Enter the Ether

By Sleeping Upright

As we enter the ether, we become more susceptible to the dystopian landscape we have built ourselves. The essence of humanity is stripped away, leaving just our avatars. Our existence is virtual and temporary. We rely on tokens and recovered artefacts to alleviate the pressure of rising sea levels, as the concrete homes, schools and hospitals get lost underneath. The token hoarders sit above, their pockets full and their chains swinging, whilst the blockchain we hang on to is crumbling under the heavy throws of capitalism.

This project explores ideas of hypercapitalism and hype culture within crypto, looking its unfolding effects and where inequality and exploitation can occur in modern digital art. I draw upon criticisms surrounding where we are heading with the development of Web3 based systems and how it is changing the way the parts of society operate. This Blender based animation and 3D printed sculpture fall under mediums I think best echo the nature of this project, with the context and work itself being technology based and looking critically at the relationship between technology, art and power.

The animated part of the piece takes on a dystopian narrative with ideas of lost artefacts in a fantasy-based style, giving the impression that these objects have gone to ruin and have been left abandoned in a lost world. I want the work to suggest a disillusionment of the physical world as we enter this virtual space controlled by what is suggested to be crypto.
Placing many of the artefacts into these buildings makes the world look more like this forgotten city that was slowly sinking under the rising water levels. I consider this to also be an acknowledgement of crypto/data mining and the negative environmental effects it is causing. The world is completely dominated by this idea of tokens, as this symbolises the new type of wealth and currency that pushed the city into disrepair. The electric billboards that surround this city represent the notion of constant advertising that we see in modern day cities, representing themes of consumerism, the daily grind, and hustle culture.
The disillusionment and decay of the city is also reflected through the effect of displacement mapping and pixilation to break up and glitch the footage. I wanted to physically show this environment falling apart and reverting into pixels on a screen, suggesting the idea of unsustainability and how easily these crypto structures can collapse.

The sculpture brings attention to the invention of the blockchain as a wider metaphor for the ways in which it can be perceived as a flawed system. The metallic 3D prints are planted amongst the foundations of suggested fragments of derelict buildings, as if they once held value long ago yet are no longer regarded in this way. The speed of the blockchains development makes it a structure that not only encourages the hoarding of wealth, but also makes it vulnerable to hacks and instability, by which we have seen vulnerable people losing out to this as a result of their initial investment.
The sculpture represents how this leads to wealth disparity and thus maintains of the elitist structures rooted historically within the art world and wider society. Its crumbling concrete foundations reflects the unsustainability of crypto and the uncertainty and confusion surrounding where it is going. I wanted the materials to no longer feel familiar and instead feel like the sculpture had adopted a physical form whilst remaining otherworldly and dystopic, like it could have been drawn from the same realm as the animation.