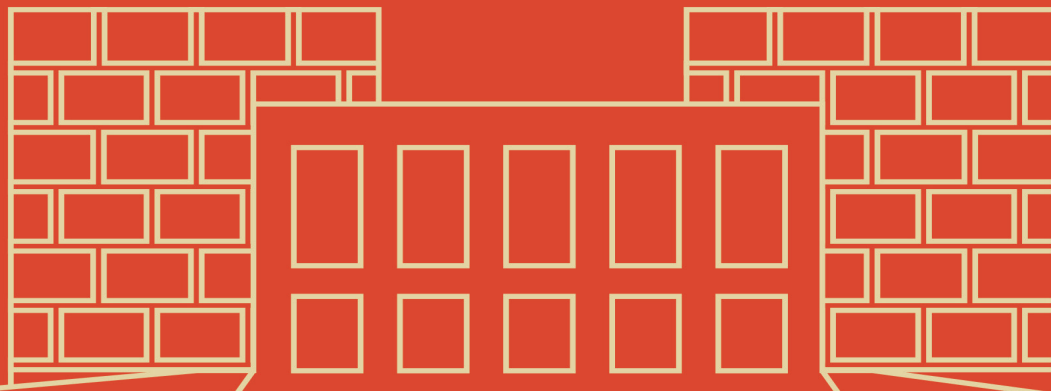


50th
Annual Conference of

ICAMT 2024 BOOK OF PROCEEDINGS

Encountering Transition

Reshaping museum architecture,
exhibition design and techniques in response to global/local changes



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50th Annual Conference

2024

Reshaping museum architecture,
exhibition design and techniques in
response to global/local changes

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博物館如何因應全球—地方變化而重新形塑建築、展示
臺灣博物館

ICAMT 50th Annual Conference in Taiwan 2024

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MUSEU.XYZ: Bridging tangible, intangible, and digital realms in exhibition design

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Abstract

In the context of Encountering Transition, this presentation examines the evolving landscape of exhibition design, focusing on the integration of tangible, intangible, and digital elements. As museums adapt to rapidly changing global and local environments, innovative approaches in exhibition design are crucial for enhancing visitor engagement and cultural appreciation. The metaverse represents a transformative shift in how art is created, curated, and experienced, offering immersive and interactive virtual spaces that transcend the limitations of traditional physical environments. As a pioneering digital-native museum, Museu.xyz leverages the metaverse to push the boundaries of exhibition design, embracing the potential of blockchain technology, non-fungible tokens (NFTs), and Web3 tools to redefine access to art and culture.

Keywords: Metaverse, exhibition design, digital art, decentralized curation, digital accessibility, NFTs, Brazilian culture

Founded in 2021 within the decentralized metaverse platform Voxels, Museu.xyz serves as a space for experimenting with digital art, education, and Brazilian culture, while elevating the voices of artists from the Global South. By highlighting projects such as "Metaversidade," "CryptoRastas," "Feminu", and "NFTrans," we will discuss how the metaverse facilitates engaging and culturally enriched experiences, bridging traditional and digital exhibition modalities.

Through strategic planning rooted in co-creation, Museu.xyz challenges conventional models of cultural production by fostering a decentralized, community-driven ecosystem that evolves continuously, mirroring the fluid nature of digital environments. The museum advocates for digital platforms to ensure open and global accessibility to knowledge and culture, removing geographic barriers and enabling new forms of engagement. This paper explores Museu.xyz's innovative approaches to exhibition design, community-driven content, and decentralized curation, highlighting the museum's commitment to inclusivity, diversity, and collaborative digital practices.

Introduction

The concept of the metaverse has gained significant traction in recent years, offering new possibilities for the creation, curation, and consumption of art. It is a persistent, shared virtual space that allows for immersive and interactive experiences, fundamentally transforming how we engage with cultural and artistic content. The term “metaverse,” originally coined by Neal Stephenson in his 1992 science fiction novel *Snow Crash*, has evolved into a complex digital ecosystem where real-world and virtual experiences blend seamlessly. Today, the metaverse is not just a futuristic vision but a reality that brands and art institutions are beginning to explore, leveraging blockchain technology, non-fungible tokens (NFTs), and Web3 tools to redefine the boundaries of emerging markets.

Museu.xyz is a pioneering example of a museum that is entirely native to the metaverse. Founded in 2021 by Marlus Araujo and Ana Cunha—former colleagues from the Master’s in Creative Media program at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (PPGMC/ECO/UFRJ)—along with visual artist Alberto Brant (aka Ottis), Museu.xyz was conceived as a space for experimenting with digital art, education, and Brazilian culture in a virtual environment. Unlike traditional museums, Museu.xyz is not bound by physical space or geography; it exists within the digital realm of Voxels, a decentralized metaverse platform, allowing for limitless creativity in curatorial practices and exhibition design. The team has continued to grow over time, bringing in new collaborators and expanding its capacity for innovation.



The foundational art occupation at Museu.xyz by CryptoArtBR artists, constructing virtual walls with NFTs, marking the museum's entry into the metaverse. © Museu.xyz, 2021. Reproduced with permission.

Central to the mission of Museu.xyz is the representation and elevation of Brazilian digital artists and creators from the Global South in the global metaverse. The evolution of digital art and the rise of NFTs have significantly impacted the art market, enabling artists to mint, sell, and trade their works directly with global audiences. By leveraging NFTs and blockchain technology, the museum offers a platform for artists to gain visibility and engage in new economic

models where ownership, provenance, and direct sales are decentralized and transparent. This strategy aligns with the museum's goal of democratizing access to art and culture, making the digital art world more inclusive and accessible.

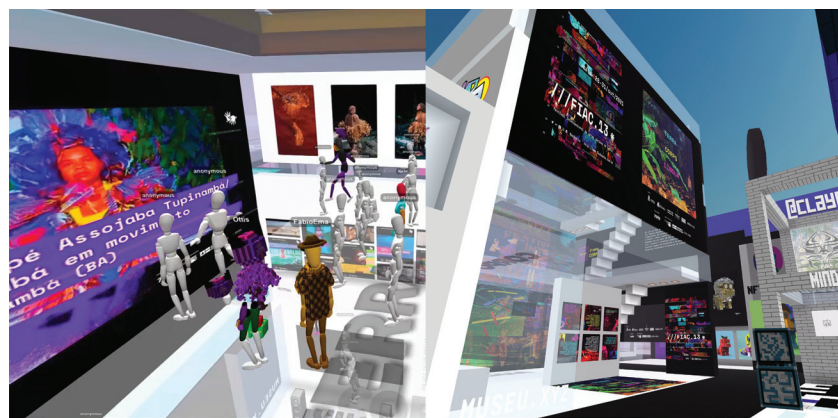
The strategic planning behind Museu.xyz draws inspiration from the principles of co-creation (Uricchio & Cizek, 2022), where the production of art and cultural experiences is a collaborative process involving artists, curators, technologists, and audiences. This approach challenges conventional models of cultural production by promoting a decentralized, community-driven ecosystem. The result is a “persistent project”—a digital space that evolves continuously, reflecting the fluid and dynamic nature of the metaverse itself. Persistence and synchronicity are crucial concepts to understanding how digital spaces can mimic the experience of the “physical world.” Persistence refers to the idea that the museum is a continuously evolving environment where the visitor's experience is synchronized with others (Araujo, 2022). When one visitor enters the museum, they see the same things as others, and when changes occur, these are updated simultaneously for everyone. This dynamic reflects the interplay of permanence and impermanence in digital spaces, where content is constantly transforming, yet a sense of continuity and history is maintained.

The creation of DISTRITO XYZ, a digital district with multiple galleries that fosters a neighborhood-like community within the Voxels metaverse, marks a significant expansion of Museu.xyz's vision and commitment to decentralization and co-creation. By hosting artist residencies and inviting diverse participants, both individuals and collectives, to experiment within these digital spaces, the museum promotes extensive collaboration and cultural exchange, fueling the growth of a vibrant digital art community. The following chapters will explore in more detail how Museu.xyz is redefining exhibition design, advancing inclusivity, and addressing the challenges and future directions of digital art spaces.

Exhibition Design in the metaverse

Exhibition design in the metaverse opens new possibilities that challenge and expand traditional curatorial practices. Unlike physical museums, which are restricted by architectural, financial, and spatial limitations, metaverse-based museums like Museu.xyz have the freedom to redefine what an exhibition can be. In digital spaces, the constraints of physical materials and space dissolve, allowing for dynamic, interactive environments that defy gravity, change form, and utilize virtually infinite digital resources. This flexibility enables Museu.xyz to create immersive experiences that push the boundaries of exhibition design, offering spaces where creativity is not limited by conventional architecture.

At Museu.xyz, the integration of digital architecture, community-driven content, and NFTs transforms the museum experience. The idea that “all shows in the physical world should also be in the metaverse” (Duarte, 2022) promotes the vision that access to knowledge should be open and globally accessible. By removing geographic barriers, digital exhibitions allow museums to reach a broader audience, creating opportunities for global visibility and interaction that are not possible in traditional art spaces. This approach encourages physical museums and other cultural institutions to promote their presence in the metaverse, thus fostering an inclusive environment where art and culture can be experienced and appreciated by people worldwide, regardless of their location.



“Museu.xyz’s fifth occupation: The International Festival of Performing Arts of Bahia (FIAC), featuring live streams during the pandemic in November 2021. © Museu.xyz, 2021. Reproduced with permission.”

Furthermore, the metaverse provides a platform where traditional art institutions can experiment with new forms of engagement and participation. Digital exhibitions in the metaverse are not merely replicas of their physical counterparts; they offer unique, interactive, and evolving experiences that respond to user interactions and inputs. This interactivity transforms visitors from passive observers into active participants, deepening their engagement with the artworks and the presented narratives. By embracing the metaverse, Museu.xyz demonstrates how digital spaces can complement and enhance physical exhibitions, enriching the cultural landscape and redefining how art and knowledge are shared and experienced.

A Museum for Community-Driven Content and Decentralized Curation

A distinguishing feature of Museu.xyz’s approach to exhibition design is its commitment to decentralized curation, a concept rooted in the principles of blockchain technology and Web3. Decentralized curation refers to a curatorial model where the decision-making process is distributed among a community rather than centralized in the hands of a few curators or directors. At Museu.xyz, this approach is reflected in the collaborative and participatory

nature of its exhibitions, where artists, technologists, and audiences are involved in the curation process.

The first year of Museu.xyz was marked by a dedication to creating space for digital art and cultural projects within the persistent metaverse of Voxels, a decentralized virtual world where land is sold in finite quantities. This model, based on the marketplace of virtual terrains, presents a challenge for many emerging artists in the NFT scene, who may find these digital spaces financially inaccessible. To address this barrier, Museu.xyz sought to curate exhibitions that would not only occupy these valuable digital terrains but also amplify the voices of underrepresented artists and cultural producers. By doing so, the museum aimed to democratize access to digital art platforms and foster a more inclusive digital art community.



“Detail of Minerva, UFRJ’s symbol, as a voxel balloon over the ‘Metaversidade’ exhibition at the Festival of Knowledge. © Museu.xyz, 2021. Reproduced with permission.”

“Metaversidade”, a wordplay combining ‘metaverse’ and ‘universidade’ (‘university’ in Portuguese language) was a foundational exhibition by Museu.xyz that embodied this mission. Featured at the annual event, *Festival do Conhecimento* (Festival of Knowledge), hosted by the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), the exhibition highlighted significant Brazilian projects by museums, festivals, artists, and musicians who had embraced digital platforms during the pandemic lockdown of 2020-2021. “Metaversidade” showcased how these entities leveraged digital tools to remain active and engage audiences in a time of restricted physical gatherings. This exhibition was a testament to the innovative spirit of the Brazilian art community in navigating the challenges posed by global health crises, using the metaverse as a space for knowledge exchange, cultural preservation, and creative experimentation.

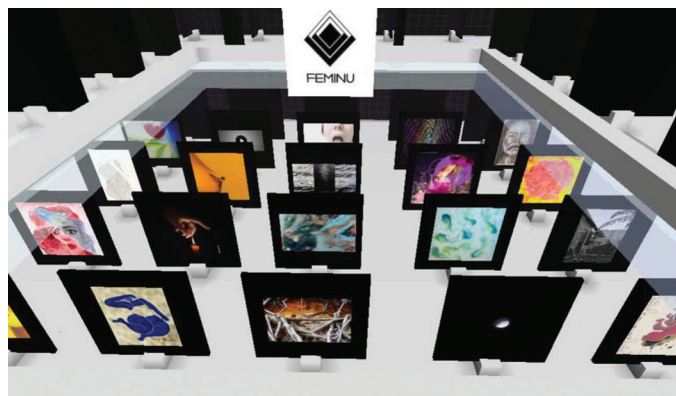
Following this, Museu.xyz presented “CryptoRastas,” an exhibition centered around an NFT collection that, following its launch with the support of the museum, became one of Brazil’s most successful NFT projects. The “CryptoRastas”



Images from the 'CryptoRastas Big Drop' event, the second occupation at Museu.xyz, featuring a live music show streamed from the metaverse. © Museu.xyz, 2021. Reproduced with permission.

collection comprises 10,420 unique NFT collectibles that celebrate Brazilian reggae and the global Rastafarian movement, blending digital art with cultural narratives. Launched by Digital Dubs, a Brazilian music collective known for its reggae and dub music deeply influenced by Jamaican and Caribbean sounds, "CryptoRastas" became an intercultural project that linked the Brazilian music scene with its Caribbean roots. The exhibition explored themes of identity, resistance, and cultural exchange, highlighting the interconnectedness of music, art, and digital culture within the NFT space. Through "CryptoRastas," Museu.xyz not only promoted the Brazilian NFT scene but also underscored the power of NFTs to carry forward cultural stories and foster global dialogues.

Another significant exhibition was "Feminu," which focused exclusively on women and artists who identify with the feminine gender. This initiative was particularly crucial in addressing gender disparity within the Brazilian digital art and NFT community. "Feminu" provided a platform for female artists to showcase their work, thereby challenging the male-dominated narratives often seen in both traditional and digital art spheres. By highlighting diverse perspectives



View of the FEMINU exhibition at Museu.xyz, inspired by Lina Bo Bardi's MASP design, occupying a 1,000m² parcel now part of Distrito XYZ. © Museu.xyz, 2022. Reproduced with permission.

and artistic expressions, the exhibition sought to bring more visibility and representation to Brazilian women in the digital art scene. It emphasized the importance of inclusivity, diversity, and equity in cultural production, aligning with Museu.xyz's broader mission to create decentralized, community-driven spaces in the metaverse.

Through these exhibitions, Museu.xyz has demonstrated a commitment to promoting cultural diversity, accessibility, and innovation in the metaverse. Each project highlights different aspects of digital curation, from academic engagement and intercultural dialogues to gender inclusivity, establishing the museum as a leader in reimagining what digital art spaces can be.

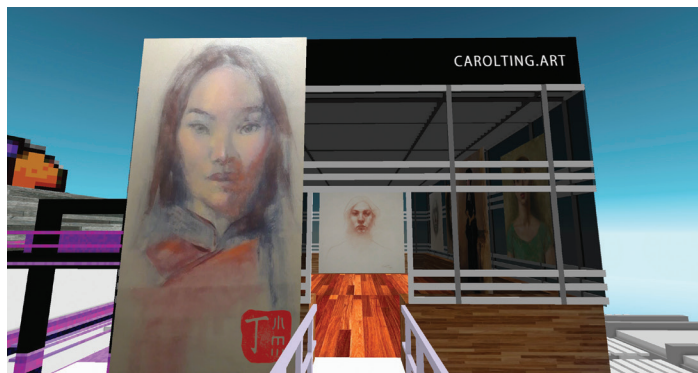
XYZ District: A Step further on Decentralized Exhibition Ecosystems

One of the museum's key innovations following the success of the Feminu exhibition is the development of the DISTRITO XYZ project, which transformed Museu.xyz from focusing on one large exhibition featured for several months to creating a dynamic digital district with multiple simultaneous exhibitions. This expansion allows the museum to host a variety of galleries within the Voxels metaverse, each operating independently yet contributing to a cohesive digital ecosystem. DISTRITO XYZ functions as a decentralized hub for digital literacy, cultural engagement, and artistic experimentation, where different artists and collectives can curate their own spaces. This shift in strategy enables a continuous flow of exhibitions, promoting a more diverse and inclusive art ecosystem by allowing a broader range of voices and artistic practices to be represented concurrently.

Through this model, Museu.xyz now offers artist residency calls that encourage artists from various backgrounds to occupy and experiment within these digital galleries. By moving away from the format of a single, extended exhibition to a neighborhood model of multiple,



View of the first galleries and residents of Distrito XYZ. © Museu.xyz, 2022. Reproduced with permission.



View of Caroline Ting's gallery in District XYZ. © Museu.xyz, 2022. Reproduced with permission.

overlapping exhibitions, the museum fosters a more vibrant and collaborative environment. This approach not only enhances the visibility of a wider range of artists but also encourages the cross-pollination of ideas and practices across different art forms and disciplines, creating a continuously evolving cultural landscape within the metaverse.

DISTRITO XYZ embodies the museum's vision of creating a decentralized, co-created cultural space that serves as an aggregator for the Brazilian digital art community. The presence of multiple galleries within this digital district promotes an organic flow of visitors; by exploring one space, visitors are naturally inclined to discover other galleries in the vicinity. This neighborhood paradigm not only facilitates a continuous exchange of artistic and cultural assets, fostering knowledge sharing and innovation in digital art practices, but also empowers all resident projects by creating interconnected experiences and shared visibility. Such an approach challenges the traditional hierarchies and paradigms that have historically governed the art world, offering an alternative model for cultural production, distribution, and engagement in digital environments.

CONCLUSION

Museu.xyz represents a transformative experiment in redefining the future of art, curation, and cultural engagement in the digital age. Leveraging the disruptive potential of blockchain technology, non-fungible tokens (NFTs), and Web3 tools, the museum has constructed an inclusive and decentralized platform that challenges the traditional constraints of physical space and institutional gatekeeping. This paradigm shift has enabled a broader and more equitable representation of artists, particularly those from the Global South, by providing them with a digital stage to engage global audiences and participate in decentralized economic models that emphasize transparency, provenance, and direct ownership. Through its innovative approaches to exhibition design and curation, Museu.xyz not only democratizes access to digital art but also fosters a more



View of NFTrans, a collective founded by Lea Arafah in 2023, occupying District XYZ during the latest artistic residency. Focused on creating a welcoming space for the artistic and professional development of the trans community in Web3, emphasizing affective onboarding and reciprocal inclusion through transdisciplinary art events and decolonial education. © Museu.xyz, 2023. Reproduced with permission.

participatory and dynamic art ecosystem that is constantly evolving to mirror the fluidity of the metaverse.

The evolution from single, large-scale exhibitions to the more expansive district model demonstrates Museu.xyz's commitment to decentralized curation and community-driven content. By shifting from an approach centered on individual exhibitions to a district model with multiple, simultaneous exhibitions, Museu.xyz has cultivated an ecosystem that allows a diverse range of voices and artistic practices to flourish concurrently. This strategic transition has transformed the museum into a vibrant digital neighborhood where cross-pollination of ideas and practices can occur organically, thereby encouraging a continuous exchange of artistic and cultural assets. DISTRITO XYZ embodies this shift towards a co-created, decentralized cultural space that serves as an aggregator for Brazilian digital art, promoting innovation in digital art practices and offering an alternative model for cultural production and engagement in virtual environments.

Looking ahead, the future of Museu.xyz lies in expanding its network beyond its current boundaries and establishing meaningful collaborations with cultural institutions and communities globally, with a particular focus on the Global South. By revealing different perspectives to the debate, especially those often marginalized in traditional art spaces, the museum aims to foster a more inclusive global dialogue that enriches the cultural landscape.

By positioning itself as a platform for other museums to explore and experiment within the metaverse, Museu.xyz seeks to provide a decentralized framework that supports curatorial innovation, cross-cultural dialogue, and inclusive audience engagement. This ambition to connect and collaborate internationally is driven by a commitment to further democratize access to the metaverse, ensuring that digital cultural spaces remain open, accessible, and representative of diverse voices. As Museu.xyz continues

to navigate the challenges of sustaining long-term visitor engagement, enhancing digital accessibility, and developing innovative governance models, it remains a pioneering example of how digital art institutions can not only adapt to but thrive within the rapidly evolving landscape of digital culture. The museum's ongoing evolution serves as a blueprint for how art and culture can be reshaped in the age of the metaverse, creating new possibilities for inclusivity, accessibility, and dynamic cultural production.

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BIOGRAPHY

Caroline Pires Ting, Sino-Brazilian-American Professor and Visual Artist with a Postdoctorate in Philosophy and a PhD in Arts and Contemporary Culture, specializing in intercultural studies, former Copyist at the Louvre Museum (Paris, France). She has held significant academic roles across Europe, the USA, South America, and Asia. Her career is distinguished by a proven track record in editing international scholarly publications, speaking at global conferences, and leading seminars that effectively bridge traditional and contemporary cultural expressions.

Marlus Mendonça Silva Araujo is a designer, visual artist, and creative technologist. He holds an M.A. in Creative Media (PPGMC/ECO/UFRJ), with a research focus on games, metaverses, and virtual worlds. Marlus earned his undergraduate degree in Design from the School of Fine Arts at UFRJ and a postgraduate degree in Digital Projects from the Istituto Europeo di Design -- Rio. His work lies at the intersection of art, design, and technology, where he develops a wide range of digital projects, including games, data visualizations, web interfaces, interactive installations, and immersive environments.

Ana Claudia da Cunha is a Ph.D. student at the Technologies, Dialogues, and Sites Laboratory (LTDS) within the Production Engineering Program at COPPE/UFRJ. She holds an M.A. in Creative Media (ECO/UFRJ) and another in Cultural Goods (CPDOC/FGV). Her work explores the intersection of art, science, technology, and memory, examining how new technologies create new ways of storytelling. She also serves as the cultural manager of Museu XYZ, a space dedicated to art, education, and digital culture in the metaverse.