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## **Sarah Meyohas: Shifting our perception of natural, economic, and social structures**

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This March at Nahmad Projects in London, Sarah Meyohas will present new works showcasing her exploration of holograms and the HoloLens. While the former is a technology that's been around for over fifty years, the latter is cutting edge, employing mixedreality glasses that create an AR experience, without the need for a screen. Throughout her career, Meyohas has mastered taking on complicated topics and technologies to reveal their poetic, even beautiful, potential. She created her own cryptocurrency, Bitchcoin, in 2015 (which notably predates ETH). She has made stock trading into performance art and painting. She created an AI algorithm using roses, human labor, and subjective ideas of beauty. Equipped with both an MFA and a degree in finance, Meyohas and the work she creates disrupt the notions of who an artist is and what art should be. Whitewall spoke with her about the roundabout way she found herself making holograms, the blessing of anonymity she has found in the crypto world, and her next genre-defying project—a feature-length film.

**WHITEWALL:** What interested you in working with holograms?

**SARAH MEYOHAS:** You know, I end up coming to the pieces in such a circular way. I didn't decide that I wanted to make holograms. It came more out of an interest in structural color. Structural color is found in iridescent animals or plants. It's a structure that light is refracting off of. I discovered that people are trying to create these structures in labs. We are getting to the point where we are able to manipulate matter on such a small scale, and it can impact the color that we're seeing in the visible spectrum at our human scale. It's also very elegant as an idea, this tiny structure that you can't see that's creating these bright colors. That's such a beautiful thing to think about. And then I discovered diffraction gratings, which are another optical tool, and they have structural color. And then I found out that diffraction gratings were actually the technology that make up the HoloLens, which I had separately been making a piece with. So it felt like things were coming together

in this kind of happenstance way. I had made a piece in HoloLens, and then it incidentally had birds in it. It felt very fortuitous.

**WW:** What's interesting is that holograms feel very futuristic, but they aren't new.

**SM:** Holograms are pretty old technology. It's recording interference patterns on surfaces and re-creating those in a piece of glass. And what's pretty amazing is the 3-D effect it creates—screens can't re-create that. And what's amazing is that the piece of glass doesn't need to be plugged in. In fifty, one hundred years you can take the piece of glass out of the box, shine a light at the right angle, and it's re-creating the interference pattern. The technology is baked into the glass.

I'm drawn to it now because we have all this talk of the metaverse, there's this whole push towards VR, and in a sense, both the holograms and the HoloLens piece point to a metaverse, but still require you physically. They can only be truly activated by you being physically present in front of them. There's no video rendition of a hologram; no documentation of a hologram really does it justice. And the same for the HoloLens piece. Making a trailer for it was a nightmare because it just looked like a bunch of animations overlaid onto a video.

**WW:** And with both of these technologies, whether old or new, you've connected them to something natural, like structural color in birds for the HoloLens piece *Dawn Chorus*. What was the inspiration for this work?

**SM:** The original inspiration for the *Dawn Chorus* was this phenomenon. There is a phenomenon where people pick up sounds at dawn on radio equipment that sounds like bird chirps. They call it an "electromagnetic dawn chorus." I thought that was poetically quite beautiful.



Experiencing the HoloLens, I was dreaming about its capabilities. It was almost like a challenge to myself: What's the best artwork I can create in HoloLens? I felt like the promise of having a piece that linked digital to physical, without you having to hold up your phone in an AR app, is so much better.

For the music, I really wanted a piano, because I find a piano is a beautiful object. I was looking into Olivier Messiaen, who was a French composer but also an ornithologist. He made so many compositions around birds. He advocated whole tone scales. They sound more fluttery, so that whole theme became part of the

composition. Fragments of these compositions were put through a statistical analysis to spit out phrases that were similar, and I worked with a composer.

**WW:** Last year, with the explosion of NFTs, you revisited Bitchcoin (2015), both with a sale at Phillips and then late last year offering a free mint as well. What's it been like to have the art world wake up to cryptocurrency and digital, having created this project seven years ago?

**SM:** It's a funny thing. It's been amazing and challenging. Bitchcoin is pre-ETH, and people sometimes forget about it. In terms of the crypto space, it's been amazing and also been very bizarre watching people make hundreds of thousands of dollars off of my work in the course of a month. They are better traders of my own work than I am. Literally. So the speculation has been shocking. And the truth is that the crypto world is still very male-oriented. Identity politics has no room in crypto, and that's both an amazing opportunity and also means that if your piece is—even in its name—aggressively female, it's not going to go to the moon as much as a Bored Ape. It's just a funny place. But it, frankly, is no different than the traditional art world, in that way. The flex is the same.

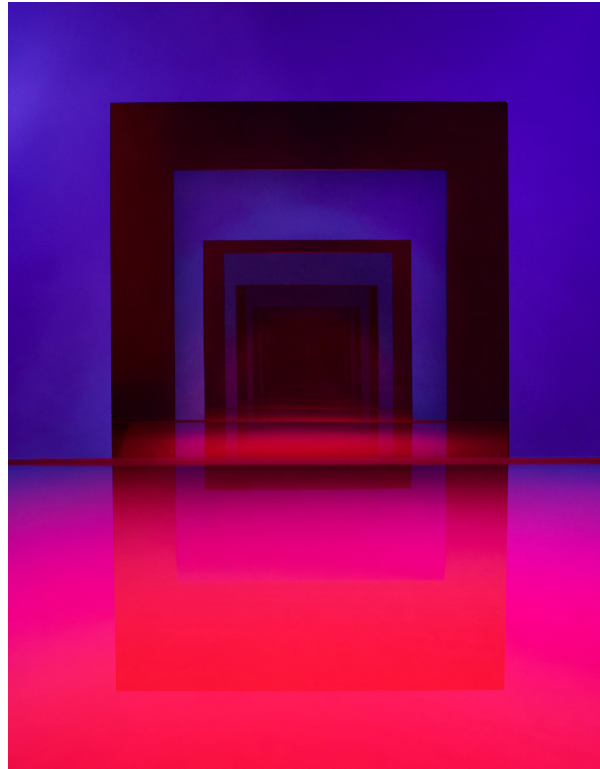
I saw this coming. I made Bitchcoin. I invested in the seed round of OpenSea. I think I'll make more from that than from Bitchcoin. But yeah, crypto is going to change a lot of worlds. The venture capital world is going to get upended by how easy it's going to be for people to self-organize and transact and invest. And information is just so accessible these days. The gatekeepers are in trouble.



**WW:** Your art addresses these ideas around value and gives visualization to complicated structures and exchanges. How are you thinking along those lines in future projects?

**SM:** One work that is in progress is a screenplay I wrote that is an adaptation of the myth of Medusa set in the perfume industry. Perfume becomes this really interesting, very visual language for a story that has to do with value and capitalism. It's a business that has amazing steps from agriculture to chemistry to manufacturing to distribution and advertising. How perfume is made and the amount of work that goes into it is amazing, and all for smelling good. It's the purest form of desire, what you put on your skin. And smell—it's very primal.

Medusa is this story that deals with sexual assault—that's her back story that people don't usually know about. She is raped by Poseidon in Athena's temple, and that's why she's turned into a monster. It's a story of horror turned into beauty. It's like the power of art—you can now look at the thing you could never look at. It's about the gaze and the image. Her gaze petrifies, but you can look at her through an image. I've put Medusa in the perfume world, and so desire, capitalism, product, and sexual assault all become modern. I've been writing it for over two years, maybe almost three years. That is perhaps more in line with my previous work than all of this structural color stuff.



**WW:** That's so exciting! Is it feature-length? We know your *Cloud of Petals* project included film. How long was that?

**SM:** It is feature-length. *Cloud of Petals* was a 30-minute experimental film. *Cloud of Petals* made me feel like film was a really good medium for me. In most of my work, even if you go back to "Stock Performance" or even Bitchcoin, there is very much a story, a real narrative, an engagement with the world. It's highly visual and beautiful. It felt like film was the most complete medium—sound, sight, story, emotion. And I like working on things that have scale. And film feels like you can really reach people. It's a very different way of engaging with the market. It's somewhat more democratic.

**WW:** So aside from a feature-length film, which is a huge undertaking, and your upcoming solo show at Nahmad Projects in London, are you working on anything else we should know of?

**SM:** I'm doing more investing these days, which I've always kept hidden because people don't want to think that artists are investors. But it's taking a more active role in my life now. I feel like it's time to change the paradigm that an artist has to just be an artist, nothing else. People wear multiple hats all the time. To be an artist and only an artist is disempowering. I want to actively shift that. I'm an active venture capitalist. I am investing in lots of different companies; I'm a part of a pretty blue-chip VC fund called Spark Capital as a venture partner, part-time. I have to say, crypto has been a very welcoming place because a lot of people are anonymous—you aren't socially embedded, in a way. It's been somewhat less political than the art world.

**WW:** It's not as much of a social minefield. The male/female dynamic does feel a little alienating, though, both in makeup and aesthetics.

**SM:** The way of collecting NFTs is much more designed for men than it is for women. Women are not as much gamblers as men are, inherently. That plays to men more. And crypto is much more related to gamer culture. Gamers are skewed men, too. I agree. Maybe this is going to change and maybe I'm naive, but in terms of community-building, people have to be nice. If not, you're going to get called out or kicked out or ignored. Everybody is only engaging because they want to.