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Zancan Is Bringing Nature To The Metaverse

In March 2022, I had the chance to interview Zancan for my newsletter. We learned about his beginnings, process, and plans at the time. An impressive array of events have happened since then.

By Kaloh

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Today's NFT artist needs no introduction. Zancan has been the top-selling artist on the Tezos blockchain for a while now. I've mentioned him and his creations several times in How to critique generative art NFT in a structured way and Top 8 All-Time Best Selling Tezos NFT Artists - which is now outdated, as Zancan holds the top spots.

Can you tell me a bit about your background before discovering NFTs?

I've been an insatiable creator all my life, and I'm self-taught on just about everything. The practice of drawing starts at the baby age of course, but the programming started almost as young for me. In high school, I was already fluent in coding in assembler language on an Atari machine for the demoscene, long before the Internet was available so the resources for learning practically did not exist. On a formal level, I have an engineering degree in electronics, but I worked as such for only one year before switching to a painter then creating a development studio with my friend Julien@v3ga

We first worked on game dev and quickly moved to create real-time visuals and interactive installations, ranging from video projections to web dev to a variety of interactive projects for museums mostly. But oddly, although I've been a coder all my life and long before I even heard the name "generative art", the only Art that I would consider as such was expressed through my passion for painting.

How did you discover NFTs?

In March 2021 I wasn't into networking at all. Like, zero. So I discovered them when I heard Julien talking about Beeple's coup with "The First 5000 Days" one morning as I arrived in our

office. At the time I had been trying for a few months to get back to drawing after a 6 year-long break, I had this urge to be creating art again but I was struggling both with recovering my former ease with the pencil and with attaching a purpose to this practice. NFTs opened my eyes to a bright new world of possibilities. While trying to absorb the so many concepts lying behind this technology, I somewhat comprehended that I had to make video art to be able to be part of it, and thought that I was already holding all the cards, but in the digital realm.

The algorithms you have created for Garden, Monoliths and The Lusthemples made you the top-selling artists on Tezos in less than six months. Could you tell me how long it took to code it and where did you find inspiration for it?

That same night after learning about NFTs, I recovered the password of that dead Twitter account with its 35 just as dead followers, turned all notifications on, and started to work on that idea of making video loops by mixing my paintings with some of my existing programmed stuff (while shilling for a Foundation invitation, lol).

I happened to not be at ease with those attempts, but you know, once the creative mind is ignited, it starts bouncing from one idea to the other, so it quickly moved on to the project of enhancing traditional drawings, or paintings, with programmed patterns. It took me just one weekend to develop a convenient framework to make javascript sketches that would output SVGs (out of a homemade CMS that I had been developing over the years for client's projects) and I started to explore pen holding devices. I made attempts with a robotic arm I had in the office, then by making a 3D printed pen-holder for my CNC, but the precision was never there, so I ended up asking my mate for his old AxiDraw A4.

From there I think that I've got carried away by the excitement of making plotter art, it captivated me so much that I almost forgot about both the traditional drawings and the NFTs. I developed my own plotter software able to perform my ever-complex designs and in June, I had completed my masterpiece, an Oak Tree made of 15 framed A4 plotter drawings. So the framework and the core of those algorithms were developed during those 3 or 4 months and focused on making plottable outputs. By the end of September, I had transformed it a bit to generate PNGs in order to create my genesis NFT piece on Foundation (the Oak Tree, in 18 parts). It's funny because the only reason why I made a PNG output was that the platform had no support for SVG format, and it is that PNG feature that made me make the leap toward the style that I'm now known for, vectors lines backed by transparent colored washes.

I owe Matt DesLauriers my career, after he retweeted one of those images my following almost doubled the next day; I used the opportunity to enter Hic Et Nunc with the first "Lusthemples". The response from collectors has been extraordinary ever since.

Who are your favorite NFT artists?

I won't be so original here but I look up to figures such as Joanie Lemercier or Matt

DesLauriers. Can't drop the names of all the FxHash/AB talents. Works of generative/digital artists in the natural trend, Cory Haber, Pierre Casadebaig, Ash White, Rodell Warner.

Darker illustrative art like Craww, Natalie Shau. Also, I've had this ongoing liking for Ladrianap's slightly dark architectural collages, I've collected many. I only collect on Tezos though.

What are your plans? is there anything special you are working on? (March, 2022)

I have so many it's hard to even explain. I'd like to release my print store, a service for collectors to order signed art prints for their zancan NFTs. I want to make new images, hopefully, some 1/1, but creation needs to free the mind from pressure. So I need to finish those former client projects that still put too much pressure.

I'm working on a « fxcollab » generative project for the launch of FxHash's release, with a fellow artist whose name hasn't been revealed yet even though it has a Z in it.

I'd like to make more physical drawings, there's a huge demand for plotter works! I turned down numerous proposals, some of them hard to refuse, on ETH notably. It's a lot, everyday head over heels! Trying to handle emergencies, but for some reason, I found the priority was to make an 8x8 pixel art generative Gard3n, M0n0l1ths on 8Bidou ;)

So I guess the main plan is to enjoy the ride.

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Edit: October 11, 2022.

Six months have passed since the original interview, and we now know that Yazid was his collab partner. They created (kinder)Garden, Monuments, which turned out to be one of the most successful projects ever released on Fxhash. His printshop is now operating out of Bordeaux, France; you can order signed art prints from owned zancan NFTs here.

As if that wasn't enough, Zancan hasn't pressed the breaks. He continued to create art on different fronts, including The Lushtemples curated drops and a long-form collection called A Bugged Forest - topping the FxHash all-time charts, just behind Garden, Monoliths.

In the same period of time, the Frenchman was also exhibited in multiple cities around the world such as New York, London, and Valencia (where he shared his development framework/UI), and was part of The Grails Season 2 by PROOF event with The Fabric of Trees.

Last but not least, Zancan has amazed an incredible collection over time. It is notoriously popular because of the green theme and the inclusion of works from today's most accomplished generative artists. He showcased prints of his collection at Verse Live, which took place at Frieze No.9 Cork Street from September 28th - October.

It is hard to think about what's next for Zancan. He has accomplished things that didn't exist a few months back.

Until next time,

- Kaloh