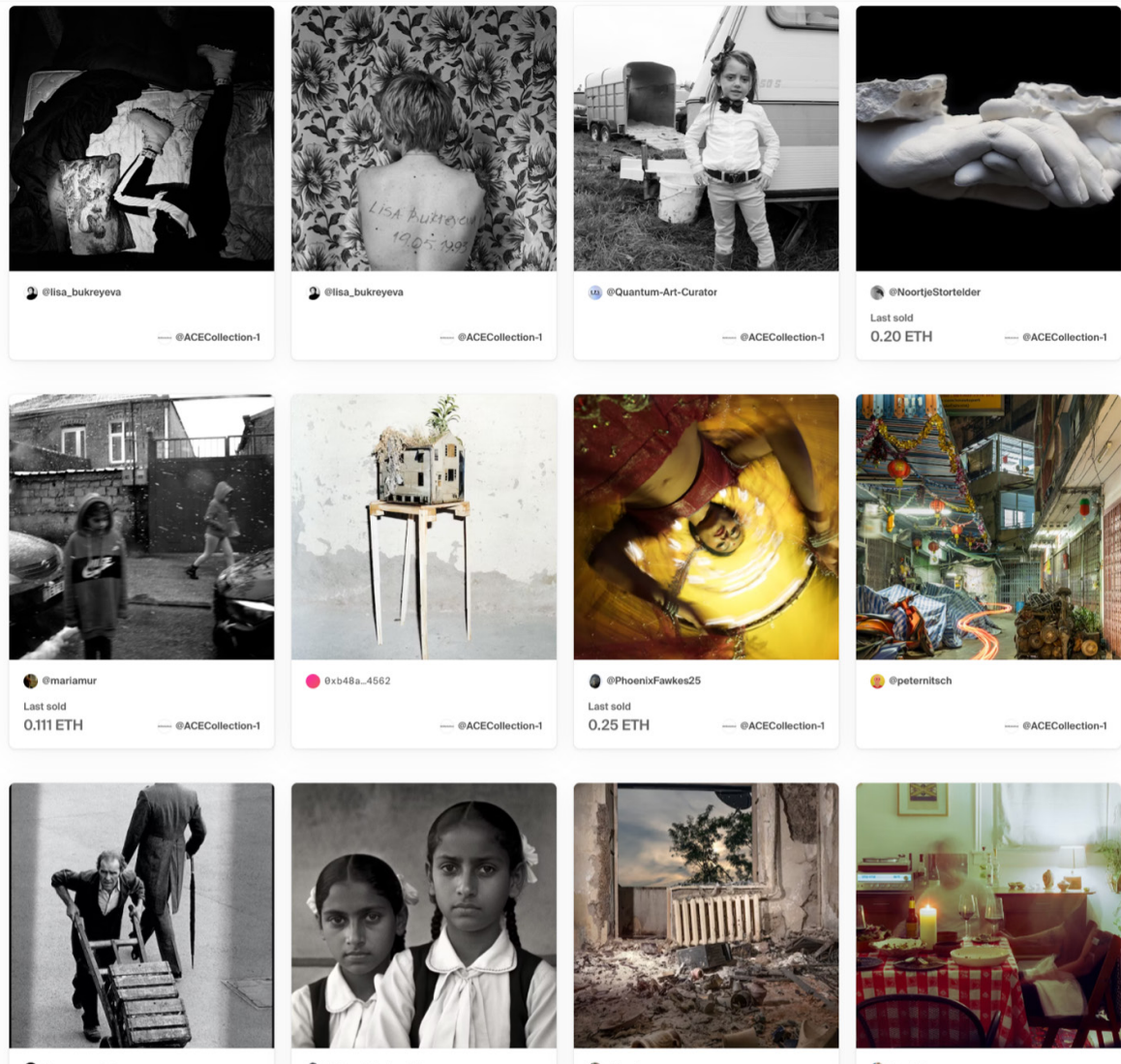


Figure 3. A screenshot of a small sliver of Anna Condo's collection in the ACECollections-1 wallet (2023)

or an argument about NFTs and NFT culture: in a space where the human image and human touch are becoming less visible in digital art, evident in how animations, AI creations, and code-based generative art tend to dominate the landscape, art that renders the human form highlights the embodied, corporeal dimensions of the world in which the art was created. Thus, by accumulating such a body-centric collection, Condo is not only suggesting a value for the human and the “organic” (a term used by one of the artists whose work lives in Condo’s collection) but also exhibiting to the world what it means to have and to hold such a display case for an eclectic mix of remarkable objects.

This argument offered through Condo’s collection of dance NFTs and other body-centric tokens is further supported by the aesthetic and conceptual sensibility of her second collection, ACECollections-2. Interestingly, ACECollections-2 consists of images that foreground, or otherwise suggest the *non-human*. Animation and AI seem to be two techniques or genres that can be found across the NFTs in this collection. As if the two collections are separate display cases that operate on a different logic, purpose, and meaning, Anna Condo is producing knowledge and meaning about the NFTs she collects.¹¹ Individuals who come across her collections may then think differently about the objects in them.

Through the lens of CryptoMoves and the collecting pursuits of individuals like Anna Condo, we see the emergence of a new custodian of dance: the collector. As collectors like Condo demonstrate, the act of acquiring dance NFTs involves more than just owning a work of art. It may involve crafting a narrative that gives life and context to the art. It may involve building a personal relationship with the digital object, one that approximates the relationship they might have with a physical object. It may also involve entering into a personal, collegial relationship with the artist over a shared interest in the work of art—an experience that many interlocutors described as personally meaningful. Through the role of the collector, then, the traditional dynamics of dance appreciation are being recalibrated in a system where dance is not just experienced but collected, narrativized, treasured, and perhaps also passed down as digital heirloom.

The implications of this shift are as profound as they are intricate. As dance enters the digital ledger, it does not merely become part

of a sphere of collectability, but it adopts a new cultural identity. No longer is dance solely framed through the performance *event*, which characterizes in-person performances as well as dancefilm festivals and screenings, or through its *transmission*, which characterizes the movement of dance across media platforms of Web 2.0—but by its *provenance*.¹² Provenance on the blockchain reveals the historical life of the dance NFT, telling a story of its collectability throughout its digital lifetime. It, for instance, weaves a narrative that can include collectors alongside the institutions that exhibit the work, the audiences who interact with it, and the cultural moments it signifies. The singular collector, with their curated digital shelves, functions as the conduit through which dance enters a wider narrative of its digital life.

The imprint of the collector, and the provenance that they activate, will continue to morph and expand in volume as more collectors enter into the market for dance collectibles, and those collectors assert their preference for a particular *kind* of dance object. These collectors may or may not be guided by the historical significance of bidding on and acquiring a non-fungible dance object, yet the fact of such a feat speaks to the dynamic shifts that screendance, and the field of dance more broadly, will undergo. Of course, many aspects of this future remain to be seen. The trajectory of Web 3.0, and the corollary dance NFT, hinges on the global geopolitical climate, the state of financial markets, international law, and legislation from independent nation-states. Thus, as political and economic changes take effect, the NFT landscape, and dance artists operating within that landscape, will respond in unforeseen ways.

While there are many unknown aspects of the future of the blockchain, its forces have already prompted a seismic shift in how dance may be conceptualized. The NFT wave that was born from blockchain technology may exaggerate the ways in which dance operates as a commodity, introduce new facets of dance's life as a gift, is transmitted digitally, and transacted in a marketplace. However, the more unsuspecting—and as I have argued, critical—contribution of the blockchain to the history of dance is its induction into the world of collecting. The notion of dance as a collectible *is* and *will continue to be* socially, culturally, and economically pivotal. Its operations of value will shift. Its relationship to audiences will change. Its capacities for meaning-making and knowledge production will transform. Yes, the new paradigm of dance is with the collector—and it is on display.

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Notes

- 1 Beyond the common understanding of how NFTs are traded using cryptocurrency, the creation of an NFT also requires cryptocurrency, particularly through a "gas fee" that is incurred at the time of minting. Gas fees relate to server costs and other overhead that is often required to sustain the technology of the blockchain. Gas fees, like petrol prices, are contingent upon a wide range of economic (and technological) factors and thus vary over time, but are often linked to the size of a file and the amount of transactional traffic occurring at a given moment.
- 2 My reference to new modalities and media references 3D and immersive experiences of dance. While NFTs of this nature exist on blockchain, they are mostly created by artists who are not involved in the world of dance or choreography (like the classic meme of the "dancing baby" by Michael Girard, which now is in NFT form). Exceptions to this trend include the work of Diego Mac.
- 3 The technological barriers of entry for blockchain activity tend to be high for many users. Interlocutors describe how their NFT journeys often began with the help of a friend or colleague who had aided

- in their “onboarding” process. This process entailed the creation of a wallet; access to NFT platforms, some of which are (or were at the time) invite-only; the minting of their first NFT, etc. Users thus often need social, cultural, and economic capital to enter the NFT market.
- 4 The first NFT minted on the blockchain is a piece called *Quantum*, created by Kevin McCoy and Anil Dash in May 2014 on a platform called Namecoin.
 - 5 Of course, Susan Foster notes via Pierre Bourdieu and Jean Baudrillard that the commodification of dance in capitalist marketplaces does not solely revolve around the exchange of financial capital, but also involves other modes of capital, namely cultural and social capital (7).
 - 6 For a study on dance’s role in commercial advertising, see Dunagan (2018). For an instance of dance’s role in influencer economies on social media, see Porter (2020).
 - 7 “Swap” is a term used on the now-defunct NFT platform, HEN, to describe the buying of an NFT. Interestingly, during its short life as a trading space for NFTs, HEN was an incubator for artists to experiment, play, and coalesce around the production and circulation of their art objects. The use of the term “swap” emphasizes the artist-centric, gift-giving potential of the NFT culture and NFT communities. The fall of HEN was a convoluted process that some interlocutors attribute to the technological insufficiencies of the platform (e.g., slow loading speeds due to a lack of necessary platform maintenance), and others attribute to the colonialist takeover of the blockchain (since HEN was founded by a Brazilian artist and was ultimately bought by an American hedge-fund-backed group). These dynamics of one particular NFT marketplace capture the competing interests and tensions at play in the early life of NFT culture.
 - 8 As conceptualized by Graham Harmon, object-oriented ontology is a theory of object relationality through a phenomenological lens. For more information, see *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything* (2018).
 - 9 Peggy Phelan (1993) notoriously argued that the fundamental character of performance is its disappearance. According to Phelan, a digitized performance is no longer “performance”. Philip Auslander (1999), on the other hand, challenges the assumption that live performance holds a unique authenticity or immediacy that mediated forms lack. In particular, Auslander argues that live and mediated performances have become interdependent and that the experience and meaning of liveness are deeply influenced by media technologies.
 - 10 The notion of flipping – which borrows from a vocabulary of buying and selling other objects, including houses and cars – refers to the act of selling an NFT for more than it was purchased. The collector thereby makes a profit from the mere exchange of a digital object.
 - 11 It must be noted in this regard that Anna Condo is an artist in her own right. Many artists in the NFT space indeed become collectors, as they come to admire the work of their colleagues and peers.
 - 12 In the world of fine arts, provenance is the chronicle of ownership for a work of art, which not only establishes its authenticity but also its history through various owners and collections.