

# Stephen Friedman Gallery

Penta  
What It's Like to Make an NFT  
Abby Schultz  
11 September 2021

## PENTA

What It's Like to Make an NFT



Image: George Clinton in his studio in Tallahassee, Florida, July, 19, 2021. Photograph by Lynsey Weatherspoon.

Neither George Clinton nor Tom Friedman had ever made art as nonfungible tokens, or NFTs, until both agreed to create a digital artwork that *Penta* will mint and sell via the SuperRare NFT platform in September. Proceeds will be divided between the artists and a non-profit chosen by the Dow Jones Foundation. Half of *Penta's* covers feature physical renderings of Friedman's *Global Currency*, while half feature Clinton's *MY DAWG*. Here are the stories of each artist and their experience creating their first NFTs.

### A TRIP BACK TO ATOMIC DOG

Images of dogs—big eyes with long floppy ears—have been part of funk-rock musician George Clinton's signature since the 1980s, scrawled on album covers and other fan memorabilia. Dogs, and their "primal instincts," have been "my personal thing," Clinton says.

Clinton, 80, the force behind Parliament and Funkadelic—bands formed in the late '60s, that continue to influence musical artists today—has a lesser known creative outlet as a visual artist.

During the pandemic, Clinton discovered that working with acrylics, chalk, and spray paint was like making music. "You do it the same way—ad lib," he says. "I can access it at will. Then it really works out good."

Clinton honed his talent with guidance from Overton Loyd, a longtime friend and artist who created the album cover art for Parliament's *Motor Booty Affair* in 1978. Clinton is colour-blind, so Loyd lays out acrylic tubes grouped by hot-warm-cold colours, and Clinton learned how putting white in the mix prevented him from making a mixture that looked like mud.



Image: George Clinton's *MY DAWG* / Courtesy the artist.

Most of his works are abstract brushes and swirls of colour, pieces that reflect what was on his mind as he painted—from the pandemic to Black Lives Matter. By now, he says, "I promised us we'd be leaving the planet," he jokes, a reference to the science-fiction infused ethos of his music and the P-Funk Mothership, an alien spacecraft prop that descended during performances. "I let that into my mind a lot (while painting)—what it would be like going through different dimensions."

For his first NFT, Clinton turned to Atomic Dog, a No. 1 R&B hit from his 1982 solo album *Computer Games*. *MY DAWG* began as a painting with "vivid mark making" created from acrylics, markers, and spray paint using drips, brushstrokes, and sprays, according to Spring McManus, an independent art

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advisor in Miami who sells Clinton's art. The work was digitized and animated with assistance from DiGGital doGG, rapper Snoop Dogg's digital media and content production company.

The resulting NFT pulses, bringing the image in and out of focus in sync to the beat of a dog panting—the same sound (courtesy of Clinton) heard behind the vocals in *Atomic Dog*. "I just did the panting again," Clinton says.

A portion of proceeds Clinton receives from the sale of *MY DAWG* will go to his foundation, Protecting Our Legacy, created to help musicians secure their catalogues, so they can pass them to their heirs. Additional NFTs created in the *Atomic Dog* series will be sold as a limited edition; the owner of the complete set will get access to additional viewing and listening experiences.

For Clinton, who has revelled in the possibilities of technology, the evolution of NFTs seems to represent a moment where "new reality is coming in." He likens it to the time that a decision was made to place a value on gold. "That had to be a hell of a conversation," he says with a laugh.

## THE FAMILIAR TO THE UNFAMILIAR AND BACK



Image: Tom Friedman working in his studio, Easthampton, Massachusetts, July 19, 2021. Photograph by Tony Luong.

Artist Tom Friedman has often turned everyday materials into sculptures that surprise—a 50-foot stainless-steel figure looking up at the sky, a pencil shaved into a singular spiral, a pile of eraser shavings. "You go from the familiar to unfamiliar to the familiar again and back to the unfamiliar," Friedman says.

For his first NFT, Friedman took a direct approach, which he says he often does. Given the NFT was to be minted with the aid of *Barron's*, a financial publication and the publisher of *Penta*, and given how interconnected NFTs are to cryptocurrencies, which are theoretically global currency, it "all kind of came together in some sort of logical way," he says.

Using Photoshop, Friedman, 56, superimposed all the images of the world's currencies he could find (except for those he wasn't permitted to copy, such as the Danish krone and the Chinese yuan). He then used a technique in Photoshop called multiply, which multiplies, but also negates, colours.

"It's 150 layers that are superimposed, at, like, 1% opacity."

To Friedman, *Global Currency*—although based in a direct, concrete idea—"almost becomes an ancient image." A viewer may think they see things in it—faces, numbers, symbols—but in reality, those real images in the currencies have disappeared. "It has the quality of having some sort of strange history and mystery," he says.

Yet, the image, shaped like everyday currency, also comes back to the familiar, "in thinking conceptually—what does this global currency mean?" Friedman says. "In theory, the whole [idea of] cryptocurrency...it's about global currency, decentralised currency—it's not associated with a location, a country; it's in the ether."

Friedman says all his works ask viewers to be aware of what they are looking at. "It's not about one thing, it's about that complexity that happens in that exchange, when you look at something and how it affects you," he says.

Friedman will donate all of his portion raised by the NFT to Hands Across the Hills, a grassroots group formed between residents of Leverett, Mass. (where Friedman lives) and Letcher County, Ky.—two rural areas with very different worldviews

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who wanted to better understand one another after the 2016 U.S. election. "It's kind of like a cross-pollination of cultures," Friedman says.