

SUPERCHAIN



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A Bloc Chain For Culture

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Abstract

The act of creation is inherently sacred. Our earliest cultural creations reflected this. Technological development has shredded art and culture into a meaningless feed, but we can do better. We propose a new artistic medium, the "Bloc"; and a new method for storage and preservation using a "chain". By doing so, we create incentives for positivity and purpose in cultural expression. Together, Superchain is a collection of art and culture created to last forever.

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I

Art In The Age Of Information

Creation is inherently sacred.

Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof.

Proverbs 18:21

Every word is an act of creation. The work of art originated in the world of worship. The work of art originates from the eternal. Oral cultures worshipped the eternal by repeating the spoken word. With reading and writing came textual culture, and the eternal Word was codified.

Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.

Matthew 24:35

At the same time, the advent of the image tore man from direct experience of his surroundings and introduced the experience of *mediation*. Those things experienced or perceived in the world and the divine could now be represented and referenced even when they were not present.

At its inception, the visual image was nonetheless *scarce*, and thus the sacred nature of creation was preserved. With limited space for display and artistic creators, there was a natural incentive for those things expressed and represented to be of divine importance. Thus early visual art retained a

significant “cult value”; representing the sacred, and displayed in contexts where the sacred was to be venerated.

Early human creative expression was decisively shaped by the difficulty of its creation, reproduction, and dissemination. With limited bandwidth for transmitting information, and high cost of reproduction, our early cultures focused on creating symbols of those things of utmost importance: truth, beauty, divine awe, and the aspirational values of life lived as it should be.

Technology is continuously introducing efficiencies in the creation, reproduction, and dissemination of information. As it does so, it has a “shredding” effect, tearing down the *grand oeuvre* and grinding it into pieces. The Holy Book is replaced by novels, then by newspapers and blog posts, then by tweets. The LP is replaced by the EP, then digital singles, then 7-second loops. To make consumption more efficient, and thus profitable, all content is shredded by technology into easily digestible chunks. And with these pieces, we can construct a “feed”.

We move from deliberate creation to ad hoc creation; and from measured, deliberate consumption to excessive, mindless consumption. As the work of art moves further away from its original in the eternal, it becomes *desacralized*. We also see the quality of works suffer for a lack of purpose: when a work is just one item in a feed, quick to pass away, what incentive is there to produce something deliberate of high quality? The algorithm selects for what will engage you just for a moment, and so selects against what may engage you for life.

It is no surprise that the “world of art” has been slow to embrace the internet. Fine art simply cannot compete in the internet’s informational landscape. Everything technology

touches is subject to shredding: text goes from books to tweets, and music from albums to viral loops. So what of art, as a product of focused, deliberate creative expression? It will get shredded too; and we have seen this happen already, with the meme.

Defined most simply, a meme is a “unit of culture”: so art as complex, deliberate cultural creation gets shredded down to its most basic unit. The meme is created, reproduced, and distributed ad hoc; it is ultimately meaningless; it is low-effort, low-quality, and created in the knowledge that its quick death is near-certain. It is designed for an instant reaction and nothing more. This process of “*meme-ification*” can be observed in any mode of expression that has touched the internet.

As we drown in ever-growing waves of information, it becomes impossible to craft a cultural narrative or produce great works of culture.

Electric circuitry profoundly involves men with one another. Information pours upon us, instantaneously and continuously. As soon as information is acquired, it is very rapidly replaced by still newer information. Our electrically-configured world has forced us to move from the habit of data classification to the mode of pattern recognition. We can no longer build serially, block-by-block, step-by-step, because instant communication insures that all factors of the environment and of experience coexist in a state of active interplay.

Marshall McLuhan,
“The Medium Is The Message”

Counter to the prevailing technological force of the internet exists another force: the increasing adoption of blockchain technology. Here we see rather different incentives: creation

and transmission are costly, not free; and reproduction is strictly controlled. Recently, we have seen developments in “blockchain art” as creators and collectors are keen on blockchain enabling verification of provenance and ownership. However, blockchains introduce technological realities which are far more interesting: verification of time, costliness, immutability, and permanence. These reverse the incentives and forces we have traditionally seen with technology, and create an opportunity to reintroduce great works of culture. Despite the pressures of instant communication, we can once again *“build serially, block-by-block, step-by-step”*.

To nourish this seedling and create an environment for great art, we must understand the effect of the medium on the message. A misinformed application of blockchain technology to art will simply create a trade in memes. Art will be commodified, reduced to “token” collectibles, answerable and aspiring only to the market and the moment.

We have the chance to once again create eternal works. To do so, we must have a medium capable of hosting them.

II The Medium

A medium for art must be unlimited, to allow for creation to be expressed in the fullest. At the same time, we must accept some limitation: as with the edges of a canvas.

The building block of all digital creation is the *file*. Practically all digital creation can be stored, in some form, as a file. So we will allow for *all* file types, to allow for the widest range of expression.

A complex composition can involve many elements, such as combinations of images, text, and video. To allow for complex composition, we must allow for *many* files.

So the most permissive, and thus expressive, medium for digital art to be created and stored is in its original format, the file. As cultural works created digitally can have many files, we will store them in a folder. With some simple instructions included as to ordering, composition, and provenance, we have a maximally enabling medium for digital art to be created.

The folder contains the raw content and all the information necessary to construct the composition. We call this the “Bloc”.

III

The Bloc

A folder with practically unlimited files provides a practically unlimited digital medium for creativity. To order the elements of the composition, and turn it into an artwork - a defined, carefully constructed unit of culture - we turn it into a Bloc.

The concept of the Bloc borrows from features of a block in a blockchain to create a work that is unique, immutable, and permanently stored.

One new Bloc is created every day. This process began on January 1, 2019. Every Bloc is sequentially numbered and given a title. 喜1, “The Genesis Bloc”, was created on January 1, 2019, and every Bloc since has been numbered in sequence.

The Bloc file contains the contents of the cultural creation, as well as structural instructions on how the contents should be ordered. Also included are the Bloc number, the date, the artist(s) involved, and a hash of every previous Bloc file. Through this hashing mechanism, the Blocs are chained together.

IV

The Superchain

Because every Bloc file verifies the contents of every previous Bloc file, the contents of previous Blocs can never be changed. So every Bloc is its own work of art, but also a part of a grand digital tapestry - a collection of art and culture created to last forever.

Because only one new Bloc can be added each day, every work has room to breathe. It can be appreciated in its own time, and always found at the same location: its number on the Superchain, or its date on the timeline. As such, works can also make reference to their number (e.g. 喜69, 喜888), their date (喜853), or both (喜420).

Bloc files and hashfiles are signed using the Superchain PGP key:

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-----END PGP PUBLIC KEY BLOCK-----

V

The Motivation

Superchain is the result of over three years' work in art and cryptography, recognizing the potential of blockchain thinking to revolutionize culture. Input has come from hundreds of artists, collectors, and other creators the world over. If “money makes the world go round”, and crypto has overturned the tables of the money changers, then there is opportunity for cultural change. With new chances to create things that last forever, we can once again represent the richness of life, and of contemplating the eternal, in works that are equally rich.

For the artist, the Superchain allows for the creation and preservation of deep, deliberate cultural works. These works are presented in their own context, free of distraction, and permanently available in the same place to be accessible to all.

For the collector, the Superchain offers security: that a work will always be available, that it will not change after purchase, and that it will be stable in value. As only one Bloc is added to the chain each day, there is no risk of supply inflation to put downward pressure on price. Every Bloc is a scarce and valuable piece of the larger chain, as well as a work of art in itself.

VI

The Structure

To truly last forever, a structure must be simple, flexible, and robust. This is especially so digitally.

Thinking in the extreme long term, we must be sensitive to tail risks: things with a small possibility of happening, but with disastrous consequences if they do happen. A significant tail risk in designing cryptographic art is blockchain risk: the risk that a blockchain stops functioning completely. If we observe two periods of euphoric highs in the crypto markets, 2017 and 2021, we see that the most popular blockchains changed drastically in the interim. No blockchain has existed for even 15 years, and thus we cannot consider them reliable platforms on which to build works intended to last for decades. While this technology is immature, we can nevertheless take advantage of those features which are culturally beneficial, while leaving those we do not need.

To this end, Superchain is designed as a blockchain “free agent”, able to be stored and accessed in multiple ways, and to switch between dominant public blockchains as they come and go.

The Superchain digital signature provides the verification of the contents of each Bloc. The structure of the Bloc and the information contained verify the artwork, the artist(s), the title, the number, the date, and every previous Bloc. By doing so, we have achieved immutability outside of a public blockchain.

Because Blocs are *files*, they can be stored anywhere. At the time of writing, each Bloc is uploaded to IPFS. Because every

Bloc contains the hash value of every previous Bloc file, the chain remains intact even if a file is deleted or a whole file storage server/blockchain becomes inaccessible. Blockchain storage is currently costly, and this allows us to create works without file size limits with storage anywhere. As blockchain storage capacity increases, Blocs could be moved onto public blockchains to enhance immutability. As designed, however, Superchain maintains the permanent storage of every creation even without a public blockchain.

The design of the medium achieves immutability and permanent storage outside of a public blockchain, to avoid blockchain risk. Even if there is a global internet outage, new Blocs could still be produced. The design of the medium also achieves simplicity, each file containing digital content in its simplest form, arranged basically, and created to be human- as well as machine-readable. Allowing for any file type also allows for maximum flexibility as digital creation tools continue to develop.

We remove the art and cultural work itself from the limitations and risks of public blockchains. It exists outside, and thus can genuinely be said to be created to last forever. Doing so, we leave the least risky, and most adaptable, function to public blockchains: ownership and exchange. An ownership token is created for every Bloc; at the time of writing, on the Ethereum blockchain. Ownership will hold no matter how the Superchain is represented on blockchain, but as the technology matures the expression of ownership and what it enables can be expanded.

Ownership of a Bloc can also be linked to other benefits, such as higher-resolution files or physical representations. Advice to buyers: do not sell.

Because the Superchain can be found in many places, the numbering system allows for a work to be found no matter how the viewer is engaging. The Superchain logo, “喜”, is appended before every number, so the first Bloc is 喜I and this whitepaper is 喜887. This creates a unique serial number for every Bloc that can be searched for online, on a public blockchain, or wherever else the chain is hosted.

Blocs are created at extremely high fidelity. Current infrastructure is unsuited to displaying works at full quality, so downloading a Bloc is the best way to view files in highest resolution. Nevertheless, every Superchain Bloc is displayed online at the Superchain website, along with information on ownership/purchase:

supercha.in

Any Bloc can be found at its number by URL
superchain.art/(number) e.g.

superchain.art/888 > 喜888.

The Bloc number can also be turned into a URL, useful where a Bloc reference is found somewhere without hotlinking. To do so insert “.co/” after the 喜 symbol. For example:

喜404 > 喜.co/404

VII

The Culture

The Superchain logo “喜” is a symbol of its cultural ethos:

- The character 喜 means joy, happiness, and rejoicing in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean; representing positivity and purpose over negativity and nihilism.
- The character resembles a human being as a stick figure, with a crown or plus symbol above its head; representing humanity as creators.
- The character resembles the “GodSelf Icon”, found across the world in the works of ancient cultures; representing the divine and universal.
- The lower part of the symbol resembles an “8”, or infinity; representing the eternal.

We extend things by making them positive-sum. Thus loving relationships are lasting, trusting friendships are lasting, and profitable business partnerships are lasting. To create art and culture that is lasting, it must be positive and purposeful. What kind of heritage will we pass to future generations? When creating on an eternal timeframe, positivity and purpose become a duty.

Thus works on Superchain are selected for positivity, purpose, and contemplation of eternal themes: truth, beauty, and the infinite.

*Get in the zone of positivity, not negativity
‘Cause we got to strive for longevity*
Q-Tip

As technology shreds cultural expression elsewhere, algorithmic feeds of content will increasingly be filled with algorithmically *generated* content. Indeed, early experiments in crypto art have tended to be algorithmic. We contend that to truly express and grapple with eternal themes, art must be *human*, and have soul. To this end, every Superchain Bloc is to be created by a human being, and this is also represented in the logo.

On Superchain, humanity can express itself fully within the machine, yet distinct from the machine; because only humanity can truly reflect the sacred nature of creation. By re-sacralizing the work of art, we enable it to once again be worthy of the eternal.

All that is not eternal is eternally out of date.

C.S. Lewis

VIII

The Beginning / The End

Technology - and the internet in particular - have been disastrous for art and culture. But a new age is dawning - one where all that can be changed, where works can once again be made to last forever, and where we can incentivize culture for positivity and purpose.

To achieve this will require right thought, right action, and belief.

What does it mean to be a Forever Creator?

