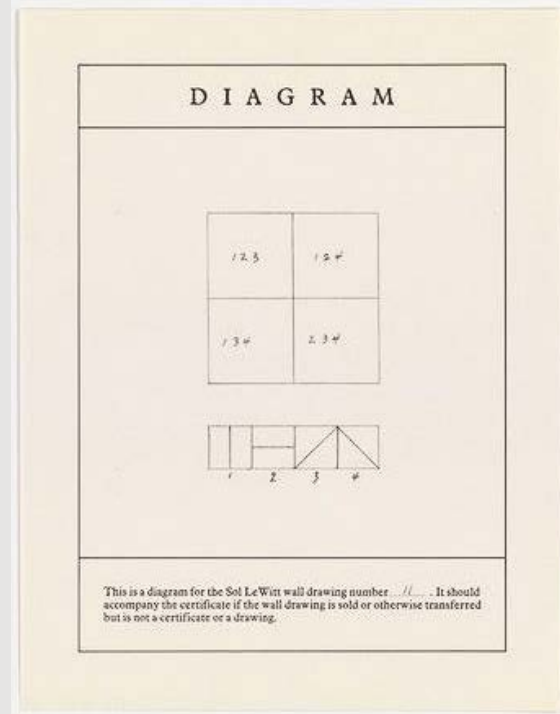




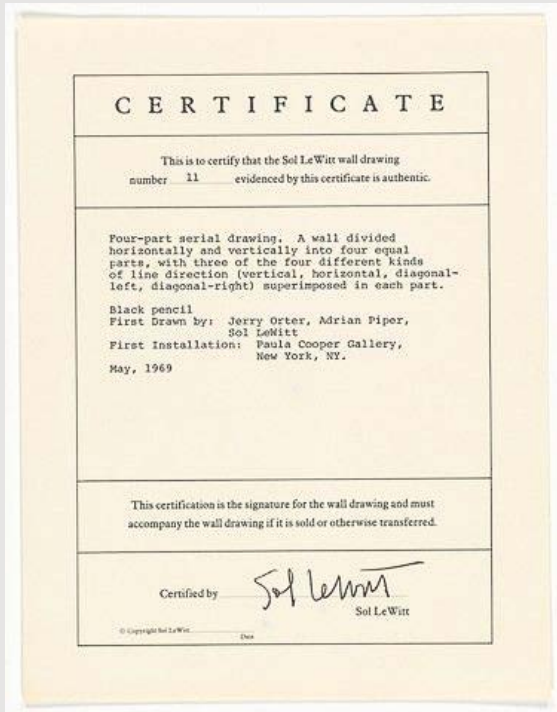
# BE A TROLL,



Diagram, Walldrawing II, Sol LeWitt

# BE AN ARTIST

TEXT by Suzana Poghosyan



Certificate, Walldrawing II, Sol LeWitt

Marcel Duchamp was a troll but art history refers to him as the grandfather of Western contemporary art. His artwork was the impetus for much of what we consider contemporary art. His infamous sculpture, *Fountain*, 1917, was one of his first “readymades.” It challenged familiar notions of what can constitute art while simultaneously poking holes in conventional beliefs of who can partake in the creation of art.

Duchamp was an established artist by the nineteen-tens. He created *Fountain* in secret and signed it “R Mutt,” intent on entering it into the “Un-juried” exhibition that the Society of Independent Artists held in the spring of 1917. The stipulations for participation were that any artist who paid the designated fee of six dollars would be exhibited. However, the board wasn’t accepting work by all artists. As the director of the board, Duchamp opposed their discriminatory selection process. *Fountain* was meant to stir controversy among the board and expose their practices. It was a form of institutional critique resulting in Duchamp’s resignation from the board shortly after the incident. Following his resignation, he claimed authorship over *Fountain* publicly and went on to make several other editions of the artwork.

Does familiarity keep us from challenging ourselves? Does it function as a false sense of sustainability?

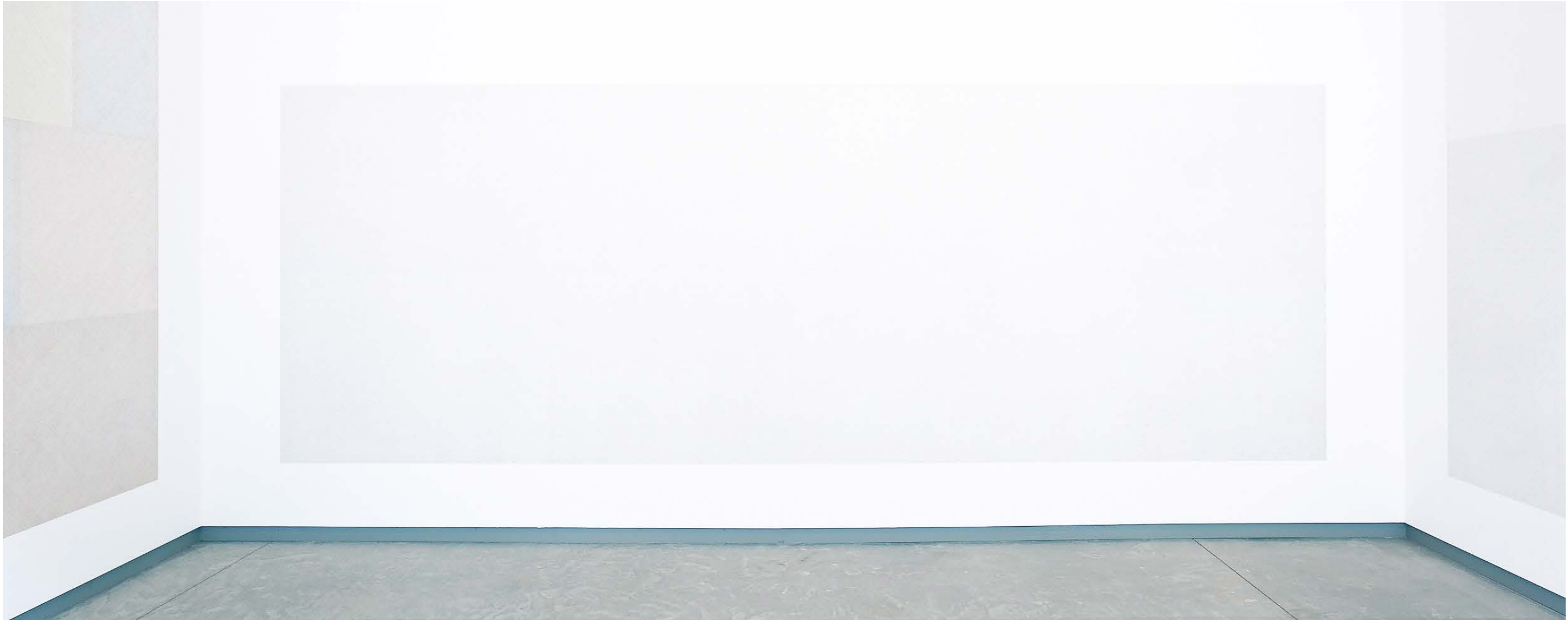
An artist’s place in society is to push against the familiar boundaries that condition us. The aspect of the *Fountain* that I feel is overlooked is that the work was activated through the reactions it drew from its original witnesses. Duchamp knew that the board would take issue with the piece when he submitted it as “R Mutt.” The introduction of *Fountain* catalyzed an intimate performance that the board and the artist only got to see. The versions of the readymade that we can survey are only partially complete.

During the 1960s, Sol LeWitt further developed these conceptual artworks. While LeWitt created works of art in many media during his sixty-year career, he was best known for his wall drawings, a form that grew out of his earlier work making abstract paintings. He initially called them “structures,” which he preferred to “sculptures.” These works combined the immediacy of drawing with a concern for space and the environment. In their blank surfaces, the works were logical and based on the premise that no object is finished until all its possibilities have been exhausted.

LeWitt exhibited his first wall drawing in 1968 at Paula Cooper Gallery in New York. His earliest wall drawings, including *Wall Drawing 11*, 1968, are done in hard, black pencil. This material rendered the work as two-dimensional as possible and maintained the wall’s integrity as a plane. LeWitt limited the work’s duration; ultimately, the wall drawings were painted over. Yet, despite this temporary aspect of the drawings, the idea is permanent, and the drawings can be redrawn on another wall by another person.

Fountain, 1917, Marcel Duchamp, replica 1964





Diagram, Wall drawing II, Sol LeWitt

LeWitt's system of lines move across the wall in four directions: horizontal, vertical, diagonal left, and diagonal right. LeWitt would later also superimpose the lines on top of one another, as seen in *Wall Drawing 11*. These works propose something that didn't exist prior, the notion that, like sheet music or choreography, art, a piece of visual artwork, can have an author yet be produced by someone else. The moment where the instructions are received by the person meant to execute the work is where part of the art resides. The rest lives in the printed instructions and then on the wall. Thus, there's a place where the art resides and a place where the thing we recognize as the art lives, but like two atoms, they cannot exist in the same exact place. Contemporarily, our relationship with social media and the internet is akin to the duality observed in LeWitt's instructional wall drawings.

Digital artwork has been in existence as early as the 1950s. Below is an artwork by Ben Laposky called *Oscillon 40*, from 1952; it's in the Victoria and Albert Museum collection in the UK. In the 1990s, with home internet connections on the rise, disparate art projects appeared across the landscape. American artist Mark Tribe started a Listserv for digital artists calling it Rhizome. As the forum grew, it endeavored to commission and preserve digital art, and exhibit it and is now affiliated with the New Museum and New Inc and their work can be viewed on <https://rhizome.org/>. Though digital art is not new, big institutions didn't generally recognize artists' work in the space or attempt to collect it.

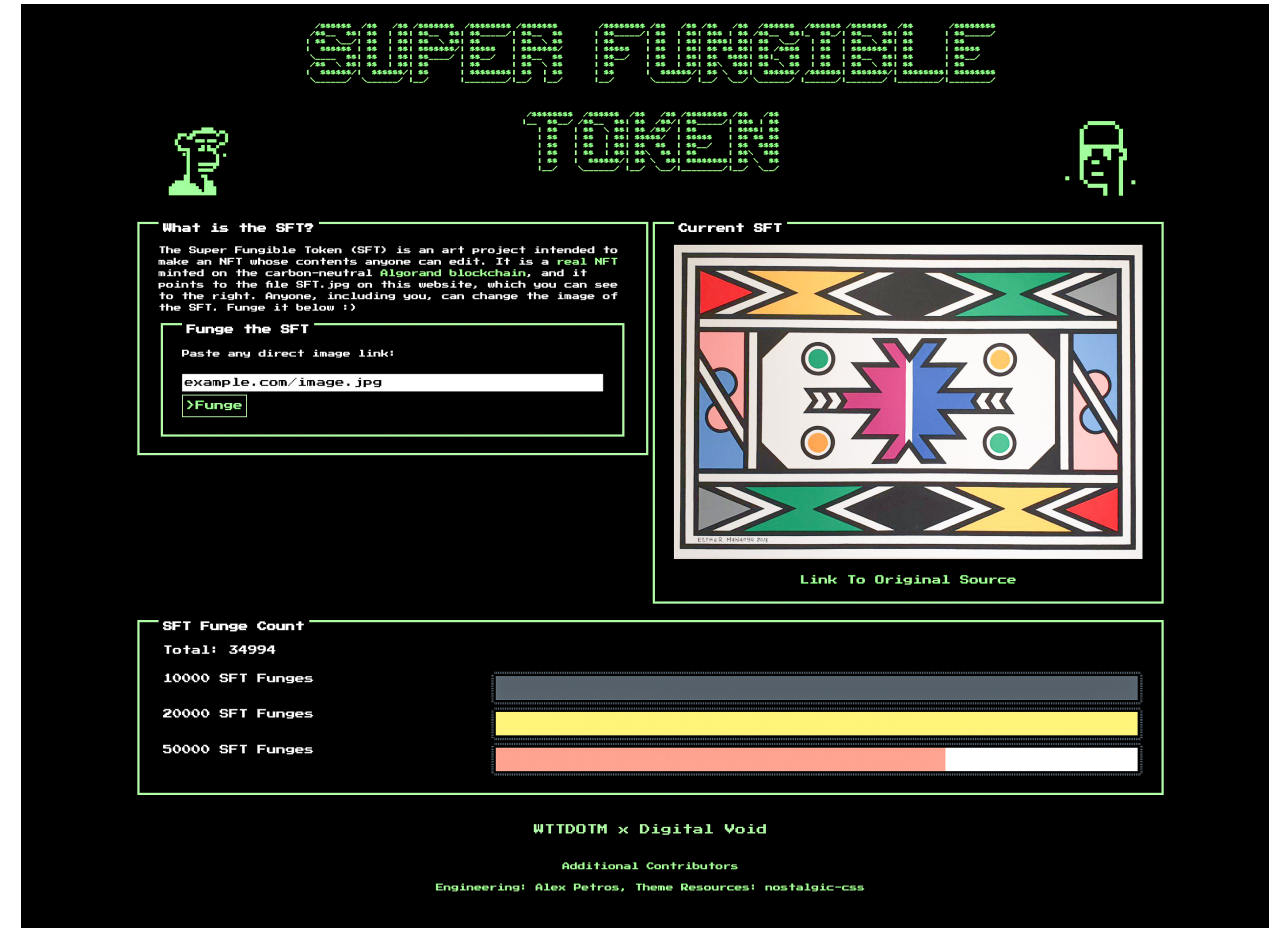
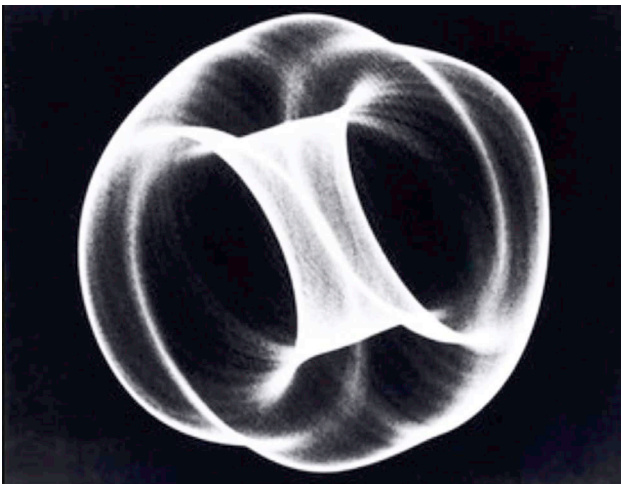
Last spring, during the scramble to mint and sell NFTs, just the mention of the acronym drew extremely polarizing arguments both within the artworld and from the outside. Some regarded them as nothing more than a marketing buzzword pushed into the general cultural landscape by Fintech Bros (Financial Technology Bros). Others criticized the carbon emissions related to all blockchains. Digital artists saw the proliferation of Crypto art marketplaces as an opportunity to earn a living for their artistic production when it was difficult to enforce copyright in previous decades. Seemingly, at the core of each of these issues was the financial aspect of the artists' production.

Since March of 2020, little has been discussed regarding the cultural significance of the artwork that artists mint on any given platform in the mainstream. While Duchamp pioneered the notion that anything can be art, each artist's specific choice is still political. As human beings, we are going back and forth between rebellion and complicity with our daily choices. When an artist elects to add a link on a blockchain they are immediately engaging with a medium that has specific cultural significance whether or not it's directly acknowledged in the work.

Morry Kolman and Alex Petros's *The Super Fungible Token (SFT)*, 2022, is an artwork which confronts this discourse by *trolling* the basic qualities that comprise an NFT. The duo codeveloped the piece with Digital Void's Josh Chapdelaine and Ryan Broderick and they minted on the carbon-neutral, Algorand blockchain.

In its use of blockchain technology, *The Super Fungible Token*, still functions as it is an NFT at its core yet it possesses an innate futility. The visual aspect of the artwork consists of a website with a black, green text, an image, and a dialogue box that anyone may submit an image URL into. The submitted URL is transformed into the one minted on Algorand through the code their team designed. However temporarily the submission stays up, it changes the image associated with the token thereby breaking down the notion of uniqueness that makes NFTs so coveted. It's been altered over 34,000 times as of April 2, 2022. One user even hacked into the code and made it so that the image always resets to one of American singers "Weird Al" Yankovic.

Ben Laposky, *Oscillon 40*, 1952. Museum no. E.958-2008. Given by the American Friends of the V&A through the generosity of Patric Prince



Morry Kolman and Alex Petros's *The Super Fungible Token (SFT)*, 2022

As with the *Fountain*, the *SFT*'s existence depends on how the people engage(d) with it. The artists chose to destroy the contract so that no one could purchase the piece; in some ways, it is a large-scale public artwork for the internet age. In making the work Kollman and Petros sought to make an artwork that trolls the expectations of uniqueness and ownership that are associated with NFT art. If anyone can alter it, what is the work? Like with LeWitt's instructional drawings, the owner would possess a certificate of authenticity proving that the visual component or the wall drawing is a "Sol LeWitt." As the contract for *The Super Fungible Token* was destroyed, and even the artists themselves don't technically own the piece, it exists as long as the URL is active.

*The Super Fungible Token* is intended to bring about feelings of discomfort because it looks like a familiar system and points out what is "bad and stupid" about it. Kollman and Petros are continuing a tradition of artists confronting the familiar boundaries that condition us. It's not enough to just say something is wrong with conventions, it's vital that the experience of a given convention is securitized. Challenges that artists are proactive forms of destabilization which dismantle a false sense of stability when an over emphasis on familiarity becomes a revolve towards stagnation.