

# NFTs ARE A NO-BRAINER

## Pioneering Petra Cortright

INTERVIEWED BY JODY ZELLEN

**Petra Cortright's** URL, [www.petracortright.com](http://www.petracortright.com), could be considered a work of net art. Practitioners of net art (beginning in the mid-1990s) often used the internet as their medium, sometimes populating their pages with images and data from other websites. Cortright's home page is a montage of appropriated animated gifs that include twirling roses, dragons, smiley faces, twinkling and spinning globes, as well as a straightforward list of links dating back to 2006 that takes viewers to her myriad projects. While celebrated for her net art, Cortright rose to prominence with a series of YouTube videos where she recorded performances in front of her webcam, often using stock special effects combined with silly, campy and girly gestures. The works attracted a following which inspired Cortright to devise an algorithm based on views to determine the price of each work. Ever entrepreneurial, it is no surprise that Cortright has begun to create NFTs.

While Cortright has segued from screen-based net art to NFT's, her digital works have also been presented as room-sized projections and as framed, printed images. She is a master at manipulating digital files, be it those culled from the worldwide web or created in

Photoshop. Her recent photographs add to and subtract from pictures of the natural landscape to become evocative abstractions that have an otherworldly presence. Cortright responded by email to my questions.

**JODY ZELLEN:** Can you speak about how you got started as a digital artist and the evolution of your practice from net art to performance-based videos, to installations. Then to more gallery-oriented photographic works and finally to NFTs.

**PETRA CORTRIGHT:** I wanted to be a graphic designer when I was younger. I thought that was the only option to be artistic and work with a computer, and at the time it was. I quickly realized that I despised the idea of people instructing me to "change" things to some client's taste, so I dropped out of two art schools trying to figure things out. I struggled for a long time; the only outlet I really had was the internet. Early groups of new-media artists who later became net artists who later became post-internet artists and so forth. I have a painter's brain; there was very little precedent for any painting being done on computers. I liked using video in a painterly way, to see



Above: *Mainbitch.mov*, Webcam video, 2012  
Opposite page: *WRITING PRIVATE EYE\_SWINGERS suplemento alimentario+ong+espa0a\_striptease previews*, 2021, digital painting on Belgian linen, 33 x 33 inches; unique, certificate of authenticity: PC\_FP4661.



how I could make live effects feel like brushstrokes. I posted them online because there was nowhere else to put them—I wasn't in school anymore and all my friends and peers were online. I was involved in groups online and that's how people got to know the work. People would email me asking if I wanted to be in shows. I was happy to have shows but would always inform the gallerist I had no money to produce anything physical. So physical work was [only] produced if the gallery had some kind of budget. Later on, I started working with (an infamous) art dealer who helped me produce physical work. We have been working together for a decade now. I've always felt outside of the art world

the internet has changed but so have I. In youth you seek things that you no longer seek as you get older.

**What are your thoughts about NFTs? I know you have entered this marketplace; how did it go for you? How do you conceptualize an NFT edition in relation to the other works you make? Do you think it is a viable way to "sell" art?**

I've released a couple hundred of them—it's gone great. I had no expectations, and everything has exceeded my expectations. The normal "art world" barely seems like a viable place to sell art, NFTs feel just as "real" as that.

**While it is (seemingly) easy to create digital artworks, to mint NFTs as an individual is pretty complicated as you need numerous accounts and cryptocurrency to start, and once the work is available to see and buy, it seems the "sales" really are dependent on marketing and (self) promotion—more so than, for example, having work on the walls of a gallery. I know you said selling NFTs feels as real as showing and selling at a gallery yet there are differences, at least to me, between making physical objects that hang on a wall and making something 100% virtual that is sold and collected as a "token." Can you speak to these differences and your preferences as well as your feelings about the dependency on social media to spread the word?**

There truly isn't a difference for my work. I have made work on a computer for 15-plus years; it was already digital. It was more work to "print it out" for the galleries. The format of the work slot fit so easily into NFTs. The way I work, I can easily make a couple hundred paintings a day; people don't seem to ever really understand that about my practice. I haven't ever been able to release that many through the traditional art world, but with NFTs it's a nice way to show how massively scalable the practice is. I have had to hold back for so many years, and I still have to even with NFTs. I produce more than I can release. You still have to cringe-ily skill and self-promote in the traditional art world as you do in the NFT world, so again I don't really see a difference there either.

The sales of my NFTs have been surprising: entire new groups of collectors picked them up via Twitter. In a way I had very little to do with it, which I love. I think it's a mistake to say it's easy to create digital artworks. It's not and that's why there is so much bad work out there. Minting is straightforward and most sites are very user-friendly: plug and play and skins over open sea. With any new technology there is a learning curve, but people are trying to make it as accessible as possible. ■



and like to experiment. There is not a lot to lose in doing what you want—contrary to what most people in the art world might tell you. NFTs were a no-brainer to engage with as I had basically already been making them for the last 15 years.

**I consider you a pioneer and innovator with respect to the creation of digital works. Do you feel like you are part of an ever growing (or shrinking) community, and how has that influenced your work and strategies toward exhibiting and sharing your works?**

When I was young, I really felt part of a community online but I haven't felt that way for years now. There are many factors to this:

*Women of Wrestling\_zoid's bikini links USA TODAY BUSINESS\_Tomb+Raider+2 Game, 2021, digital painting on Belgian linen, 33 x 33 inches; unique, certificate of authenticity: PC\_FP4662.*