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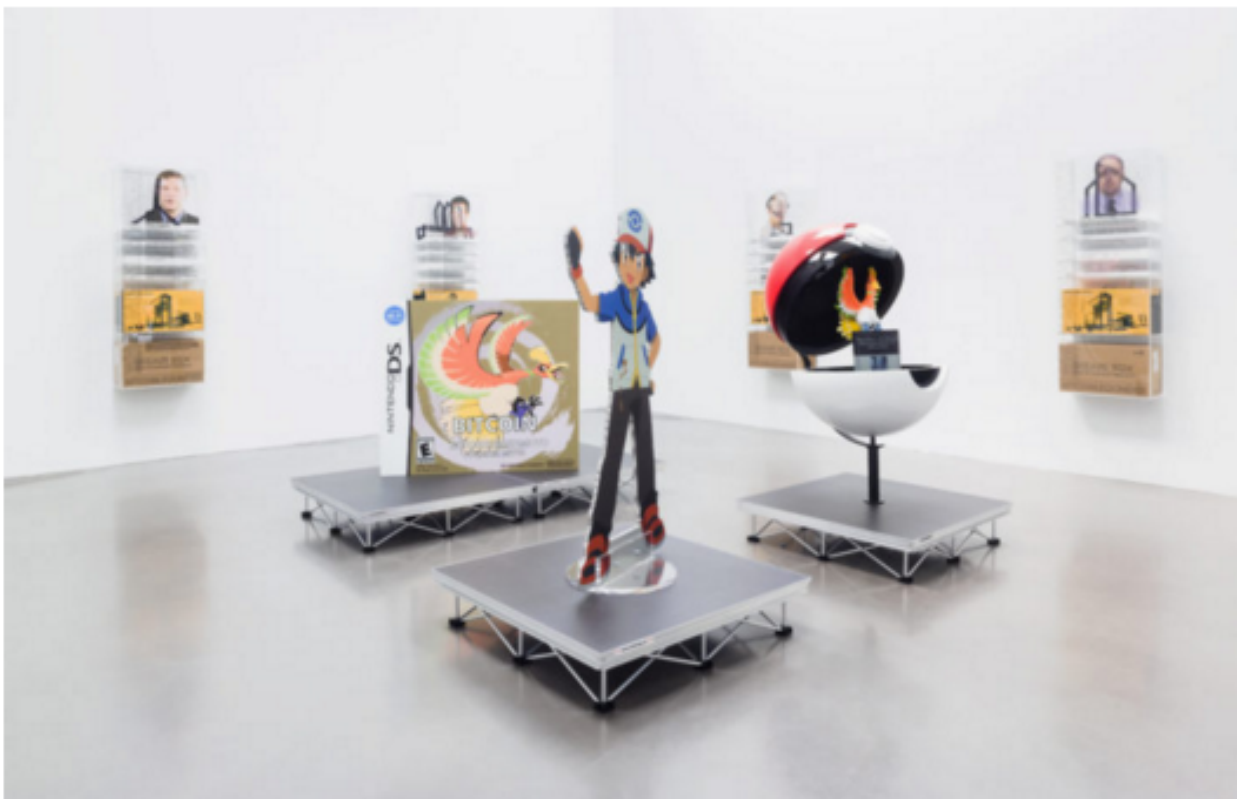
GALLERIES

Envisioning Our Future States Through Crypto Currencies

An artist helps us understand how crypto currencies are creeping their way into our global economies.

Olivia B. Murphy | 20 hours ago

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Simon Denny, 'Blockchain Future States,' installation view at Petzel, New York (all images courtesy the artist and Petzel, New York)

Entering Simon Denny's latest exhibition *Blockchain Future States* is like stepping into a distilled version of a comic con or tech conference, complete with plexiglass cases and full-size Pokémon cut-outs on stage platforms. But more importantly, what the exhibition holds is a key to understanding how crypto currencies are creeping their way into our global economies and governmental structures.

Petzel

Olivia B. Murphy, "Envisioning Our Future States Through Cypto Currencies," *Hyperallergic*,
October 13, 2016.

The first half of the exhibition is a hall of fame of sorts, containing the narrative of five men who have all been either accused or claimed to be Satoshi Nakamoto, the supposed creator of bitcoin, who has remained illusive since the inception of the cryptocurrency in 2008. The Pokémon and Nintendo figures then serve to place the supposed origin story of bitcoin in this era and digital world of gamers and coders, working on the fringes of society to create this idealistic currency.



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But bitcoin has become so much more than a pseudo-currency for developers and dark web users — it's since spawned one of the most revolutionary programming systems we've yet to see. Known as the blockchain, this ultra-secure database holds a constantly growing list of time-stamped records of exchanges, secure from third-party tampering. It's essentially a digital infrastructure that allows for currencies or contracts to transfer with no need for third-party oversight, which means it could change the basis of the global economy as we know it.

The main space in the gallery is fully devoted to a study of the blockchain, demonstrating its use or envisioned use as exemplified by three companies: Ethereum, 21, and Digital Asset. They represent three spheres of use for crypto securities and currencies: banking (specifically global banking), tech, and a borderless cyber society. The three distinct installations are each constructed from the visual language of the company, so that we move from well-organized corporate marketing materials, to a more symbolic, anarchic visual language of deconstructed gallery walls to represent Ethereum.

The range of the blockchain's usages, from corporate banking to a more idealistic open market, is possibly best encapsulated in the three versions of the game *Risk* that Denny has reimagined for each company. For Digital Asset, the game stays pretty true to its global domination themes, keeping the bordered maps intact, only replacing the pieces with Female Banker, Corporate Capitol, and Federal Reserve playing pieces. The next iteration is a more abstract version of the game for the tech start-up 21, where the board is broken up into two spaces, the onshore or nation-based side, and the offshore, 'cloud'

Petzel

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side. Lastly, in Ethereum's game, the global domination theme is seemingly absent, with the board looking more like Chinese Checkers (or the blockchain itself), to denote the possible cyber reality of a borderless global economy.

Although the installations on a whole paint a compelling picture of these imagined future states, the individual sculptures straddle the line between being information containers and aesthetic art objects. Denny posits that he wants to strike a balance between relaying information — in effect being a “tech advocate of sorts,” as he told me on a walkthrough of the show earlier this month — while also creating sculptures in the visual language he is traditionally versed in, which is art. And many of these works achieve this goal, like the Bitcoin/Blockchain Founder Myth “Dreambox” Gamer Custom Case Kit series, the shadowbox-like shrines to the illusive figures surrounding the emergence of bitcoin and cryptocurrencies, with their strange talisman tokens preserved in plexiglass boxes like cherished action figures or playing cards.



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But others, like the *Block Chain Future State Founder Whiteboard Globe Drawing* series, which features the over-sized globes that represent the imagined strategies for future states, feel like they could easily be found in any of these companies' offices. Denny produces compelling and researched exhibitions, but after information has been gleaned from each individual piece, there is not much else to grab on to.

He also avoids taking a clear political stance on the information he presents. Rather, he lays it out in a methodical, almost antiquated science fair-like display in order to let you come to your own conclusion — in this case, about what these future realities could look like in the age of a global blockchain economy. The onus is then on us to ponder these incredibly complex questions about national responsibility, cyber security, and what impact this digital currency could have on the delicate ecosystem of individual national economies — Denny is just giving us the tools to comprehend it all.

Simon Denny: Blockchain Future States *continues at Petzel (456 W 18th Street, Chelsea, Manhattan) through October 22.*

<http://hyperallergic.com/329632/envisioning-future-states-crypto-currencies/>