

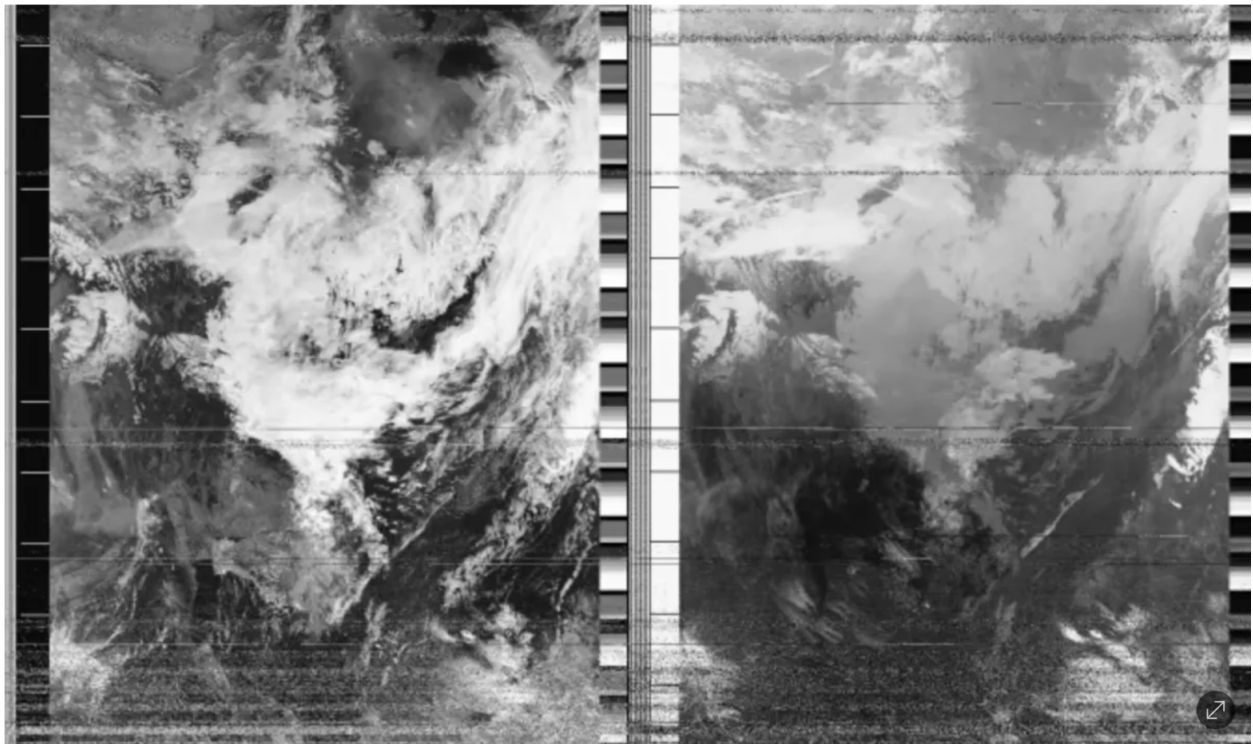
ART SY

Art

How Xin Liu Created the First NFTs in Space with Retired Satellites

• Ayanna Dozier

Mar 23, 2022 3:58pm



Xin Liu, *2022-01-30-02-59-09-UTC_NOAA-18*, from NFT series of images captured by NOAA-15 satellite by antenna in Hong Kong "Atlas," 2022. © Xin Liu. Courtesy of Blank.art.

"Atlas" (2021–present), a new NFT series by Xin Liu, is the collision of digital technology with the analog. Billed as the first NFTs to be created in space, the works use an antenna installed in Hong Kong to receive radio frequencies from

decommissioned weather satellites. The satellites Liu utilizes were launched by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in 1998. The data from those devices is translated into cartographic images that mirror Xerox copies of surveillance photos of Earth's mountainous regions. The images, transmission metadata, and radio frequency are then minted as an NFT.

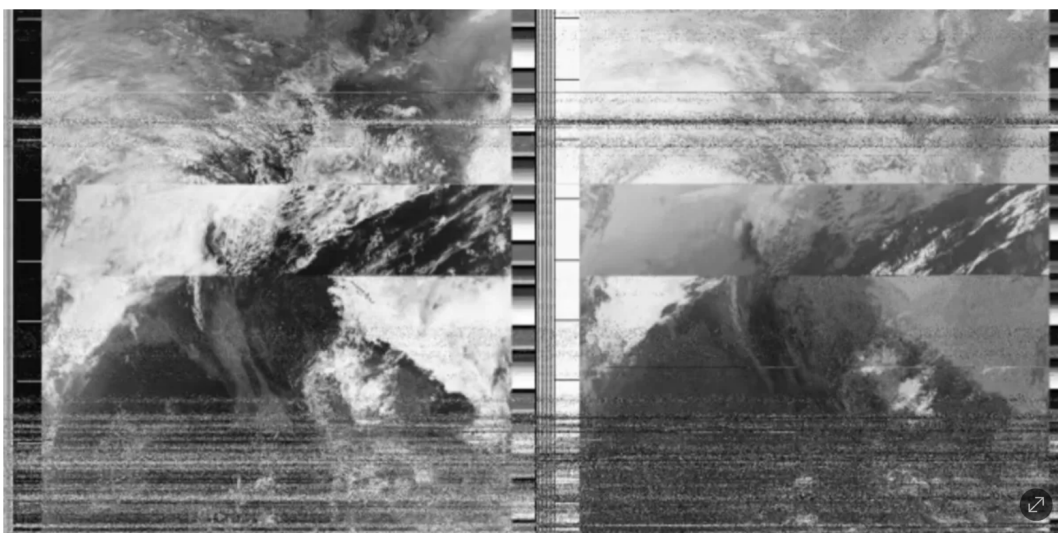
Each work in “Atlas” is singular as the satellite captures the geolocation, weather, and time when each image was taken. A far cry from the high-res imagery we're used to seeing on Google Maps or weather reports, the now-obsolete hardware used to produce these photos renders them archaic to our contemporary eyes. The transmissions Liu receives can take 10 minutes or longer to be downloaded and processed. Liu has described the process of waiting—while the satellite passes and the complete signal transmission is downloaded—as ceremonial. By the time each image is received, the satellite has already continued its orbit and is hundreds of miles away from where the image was taken.



Portrait of Xin Liu in her studio at Silver Arts Projects. Courtesy of Blank.art.

“Atlas” is part of the first collection of NFTs dropped by the newly relaunched Blank.art, an NFT marketplace that distributes work by emerging creators across cyber cultures and disciplines. That collection, curated by Xin Wang, the platform’s head of content, will also include NFTs by Renee Cox and Ani Liu later this spring. In her essay on the launch, Wang describes Liu as an artist “interrogating and transforming” digital mediums while asking “audacious questions about new technologies that reshape our sensibilities, values, and social organization.” For Wang, Liu materializes the mid-20th-century impulse of wanting to image Earth as a way to imagine a collective humanity.

“Atlas” was born out of early COVID-19 quarantine boredom when Liu and her partner, artist Gershon Dublon, began listening to open analog radio channels to pass time in their Brooklyn apartment. Radio cruising, she explained, led them to “open-source platforms that allow individuals to tap into the frequency and receive signals from retired NOAA satellites.” The images from her first experiments were published in a photo series in 2021. Since then, Liu has redefined the project into a series of NFTs that feature the downloaded satellite image along with the code of the original frequency as part of its blockchain.



Xin Liu, *2022-02-04-03-40-32-UTC_NOAA-18*, from NFT series of images captured by NOAA-15 satellite by antenna in Hong Kong “Atlas,” 2022. © Xin Liu. Courtesy of Blank.art.

Digital technology is ever in pursuit of renewal and regeneration. It is rare to engage with outdated technology for these objects operate as relics of a bygone era that are physically difficult to operate. We are forever hurtling towards new mediums that replace our technological know-how of the previous models. Liu's engagement with the retired satellites presents a time stamp of a technological device in stasis—not of the past because of its continued existence in orbit, but not of the future because of its decommissioned status. The artist explained it as such: "These images will probably never be read otherwise, stored in the recorder, floating in space." By connecting with these dated relics in celestial orbit, Liu makes available images that would be lost to the ether in space.

Ayanna Dozier is Artsy's Staff Writer.