

Studio Beisel
St. Beisel

Curated by Dr. Nadia Ismail
Duration: 22.10.2021–9.1.2022



Fig.: Studio Beisel, Untitled (NFT), 2021 © Studio Beisel

Crypto art, NFTs and *St. Beisel*

NFT – Non Fungible Tokenⁱ – is a digital file that exists exclusively in virtual space. The token is unique as a fixed and defined form. The NFT is secured by a so-called blockchain – a kind of collectively visible "ledger" [Kolja Reichert 2021, p. 10]. The data chains these contain are forgery-proof, and permanently and inalterably document a digital product as well as its history of ownership (provenance). The digital file as a unique item, and its security of sale that is guaranteed by the blockchain make NFTs attractive for a wide variety of sectors, whether in the music, film or gaming industry, sports or the visual arts.

Thus, with the help of blockchain technology, artists are able to upload their digital works quickly and securely to online platforms, make them visible to a wide audience and sell them. The kind of art is extremely diverse. NFTs can be individual images as well as videos, animations, collages or purely auditory. Owing to their unique data chains, these works of art are the equivalent of a signed original. At the same time, the NFT can be distinguished from identical copies as a unique digital entity due to the described data chain. They can be purchased via online platforms such as OpenSea and Nifty Gateway, in most cases by using cryptocurrencies.

Kevin McCoy's *Quantum (#1)* is now considered to be the first NFT. The digital artwork was presented by McCoy in 2014 at a conference held by *Rhizome*, a magazine for digital culture, and was auctioned off at Sotheby's last June for 1.4 million US dollars. Sales figures in the millions are no longer uncommon. Christie's auction house recently sold the NFT collage *Everydays: The First 5000 Days* by the artist Beeple for the equivalent of more than 58 million euros.

Existential questions

The artist duo Studio Beisel adds an 'existential' dimension to the global hype surrounding digital artworks with their first institutional solo exhibition *St. Beisel* at Kunsthalle Giessen. Guided by a pilgrim passport, visitors are not only accompanied on a journey from this world to the world beyond, but are also guided into the arena of crypto-culture. In their walk-in installation, Studio Beisel combines the physical space with the digital: while traversing the installation, visitors are invited to leave behind visual or acoustic traces, from which Laurenz Raschke and Kajetan Skurski generate NFTs. They will be sold to the highest bidders during a fair at the finissage on 9 January 2022. The artists transfer reflections on life after death and the human desire to leave traces of one's own existence, into the virtual present with a humorous twist. The visitors' NFTs become a form of digital immortality that can also be purchased. This enables the buyers to secure their own obituary in virtual space. The NFT fair and the spiritual service converge – and raise questions, not least regarding their ecological, social and ideological functions.

At the same time, the NFT auction, titled as a fair, can be understood as an ironic dig at the hype surrounding the new digital art genre. The future potential of NFTs does not go undisputed: advocates refer to the democratising potential and the utopian notion of being able to establish a new art sphere and genre through NFTs, which – detached from traditional evaluation criteria and institutional gatekeepers – can be collectively co-determined.

Opponents, on the other hand, emphasise the immense amount of energy required to generate the data chains, the lack of any evaluation standards and the associated risk of bad investments as well as a fast-growing monopoly.

Studio Beisel incorporates the global phenomenon of NFTs, their promises and risks, into *St. Beisel* and thus poses long-term questions about artistic quality and economic benefits for art and society anew.

A selection of these unique digital artworks made by Studio Beisel will be available for purchase at the NFT fair during the exhibition's finissage on 9 January 2022 at Kunsthalle Gießen. During the exhibition, the artists' website studiobeisel.com will be transformed into a virtual showroom where curious visitors as well as potential buyers can familiarise themselves with the work prior to the auction.

ⁱ Here, a token refers to a unit of information, a data set consisting of several individual data points, which is defined and accepted in terms of its structure.

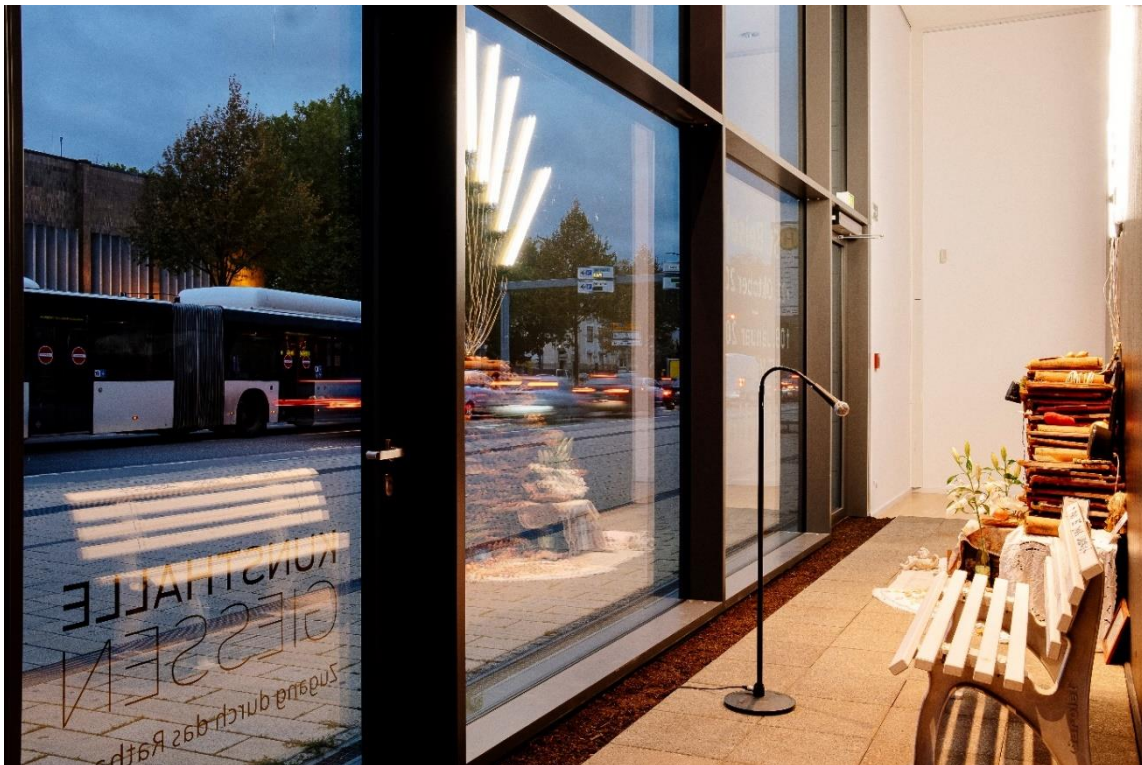


Fig.: Studio Beisel, *St. Beisel*, 2021 © Michél Kekulé