

# *tickle*



#79

Kenny Schachter, Patrick Tresset,  
Chris Follows, Encapsuled, Aebrer



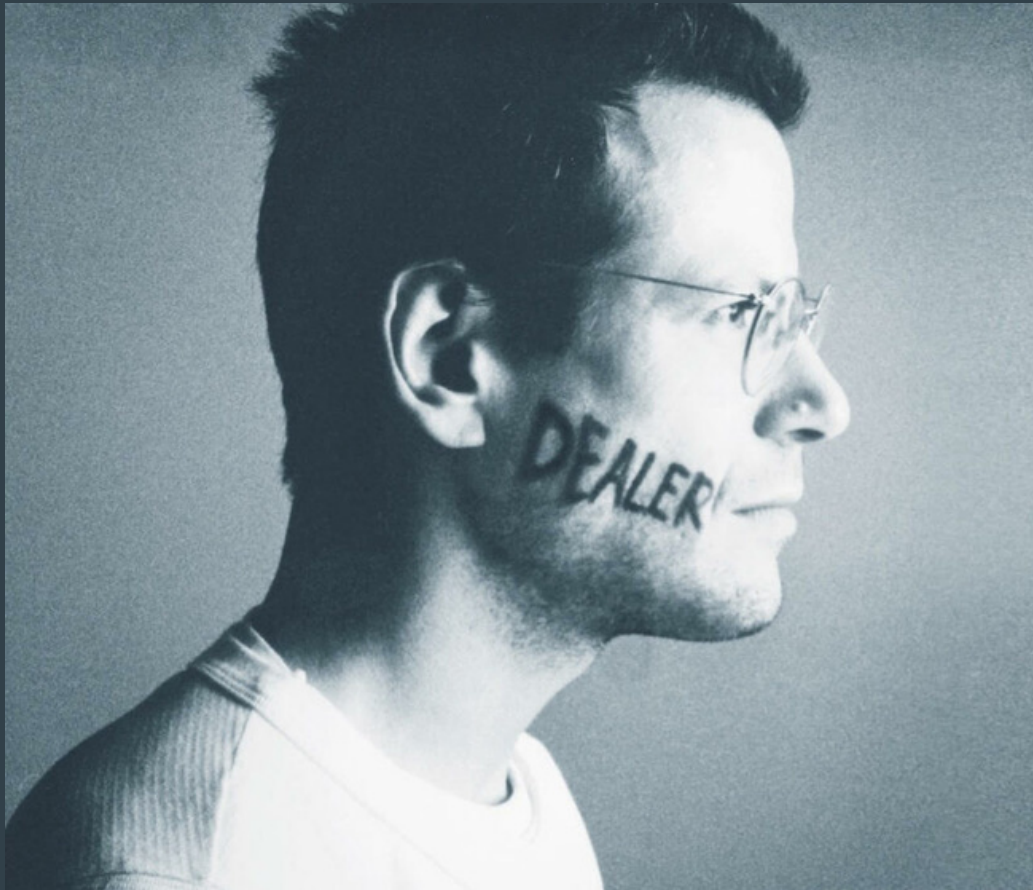
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**KENNY  
SCHACHTER**

@kennyschac



The NFT Crusader

From the traditional art world, there are perhaps no individuals more invested in NFTs as a concept than the outspoken dealer, curator, artist and columnist Kenny Schachter.

Trained as a lawyer and claiming to have not even known what an art gallery was until his 20s, Kenny joined the contemporary art world in the boom-time of the late '80s/early '90s and stuck around, despite the almost immediate downturn in the economy and the art market. Perhaps this adherence to art as art, rather than commodity, and the experience with wildly variant market conditions has allowed him to see the fluctuations and nonsense associated with NFTs and their link to crypto as just a parallel to that dramatic beginning.

Either way, Kenny stuck around with NFTs too, and has been promoting the concept incessantly to everyone who will listen. For that alone he deserves recognition, but there is so much more than this. *The Tickle* got the opportunity to chat with Kenny about the potential, the absurdity, and the negatives of NFTs and how it all relates to his own unique journey.







*"These people are wagging their collective finger. It's a deafening chorus. I find that so fucking tiresome. Excuse my language, but it just never stops. And I don't understand. I mean, why is it such a threat?"*

*These people are living in medieval times. You know, just writing off NFTs and all new technologies, including AI - all of these issues and topics. For what reason? Because they're uncomfortable with it, because they're fearful of change."*

Will that mentality ever change?

*"Well, as a maker of digital art for decades - I was showing computer generated prints back in the mid '90s - I mean, the underlying notion behind NFTs, to have a mechanism to buy and sell digital art, and to have forums like objkt.com, to see it all there, it's profound.*

*In some ways, the inflamed rhetoric, the intense animosity that this whole universe seems to elicit - I like it. It's heartening because it just affirms my belief that these things really have weight and historical significance, more so than perhaps even I think.*

*I love it as much today as I did the first day I found out about it. And I think that the impact has not even begun to take hold. It only makes the art world broader and shouldn't that be part of what this is all about?*

*About experimentation, about curiosity, about passion?"*

It's at this point that *The Tickle* mentions the experience of being at Bonham's for the Cure3 fundraising event (see page 22 for our full report). For us, this event seemed significant, in its hint at an integrated future for 'crypto' and 'traditional' art, and that this still felt like a beginning.

In the fundraiser, the money raised by the miniscule percentage of NFT artists was fairly profound. Kenny was, naturally, enthused.

*"I'm going to load that up as my ammunition in these interactions with pessimists and critics.*

*There's also a parallel there for me - in the middle of getting into a school-yard argument in a thread on Instagram recently, it was announced - literally simultaneously - that the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art acquired their first NFT\*, which was by Lynn Hershman Leeson, who's 80 years old and has been at the forefront of digital art and feminism for over half a century."*



How does the impact of NFTs compare to other developments he's seen throughout his art world experience?

*"I've been in the art world for 33 years, give or take, and I've never seen anything like it. In the last two and a half years, there hasn't been more than a week's worth of time that those three letters - NFT - haven't been at the forefront of my mind."*

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Kenny was, as mentioned, born in the violent boom and bust in the contemporary art world and remained part of the scene, but we wanted to know: did the even more violent boom and bust in NFTs affect his enthusiasm?

*"To this day, two and a half years later, and after the recent crash with FTX, OSPF and this whole market collapse, I'm still enthusiastic. To illustrate: the NFTs I was previously selling of my own work went for between \$10,000 to \$20,000. Now, I'm selling on objkt.com for \$50. Genuinely, I have to say I derive the same degree of satisfaction from selling my artwork in either scenario, whether it's for \$5 or \$5000."*

*"...when everything is going up without any connection to quality or depth of content, it doesn't do anybody any good."*

There's the sense that the Great Crypto Crash of 2022 was a disaster for NFTs - this has certainly been the theme of many an article by many art world observers, but *The Tickle* is not so sure - was this perhaps simply a cleansing of bad actors? The removal of quick profit from a venture certainly discourages the scammers and the chancers.

The people that are left are the artists: we have washed away everyone else and only the art remains. We asked Kenny for his thoughts on this:

*"To be honest, I'm glad that I lost my market to sell my NFTs for the time being, because when everything is going up without any connection to quality or depth of content, it doesn't do anybody any good in the long run."*

*This whole washout will bring greater rationality to this space, which is good. This 'crash' probably set back NFTs by one to two years. But in the next two years, people are going to focus on technology and art for the sake of it, and not to simply create another PFP project. Those things are just hollow."*

*Bubbles too, they're insignificant. I mean, there have been bubbles in contemporary art - I lived through a huge one. From the day that a piece of art came off the wall of a cave there's been irrational exuberance in the buying and selling of it. That's human nature. That's not technology, that's not NFTs, it's people."*





So has it become less about the money?

*"I don't think so. It's about money. Everything is about money.*

*I think there are many people that care deeply about art sitting at their computers at this very moment, trying to devise ways to make money in the face of a down market. That's OK, that's realistic.*

*And listen, I don't believe in altruism. Everything has some motive, even good behavior. And there's always some degree of self interest not far from the surface, but some of the greatest experiences in my career were from 1990-1995 where I curated these exhibitions with artists that had no market at all. Artists like Cecily Brown - contemporary artists that have gone on to sell for multiple millions of dollars. None of these artists had money on their minds. None. They were all making art because that's what they were born to do and had no choice.*

*Also, all this talk of crime, and scams - I mean, people say that the traditional art market is rife with crime and money laundering, tax evasion. The fact that it's unregulated. That the art market, before crypto, was the last unregulated billion dollar business.*

*This is one of the greatest misconceptions in history. There's more crime at lunchtime at Goldman Sachs than in any given year in the art world."*

Speaking of unregulated, we take this opportunity to quiz Kenny on the decentralised nature of blockchain related matters. Anyone involved in the scene will have heard the term DAO (decentralised autonomous organisation) floated about, and heard how profound that will be for governance, or the lack of it, in the future. Does Kenny buy into that utopian ideal?

*"I've never come across a single decentralized anything in the crypto space. That's complete bollocks.*

*Listen, crypto was basically created for crime. I mean, anyone I know who's been involved in Bitcoin since 2009, used it to buy drugs. Every 'DAO' has this attempt at pure democracy. It's bullshit. An analogy: Clubhouse. It was meant to be God's greatest gift to humankind, but it became obsolete because when everyone has the mic, nothing gets said.*

*I would say though, that there are these unheralded benefits to NFTs. I did an NFT exhibition recently, and I enlisted David Cash in Toronto to help me to donate money to Ukraine. The Cure3 event too - these types of activities never could have existed prior to NFTs. You'd have to start a not-for-profit and by the time you'd get everything up and running, legally-speaking, the money wouldn't be needed anymore, or the time would've passed. People have been helped profoundly in this way, people's lives have been changed by NFTs."*

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On the topic of changing lives: it seems that in a flash, the life of an artist has changed. The dynamics of selling, paying the bills, getting known - if you engage with NFTs, everything is different now than it was just a couple of years ago. Or at least, we suggest to Kenny, it has the potential to be different.

*"Absolutely. I recently did studio critiques at the Art Institute of Chicago and I was struck by the fact that I found myself giving a talk to students that was completely different from a talk I would have given 10 years before.*

*We have tools at our disposal today, namely social media and NFTs, that didn't exist a short time ago, that have fundamentally changed the definition of a practicing artist and how they can create opportunities and make a living from what they care about the most.*

*My advice in the past was so different - I would say things like 'find galleries with a shared sensibility that you relate to, then ingratiate yourself' - by that I mean: go to every opening, befriend the artists that the dealer is showing, befriend the dealer if you can, without being a pain in the ass, and then just like, you know, insinuate yourself into their program, get into a group show, etc etc.*

*But when I was giving the latest critique I realised that it would never occur to me today to even mention galleries. So if you boil it down, you can think of NFTs as a tool to take control of your content, your work."*

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# plf.

GATEKEEPER=  
WORLD'S WORST  
CURATOR.





In this supposedly open new world where the artist has control, we've noticed a lot of community angst relating to this notion of gatekeeping, certain platforms being more guilty of this than others, let's say. Kenny's thoughts on this?

*"This sign behind me [Kenny points to what seems like a scribbled note on A4 paper, pinned to the wall in his studio] says that gatekeepers are the worst curators.*

*There are lots of platforms out there that have... limited access - Super Rare, Nifty Gateway, Makers Place, Known Origin, Foundation etc, and all of these platforms are tremendously controlled. I won't say curated, because that's a ridiculous misnomer.*

*My first curator at Nifty Gateway was the Chief Financial Officer, because the company was so small, and you couldn't even hit him over the head with a piece of art to get him to identify it as such. But now, with this economic downturn, basically anyone - and there are exceptions - can go to any of these platforms - it's like they've all basically stopped discriminating. Even Nifty Gateway has an open-to-the-public section. They pretty much all do.*

*In this respect, for me, this new openness is nothing short of revolutionary - people now have the tools at their fingertips to create or impact their destiny in ways you absolutely couldn't just a few short years ago and that is a profound, fundamental, life changing transformation of the art world."*





*"What began with the internet has evolved into this great, fundamental paradigm shift in human interaction, both intellectually, philosophically, socially."*



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*"All of these things are great shackles affecting the world, human happiness, and I just think if NFTs can break through that in some way, that's a small miracle. It isn't the first, of course. Social media was the first technological phenomenon that served to blur the geographical barriers in the world at large. However, it was 'just' a way to express yourself without anything further in terms of fostering greater parity, economically speaking, beyond just having your work seen if you were lucky enough to be able to nurture an audience."*

*With this, it feels different. I launched a project, CryptoMutts in 2021. It was satirising PFP project hollowness and the borderline racist nature of these Apes and such, but anyway it sold out. I had to send out 300 t-shirts to collectors. This thing ended up giving me the broadest exposure across the globe, spanning one continent to another - it was absolutely shocking. All across Asia, Africa, South America, North America, everywhere. The breadth of participation was astounding.*

*What began with the internet has evolved into this great, fundamental paradigm shift in human interaction, both intellectually, philosophically, socially."*



About that tattoo, 'NFTism' - tell us what that means for you.

*“For context: for me, nothing was as bad in my professional life as the period from 1990 to 1995. It was the most prolonged downturn, that was by far, for me, the worst financially. And yet, the kind of community that I had, the kind of relationships that were created during that period - those things were my best experience in the whole world and remain as such. This stupid word ‘NFTism’ is about the community and about these kinds of interactions.*

*But then I changed my tattoo to ‘Post NFTism’ because the velocity of change is head spinning - within my two short years, the NFT world ate some of the worst characteristics of the art world, the art market and went from like this idealistic, content-oriented space, full of people that were in it for the right reasons - to this place of over speculators, the get rich quick types, the unsavoury behaviours - so the conversations quickly soured.*

*Anyhow, NFTism is a beautiful notion and as a tattoo, I'm stuck with it, but I still believe - idealistically, with a dash of cynicism - in that sense of community.”*





*"When I joined the art world, I just assumed it would be this crazy, hedonistic place - everyone would be drinking absinthe and swinging from the chandeliers, but I was so disappointed.*

*I worked for law firms. I worked for fashion companies. I had a million different jobs, and nothing prepared me for how archly backward-thinking and conservative the art world was. I always joked that I never get to speak about art because in the art world that no one talks about art, and the conversations were just so dumb, and so uninspiring.*

*Now, I have weirdos and strangers and people from disparate walks of life, engaging and reaching out to me. I've had physicists, mathematicians... people that not only I never talked to before, not in a million years, but I would never be in the same building with. I engage with them all. It's beautiful.*

*The best of the NFT world has brought back that idea of drinking absinthe and hanging from the chandeliers. Not in a literal sense, like the Bored Ape Yacht Party, but stuff like this conversation right here - it's really heartening. I love it."*




We end by asking for Kenny's final thoughts on NFTs - what will become of them?

*"We live in a digital age  
and NFTs have created a  
renaissance in digital art  
and nothing's going to stop  
it. I just think that the idea  
remains."*

*It's barely even started."*

Amen.



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