EQUITY IN NFTs
IS THE CRYPTOART SPACE THE UTOPIA WE WERE PROMISED? BY SHANA NYS DAMBROT
**FOOD**

**WEEKEND WINE GETAWAY**

It’s All In The Family At Temecula’s Doffo Winery

**BY MICHELE STUEVEN**

There’s always something happening at the award-winning Doffo Winery in Temecula, a short two-hour drive from Los Angeles. Whether it’s a sidecar tour through the wine valley with tasting stops on the way, an Argentinean BBQ on a hilltop overlooking the rolling hills, motorcycle races or just kicking back at the pool of the Malbec Estate – you don’t have to leave the vineyard for a full weekend recharge.

When Marcelo Doffo came to Southern California from Argentina in 1975, he got into the collision repair service and owned a body shop. His two hobbies were collecting and restoring vintage 1960s motorcycles and making wine in his backyard in Orange County.

On a trip to buy fruit in Temecula one weekend, he came across an old school house next to a pepper tree similar to his native Argentina and bought the property as a place to retire. Together with his son Damian, Doffo spent two years planting vines, laying irrigation systems for cabernet sauvignon, syrah, cab franc, zinfandel and malbec varieties. His intention was to retire and make a little wine. He never expected it to become a full-fledged award-winning estate winery and event space, excelling at the Malbec varietal.

His obsession with wine is matched only by his love of collecting motorcycles, which is evident by the Doffo Winery's tasting room's décor. The warehouse space displays just a fraction of the more than 300 bikes he’s collected over the years alongside rows of signature wine bottles. Plasma screens of live motorcycle racing line the walls, reflecting the family’s passion for bikes.

Wine flights in the tasting room are generous and affordable, all made from hand-picked grapes. Nothing is machine harvested. An unusual California find, grab a bottle of the Doffo grappa. Also worth a taste is the late harvest Tiago, the MotoDoffo Super Tinto and their elegant deep purple red Syrah. White wine lovers should sip the delicious concrete fermented Viognier, with aromas of tangerine, peach, pineapple, mango, apricot and Marcelo’s beloved Mr. Lincoln roses that dot the vineyard.

With the help of wife Maria, daughters Brigitte and Samantha as well as Damian and his wife Vanessa, Doffo Winery has expanded into a family run experience that is wine, song and food for the soul.

**The Malbec Estate**

Maria Doffo runs the Malbec Estate Airbnvb tucked behind the Doffo Winery, surrounded by palm and pepper trees. The 2,903 square foot house on 2.5 acres of gated property includes four bedrooms and 2.5 full bathrooms with a private backyard including a furnished poolside area, fire pit, BBQ area, bar, pool, jacuzzi, and is a reasonable deal at about $533 a night for up to eight guests. It’s located five to 10 minutes from the other 60 wineries in the area, hot air balloon rides, vineyard horseback riding and 15 minutes from Old Town. Breakfast platters, poolside charcuterie and other items can be ordered through Vanessa Doffo’s FYS catering.

**Wine Tours And Tasting**

Starting with a glass of sparkling Paulina, your tour will be guided by a Doffo family member whenever possible. The tour takes you through the vineyard and details farming practices and family history. It also includes some of the production area and the MotoDoffo collection of antique motorcycles and concludes with a traditional counter tasting for two.

There are indoor tastings in two distinctly different atmospheres as well as outdoor spaces drenched in roses overlooking the rolling hills dotted with vineyards. Choose between the sophisticated tasting area and retail shop designed by Brigitte Doffo or watch MotoGP races on the big screen of the main tasting room while sipping on a red flight. On weekends, Damian’s wife Vanessa’s Fuego Y Sal catering sets up with breakfast burritos and traditional Argentine fare like beef empanadas with olives from the vineyard cured by Maria as well as churrasco steak and fries topped with the Doffo family chimichurri.

**Cruise The Valley In A Sidecar**

Kickstands up by the barrel room. SoCal Sidecars have deals with Doffo and other wineries in the valley and will pick you up for a 45-minute ride through the Temecula Southern California wine country. An exhilarating way to start the day, helmets and blankets are provided. They also offer door-to-door wine and brewery tours as well as cocktail, food and custom tours. If you’re lucky, you may get an escort from two generations of the Doffo family, all of which ride and race on a regular basis and will use any excuse to get on a bike – that includes 69-year-old Marcelo on his BMW R 1200 RT.

**Sunset Dinner On The Colina**

Perhaps one of the most delightful and rejuvenating reasons to come to the Temecula valley is the five course plated sunset dinner paired with Doffo’s best wine selections on a hilltop of the vineyard. The Argentinian inspired BBQ feast is presented by Damian’s wife Vanessa and the tablescape are handpicked from the vineyard and designed by Brigitte. Damian greets guests with glasses of sparkling Paulina wine while the rest of the family – Marcelo, Maria, Brigitte and Samantha – mingle and sit down with the crowd for wine pairings complimenting a dinner that includes a charcuterie grazing table, Morcilla crostini (Argentine blood sausage) and Molleja, delicate grilled sweetbreads that even the most fearful will love.

The main plates are tender grilled lamb chops with herb sauce and garlic mashed potatoes alongside roasted vegetables and grilled flank steak with roasted turnip and parsnip puree and an emulsion made from the family’s chimichurri recipe (jars are available for sale at the winery). Dessert is inspired by Maria’s Dulce de Leche obsession – a traditional sweet alfajor sandwich with flan and vanilla meringue. Golf cart rides are provided back to the Malbec estate from the hilltop.

While this event is seasonal, it’s included at a discounted price if you’re part of the Doffo wine club, but also available to the public. The winery is open seven days a week, check the calendar for upcoming events. Harvest season is just around the corner.
RISE UP, RISE ABOVE, ‘RISE AGAINST’

Political punks offer dark themes but a hopeful future

BY BRETT CALLWOOD

You can always count on Chicago political punks Rise Against to offer timely commentary. Their last album, 2017’s Wolves, came out six months into Trump’s term, with songs such as “House on Fire” and “Mourning in Amerika” giving us some much-needed perspective. What the band has always done, from their 2001 debut The Unraveling, is spell out the problems we face and then give hope. That’s what they’ve done yet again with new album Nowhere Generation.

“I think of Rise Against as a thing that will take you to a dark place, ask you to join us in this dark place, but we’re never gonna leave you there,” says frontman Tim McIlrath. “We won’t abandon you in the dark place. We’re gonna leave some breadcrumbs for you to get out. We’ll come back into the sunshine, and that’s when we’ll start talking and thinking about how we change things so we don’t end up living in that dark place. Darkness exists, and that despair will exist on a Rise Against record, but I feel like our songs should be like the arc of any good story. It should lead you to a place with a silver lining, lead you to a place where it’s not completely void of all hope. That’s part of the responsibility I feel as a songwriter but also how I feel as a person.”

McIlrath describes himself as an optimist, something which might surprise those familiar with his lyrics that deal with dystopian futures, and wretched political situations. Even the title of the new album appears nihilistic. There’s more to it than that.

“Nowhere Generation” is speaking to a generation of people who feel a little bit invisible, and lost in the years of society,” McIlrath says. “People who feel like they’re running a race but the finish line just keeps moving on them. It’s giving an ear to those voices, and trying to listen instead of dismissing the complaints of people who are trying to get ahead and swim upstream the whole time. I feel like this is a lot of what our fans were communicating to me, and not just here in America but all over the world. I realized that we have been living in a very tumultuous political climate for the last four years.”

For an American political punk band like Rise Against, the last four years have offered plenty of lyrical inspiration, low hanging fruit and easy targets. But McIlrath wanted to tackle the disease, rather than the symptoms. The bulk of the work for the new album was done in 2019 and it was intended for a pre-election release. The pandemic knocked those plans to the ground.

“It led to me way overthinking everything,” the frontman says. “I think I had a picture in my head of what this record would be, and when it would come out. When I realized it wasn’t coming out before the election, it was going to be a post-election record, I thought ‘wait, is that going to be a bad idea? Should we get this thing out?’ When that came and went, I realized that ‘no, we’re singing about things that are a little more timeless than just an election, a president or an administration. This record still very much makes sense.’

But then I went through the same thing with the pandemic and the lockdown, the rebirth of the Black Lives Matter movement and the riots around the world. I thought the same thing: so much has changed in the world, is this record even still relevant to what’s happening? Again, overthinking got the better of me because the more I listened to the songs, I was like, we were talking about issues that were bubbling just beneath the surface anyway.”

The latest single, and the opening track on the album, is “The Numbers.” The song works as a reminder that people are a vehicle for change. Power comes from below. “People really decide what happens,” he says. “Our leaders can be compelled to make changes if enough of us demand those changes. You certainly don’t need a Rise Against song to tell you that. We have a rich history of social movements that all started with one person or a group of people raising their hand saying, ‘I’m sick of this and want it to change.’ 100 years ago, women didn’t have the right to vote in this country. That was something that people fought for. So ‘The Numbers’ is just a reminder of that.”

“It’s a truth that McIlrath takes seriously, amplified by the fact that he’s the father of two teenage girls. As he’s forced to think hard about the day that they leave home, he also wonders what sort of world he’s sending them out into.

“It’s a lot more of a real thing now that my kids are a little older,” he says. “I want them to have the experiences that I had if they were good experiences. I want them to avoid bad experiences. The world seems a little bit like uncharted territory and so all those things were weighing on me when I was writing songs like ‘Nowhere Generation’ and an awful lot of the stuff that pops up on this record.”

But still, McIlrath is feeling hopeful. The band just announced a tour that starts at the end of July and, while he’s yet to figure out what those shows will look like, he’s happy that there is a light at the end of this damn tunnel.

“The world looked totally different just six weeks ago,” he says. “It could look totally different two months from now when we finally get on the road. But I’m feeling pretty good about it. It seems like things are trending in the right direction. Most people are taking the virus seriously, and people don’t want to go back into lockdown whether for health reasons or economic reasons. In our world we’re vaccinated against everything from tuberculosis to polio, and this is something else that we’ve figured out how to combat. All we need to do is figure out how to make sure everybody is on board. Then we can look at brighter future.”

Amen. Rise Against’s Nowhere Generation album is available from June 4. They play the FivePoint Amphitheater in Irvine on August 21.
The Friends Reunion Took Fawning Too Far; Cruella is a Devilish, Fashion-Filled Delight; Halston Turns Icon
Designer into Couture Caricature; and Cruel Summer is a Hot Girl Whodunit

BY LINA LECARO

The Friends Reunion / HBO Max
For a show that was always very clear about who it was and what it was about, The Friends Reunion (which premiered last night on HBO Max) was pretty all over the place. There was the candid walk-thru by cast members on the old set, a sit-down live talk show thing with host James Corden, clips of fans from around the world talking about the show’s impact, famous people (Lady Gaga and Justin Bieber!) and co-star reflections, a game night memory test with the guys against the girls, a table read-thru of a couple old episodes, and even a fashion show. It was weird and fun but some segments definitely worked better than others.

Friends ended 17 years ago and ran for 10 years (making it 27 years old). I’m the same age as most of the cast are now, and I watched it every week with my own roommates at the time, so it was relatable to some degree. As creator Marta Kauffman shares in the special, the comedy aimed to capture young adulthood and that time in your life when your friends were your family. Did it reflect me and my crew? Not really. It was in New York and the gang could actually afford apartments in Manhattan without having to turn the living room into another bedroom. Everyone was white, straight, cute and reasonably well-adjusted/problem-free. Okay, Phoebe was a wackjob, Monica had OCD, Ross had ADD and probably depression, Rachel was a narcissist, Joey was a fuckboy and Chandler was a dick – but they were lovable at the same time (and they clearly loved each other) and that made all the difference. Just like it does in real life.

The reunion plopped on the praise to an almost embarrassing level and I’m sure I’m not alone in admitting that it made me wonder if the show really deserved it. Was it I Love Lucy, Cheers, Seinfeld great? Never thought so. Unlike some of the celeb fans on the show who shared that they regularly watch syndicated repeats, I never have. I won’t change the channel if the other aforementioned three shows are on, but Friends never felt classic in the same way, it actually felt really dated.

Still, the table read-thru of the Ross and Rachel first kiss episode and the ugly naked guy episode, plus the dissection of the couch “pivot” episode (which had me cackling, again) confirmed that yes, these actors – Courteney Cox, Jennifer Aniston, Lisa Kudrow, Matt LeBlanc, Matthew Perry and David Schwimmer – were and still are damn good, and that the writing was clever, sexy and indeed, timeless-funny most of the time. Everything on Friends just clicked and guest star Reese Witherspoon says, “each character is so distinct that they could hold a television show all by themselves.” In this way it is a lot like Cheers and Seinfeld, a potent ensemble with edge (re-watching a few episodes last night after the special, I realized just how adult the humor could be, especially for ’90s network television).

Last night’s love-fest glossed over a lot, though. The lack of diversity, Monica’s problematic fat suit, and Matthew Perry’s past – hopefully not present – drug problems (social media has been abuzz with speculation after he slurred a bit in the teaser last week, he seemed fine on the special, if a little low-energy.)

The reunion’s everything-and-Monica’s-kitchen-sink adulation was made for Friends super-duper fans/stans, but it’s hard to believe that anyone (especially David Beckham, who kisses major arse here) is still this passionate about the show today. There’s simply too much good stuff out there to give time to; stuff that’s fresher, wittier and cooler. A show about privileged NYC quasi-hipsters from the ’90s can still be funny, but social media and streaming TV have changed things, even if the ’90s can still be funny, but social media and streaming TV have changed things, even if the ’90s can still be funny, but social media and streaming TV have changed things, even if the ’90s can still be funny, but social media and streaming TV have changed things, even if the ’90s can still be funny, but social media and streaming TV have changed things, even if the ’90s can still be funny, but social media and streaming TV have changed things, even if the ’90s can still be funny, but social media and streaming TV have changed things, even if the ’90s can still be funny, but social media and streaming TV have changed things, even if the ’90s can still be funny, but social media and streaming TV have changed things, even if the ’90s can still be funny, but social media and streaming TV have changed things, even if the ’90s can still be funny, but social media and streaming TV have changed things, even if the ’90s can still be funny, but social media and streaming TV have changed things, even if the ’90s can still be funny, but social media and streaming TV have changed things, even if the ’90s can still be funny, but social media and streaming TV have changed things, even if the ’90s can still be funny, but social media and streaming TV have changed things, even if the ’90s can still be funny, but social media and streaming TV have changed things, even if the ’90s can still be funny, but social media and streaming TV have changed things, even if the ’90s can still be funny.

Cruella / Disney
It’s hard to pinpoint when exactly Disney’s villains became more interesting than their princesses, but somewhere along the way the company’s marketing geniuses figured out that ominous figures driven by revenge could be just as aspirational – at least in a figurative sense – as beautiful ones driven by love. With some contemporary exceptions, the goal for female characters in the Disney universe has always been about snaring Prince Charming (or Prince whichever) and living happily ever after. Its animal driven animated films are another story, but even those tend to idealize innocence and oversimplify evil, creating a black and white narrative that never went too deep into motivations and never had to consider the target audiences were children.

Which makes Cruella, the latest live action take on a classic character angled at the dark comedy/goth crowd, so refreshing. The backstory here is bodacious but it has actual depth and a twist you might not see coming, with complex characters that you’ll enjoy in spite of their flaws. There’s no romance here whatsoever, and yet, there are moments when Cruella (Emma Stone, in one of her most charismatic portrayals ever) pulls at your heart strings. It’s to the actress’s credit that she does so as the sinister two-tone tressed Cruella De Vil, but equally so as her mean and awkward alter-ego Estella.

In 101 Dalmations (the cartoon and the live action film from 1996 starring Glenn Close) we didn’t know a lot about Cruella other than the fact that she wanted to kill puppies to make a fabulous fur coat. I, Tonya director Craig Gillespie and writers Dana Fox and Tony McNamara clearly strove to humanize what’s essentially been one of the most villainous Disney villains in history. But even if they hadn’t, there’s enough eye candy stylizing and raucous rivalry on screen to delight regardless.

Set in ’70s London, Cruella unravels the childhood of Estella, a girl with strange hair and lots of moxie. When she sees her mother die after falling off a balcony at a fancy gala, she decodes her death and takes to the streets, hooking up with two mischievous thieves and becoming roommates. Estella’s dream was always to be a fashion designer and when she gets a job at Liberty of London as a cleaning person, it ultimately leads her to a gig with Baroness von Hellman (Emma Thompson), a legendary designer who’s been in a slump and seeks the kind of energy and youthful hopeful displays when she goes rogue on a Liberty window display.

The Baroness is narcissistic, abrupt and ice-cold. Her dynamic with Estella is a shameless reference to Meryl Streep in The Devil Wears Prada (and there are in fact, a few fierce Prada-like moments in this film) but while both characters (actresses) autark it rings right because women have to act that way to get ahead. Well they don’t actually, but as we saw in Malificent and its sequel, Disney always seems to need another villain to make its reconsidered protagonist less distasteful by comparison.

Thompson is effortless as The Baroness and though her cruelty is cartoonishly over the top, it matches what ensues – a riotous back and forth romp filled with heists, grand events and distastefulby comparison.

To this end, the Cruella soundtrack is pretty incredible too; we’re talking The Stooges, The Smells, The Doors and two like & Tina Turner covers (“Whole Lotta Love” and “Come Together”), all of which informs both the narrative and the movie’s splashy montages in a way that’s on the nose and music video-like, but maintains a wicked edge and sensibility, especially for a Disney vehicle. This duality is in fact the essence of the film, which aims to give its anti-heroine a relatable rationale for her provocations while still keeping her de-vil-ish. With fiendish performances and striking production, they more than succeed.

Halston / Netflix
Ewan McGregor revisits the flamboyant glitz and gaudy attitude he displayed as the villain in Birds of Prey, the last Harley Quinn movie, for this un-likeable but nonetheless captivating take on Roy Halston, the American designer who basically defined chic in the ’70s. Seriously, watch that movie before this, and tell us it’s not the same guy!

In this new biopic series Halston is pretentious, at times nasty and impulsive to the point of seeming adolescent, but he had the talent and ambition to make up for it all. This Netflix series – executive produced and co-written by Ryan Murphy – is so dazzling and unflinching in its portrayal of a flawed but utterly fabulous figure, that you can forgive its faults as well. Murphy often walks the line between substantive character study and cartoon-like portrait, especially when it comes to queer characters, and this series is no exception.

But the fashion, backdrops and real life story here suck you in completely. We bingeed all five episodes in one long night and felt like were on a “contact high” watching the cocaine-fueled exploits of the designer and his friends including Liza Minnelli (Krista Rodriguez) and Elsa Peretti (Rebecca Dayan).

Director Daniel Minahan has a great eye, capturing the glamour of New York and Studio 54 (which we’ve all seen depicted hundreds of times by now) in a fresh yet gritty way. The series manages to be an aspirational escapist treat and a tragic cautionary tale at the same time, and the kind of young hope-and-dreams story it is, Halston may have sold his soul to JC Penney (and his name is slapped on any number of subpar products to this day), but as this series reminds us, personal brands are more fluid than any one product or label, and time has a way of leveling out a legacy. Halston’s style-legacy, ultimately resonated more than his misses. This Netflix project (and a few docs out there) wouldn’t exist otherwise.

Cruel Summer / Hulu
This Jessica Biel-produced teen drama obviously aims to toy with the viewer, weaving in and out of 1993, 1994 and 1995, during which times, main character Jeanette Turner (Chiiara Aurelia) goes from nerdy 15-year-old to blossoming 16-year-old to outcast 17-year-old.

Things go south after popular girl Kate Wallis’ (Olivia Holt) is abducted by the local school’s vice principal and Kate accuses Jeanette of knowing about the whole thing. She certainly has motive, as she almost completely takes the golden girl’s place when she’s gone, dating Kate’s boyfriend Jamie (Froy Gutierrez) and hanging with her girlfriends. Jeanette denies it all and says it’s just jealousy; but she did have a key to the abductor’s house, so... who’s telling the truth?

Each episode thus far has revealed another piece of the puzzle, and the series is clearly designed to make the viewer switch back and forth in surmising guilt. We honestly aren’t sure who we believe yet, but thanks to solid acting by the young leads, careful character development and mostly, the period soundtrack, we’re invested enough to watch it unravel each week. Hopefully, the truth will be revealed by Summer. I’d be cruel if it wasn’t.
BIDEN RAMPS UP ENFORCEMENT AS DRUG WAR TURNS 50

A couple of weeks ahead of the 50th Anniversary of the War on Drugs starting, Joe Biden’s Department of Justice is picking up enforcement.

BY JIMI DEVINE

A s the 50 anniversary of the War on Drugs approaches later this month, Joe Biden’s Department of Justice has announced it will be revamping its efforts to reduce violent crime.

Attorney General Merrick B. Garland revealed the new DOJ plans last week. The whole thing is said to be meant to protect communities from the recent increase in major violent crimes.

“The Deputy Attorney General is issuing a comprehensive strategy to deploy our federal resources in the most effective way, disrupting the most dangerous threats and supporting the ground-level efforts of local law enforcement. In this endeavor, we will engage our communities as critical partners,” Garland noted. “And through our grant-making, we will support programming at all stages – from the earliest violence interruption strategies to post-conviction reentry services.”

This all sounds well and good. But it quickly seemed like it may just be another extension of the War on Drugs framed as an effort against violent crime.

“Violent crime is irrefutably linked to the transnational criminal organizations flooding our communities with illicit drugs,” said Drug Enforcement Administration Acting Administrator D. Christopher Evans. “Leveraging our strong partnerships with state, local, and Tribal law enforcement, DEA will concentrate our efforts on the most serious offenders in areas with the highest crime rates.”

For those under the impression the DEA was already targeting its resources at the most violent offenders, just look at the decades helicopters spent circling the hills of Northern California in search of cannabis, eventually much of it a state-legal medical crop. So at least part of what we were being told last week was we’ll go after the real bad guys.

But is that the case? Over the last 50 years, how many nonviolent offenders of color have found their way to a jail cell for every real kingpin taken off the street. And always, someone stepped in to fill the voids left by major enforcement actions over the years. Regardless of the feds’ tactics, the black market carried on. The borders were just closed for a year and nobody ran out of drugs.

While transnational drug organizations were put in the crosshairs again by the DEA, the wider plan suggests building trust and legitimacy in the community as the first step. In the age of militarized drug raids and smartphones putting the worst police interactions on blast, it could prove tricky. But the DOJ believes meaningful law enforcement engagement with the community and accountability are key. One might argue accountability in itself is a meaningful engagement with the community by providing justice for wrongs they may have or will face.

The DOJ noted some of the programs under the plan will include FBI analytics being provided to investigations at the local level, ATF agents embedding with local homicide units and The United States Marshals Service, in coordination with state and local authorities, conducting fugitive sweeps throughout the country with a focus on warrants for homicide, aggravated assault with a firearm, aggravated robbery, robbery with a firearm, rape or aggravated sexual assault. And we want to emphasize we’re not hat- ing on the grants and prevention programming planned in all this, which should be a constant conversation unattached to this response action.

But again, for all the bad guys out there, there are concerns the low-hanging fruit will end up filling the basket. They’ll likely end up being street dealers created by the prohibition of drugs who are not willing to flip the on the next guy in the chain. Much of the time participants in the victimless crime of supply and demand, but certainly not always. Some will flip, but many will be a nonviolent offender who wasn’t actually a threat to society ending up in a cage. Nevertheless, they’ll contribute to the eventual “dangerous people off the streets” number we’ll see from this wave of enforcement.

Maritza Perez, Director of the Office of National Affairs at the Drug Policy Alliance, explained how the drug war has been waged in the name of preventing violent crime numerous times.

“Associating ‘violence’ with drugs is the oldest scare tactic in the drug war’s playbook. This goes back to the same racist tropes used to vilize Chinese immigrants for their opium use in the late 1800’s, Mexican immigrants for using marijuana after the Mexican Revolution, and Black people for heroin and crack-cocaine in the present iteration of the drug war that has been going on for the last 50 years,” Perez told L.A. Weekly, “And the reality is—each and every time—we have not seen our communities get any safer. In fact, it’s been very much the opposite, with Black, Latinx and Indigenous communities completely devastated as a result. This administration doubling down on these same enforcement-first approaches, under the guise of fighting ‘violent crime’ is unconscionable.”

The War on Drugs turns 50 on June 18th.
There’s no shortage of conversations both on and off Clubhouse about NFTs and cryptoart. But the most urgent, and the most interesting, are not the conversations about money. Rather, they are the ones around professional and creative freedom, access and inclusion. The cryptoverse is a promised utopia, an antidote to the ivory tower, market-driven art world with its well-documented preference for work made by white men. Cryptoart is meant to be a setting where every viewer/collector is on a level playing field regardless of fluency in artspeak, and every artist is properly rewarded for their talents. So far though, it hasn’t fully turned out that way.

The NFT boom has indeed elevated the practices of artists who have been working in the digital, internet and blockchain spaces for years. There is no doubt that an ocean of pluralistic voices, in terms of medium at least, have entered the chat. Also, some artists have been able to succeed financially, even wildly so, outside the gallery realm; most have not. There have also been concerning trends replicating the racial and gender biases endemic in the traditional art world and importing them into this new space. This risks repeating mistakes of the past, the kind with which the traditional art world is currently reckoning.

The good news that a number of women, non-binary and racially diverse artists are currently raising their voices and lifting up ideas in a move to protect a truly international and inclusive community.

This summer’s L.A. Art Show will feature a curated section of women NFT artists, and the show’s overall theme is Women in Technology. On Clubhouse alone you will find dozens of thoughtful and high-spirited rooms, forums and talks across...
clubs like Women's NFT Art Coven, NFT Women, NFT Asian Women, Femme NFTs, CryptoVixens, Crypto Basel, and The Art Club. Similar groups exist to address issues of race in this space as well; there's a lot to be learned in rooms like Black NFT Art, AfricanNFTCommunity, BLK NFT Network, Black BitClout, and Crypto Noir.

One of the most high-profile practitioners in this dimension has been Lady PheOnix, a peripatetic curator and producer across cultural spaces from Crypto Fashion Week to Crypto Sports Week and Crypto Basel. She and her collaborators at Universe Contemporary are always looking for the progressive edge of the art and technology conversation. She's the curator of the current show and sale at Christie's, Proof of Sovereignty; her team has created a special IRL and AR hybrid environment debuting at Tribeca Film Festival Immersive, working with designers, coders, artists and the family of Breonna Taylor to build the joyful Breonna's Garden memorial project; and she's working on a Women in NFTs Conference in L.A. and on Clubhouse for around July 1.

The Weekly caught up with Lady Phe in L.A. to talk about how ideas of freedom and community can be embedded into the fabric of this new galaxy within the cryptoverse, how the projects happening this month all fit into that scheme of equity, and what it was like creating the Christie's show. "Proof of Sovereignty was Christie's first curated foray into the NFT space, and among other things, the artists keep 100% of the hammer price," she says, which is all but unheard of. So, does she think that's a long-term investment in the NFT market on the part of Christie's? Some kind of trust-building exercise with the community? Or is it just them learning some of the (many) ways that working with living artists in the primary market is
different from what they usually do? “They were founded in 1766, remember, so they might be slow to change,” she says. “But there are some there who are eager for that change. We are all learning together right now, across multiple generations and different understandings of what art means, of what it even is,” she says of the experience. “Anyway, it’s an exciting show!”

Proof of Sovereignty features artists like IX Shells, Kesh, Josie Bellini, Tamiko Thiel, Auriea Harvey and Coin Artist leading the charge along with familiar names like Jenny Holzer, Nam June Paik, Guy Marshall, Urs Fischer and the House of Gucci. Its diversity of age, race, and gender is embodied and manifested, and the works themselves cohere around an aesthetic and narrative taste for the wondrous, the gorgeous, the surreal and the sublime. But it’s also an enacted format, as the title implies, of empowerment for the artists. “This is the first of many,” she says, “and everyone will be richly blessed by reciprocity.”

“Breonna’s Garden is the most fulfilling in some ways,” says Lady Phe. Described as “a framework for veneration,” the project uses augmented reality to create a lush and spiritual space, a living garden in bloom, replete with the music and butterflies Breonna loved. The project started when Lady Phe connected with Ju’Niyah Palmer, Breonna’s sister, at first just thinking about a web-based site, a place for an uplifting tribute to Breonna expressed in beauty and joy. Soon they were collaborating with Creative Director and renowned new media artist Sutu (of the EyJack app) because the role of technology in this in both the experience and in access to it is so essential. Premiering this month in New York at Tribeca Film Festival Immersive, the AR experience will soon be available to everyone everywhere.

The planned Women in NFTs conference is also a hybrid event, happening both on CH and in Los Angeles, for several days right around July 1st. Acclaimed curator and activist Mashonda Tifrere from ArtLeadHER is opening a physical gallery on Sunset on that date, and while the summit’s first week will be on CH, the rest will be at the space. Lady Phe believes that idea shares like this are essential moving forward. “It’s about consciously designing the world, doing it once, doing it right the first time, and learning from our mistakes so we won’t have to repeat them and fix it later. Even writer Jerry Saltz can see the problem, recently remarking in a talk that, “Right now it’s an unfortunately male world, with some really strange behavior. Otherwise, it’s a tremendous open
beautiful world.”

Nancy Baker Cahill is a renowned artist working in the AR/VR/XR/NFT space who is also well-grounded in traditional physical mediums and site-specificity -- and equally suspicious of the dominance of the tech-bro dynamic in the present conversation. She produces works “located” or otherwise meaningfully tethered to geographical locations, as well as portable deployable works that live in the shared immersive space of your phone -- such as via her platform, 4thWallApp. Her most recent project Contract Killers deftly weaves all these threads together in a single series -- one whose story, technology, imagery, actions, locations, social histories, physical objects, and even the smart contracts and blockchain itself are all part of the gestalt. As it interrogates the infrastructure of self-determinism, the end goal is equity.

“The rule of capitalism is that you have to prove you can make money so you can get the microphone so you can start to truly subvert effectively. Right now that's the only path, but we can still choose to protect the vulnerable,” says Cahill. Contract Killers exists not only as a template for how to mint work independent of large, increasingly corporitized publishing platforms, one enabling the artist to exert more control over the carbon imprint of their work and the currency. The piece is also a conceptual emblem decrying all manner of broken social contracts. “What is the promise of the blockchain when there are no consequences for breaking contracts? We are used to stiffing artists, and we all want that to stop, but how do DAO and accountability interact, beyond the honor system?”

Cahill uses the currency Tezos because of its drastically reduced carbon footprint, and for her that’s about accountability. By insisting on it for all her transactions, the platforms are forced to accommodate her and, as she says, “that’s how you change things.” Like Bob Dylan demanding his royalties, in standing up for oneself, one can change the paradigm for everyone. “I have a critical engagement with the tools of technology,” Cahill says. “But I believe in the potential of this unexplored territory. The promise has so far failed to be enacted, however, and ultimately, partaking in a broken system isn’t the point. We require a true dismantling. What does the art world need more than real change?”

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