Archiving the NFT Community

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Research Question:

What is the role of archivists, librarians, and historians in the NFT space as NFTs gain popularity and blockchain technologies unfold? What types of materials are not embedded within the blockchain and need to be collected and preserved so they remain accessible?

Abstract:

The rise of early Net Art in the 1990s was a pivotal moment with drastic changes in the way art was made and shared. However, much of the digital art produced decades ago has all but disappeared, with the exception of works that were actively archived by a few key players, including Rhizome and the Internet Archive. We are witnessing a similar moment today with the emergence and popularization of NFTs. While some information is embedded in the blockchain itself, not all artwork is securely stored on-chain. There are also other important facets of the space that deserve to be recorded. Ephemera can be collected, off-chain publications can be saved, and oral histories of NFT visionaries can be conducted. Archivists, librarians, and historians have the necessary skills to begin archiving this community before numerous voices are lost.
Challenges:

- The NFT community is broad and dispersed. It consists of developers (like of NFT marketplaces like MakersPlace, SuperRare, and OpenSea), artists, collectors, and more. The scope of the project may need to be narrowed.
- It’s hard to keep up with such a rapidly evolving community. We are at the stage where many projects have come and gone, while others are in infancy.
- Many important people in the space remain anonymous when communicating online, such as the instant messaging platform Discord.
- Many archivists are unaware they can begin archiving developments in Web 3.0 using web 2.0 tools like Archive-It and Conifer.
- It’s unclear who would fund this archival project and provide it with a permanent home. Perhaps a library and archives department within a traditional institution like a science museum or computer history museum would be interested, or perhaps a new organization will become interested in how NFTs fit into a much longer lineage of experiments of art and technology, including computer art and digital art.

Biography:

Andrea Kutsenkow is an arts professional interested in information management and issues of legacy. She has experience working in the development of archives for major institutions, including the Vilcek Foundation, Pace Gallery, AFS Intercultural Programs, and New York University. She is a member of the Archivists Round Table of Metropolitan New York (ART), the Catalogue Raisonné Scholars Association (CRSA), the Society of American Archivists (SAA), the College Art Association (CAA), the National Museum of Women in the Arts, and Art Table. She earned her Master of Arts in Archives and Public History at New York University and a Masters in the History of Art and the Art Market (Modern and Contemporary) from Christie’s Education, New York. Recently she has actively explored NFTs and blockchain technologies. She is a core collaborator on OneBigZoo with multimedia specialist and crypto artist Mich Palmer.