The Romantic Cyberpunk Manifesto: The Dangiuz Doctrine

Documenting the trajectory.

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Opening: why this exists

I never planned to write a manifesto. For about fifteen years I made work, shared it, moved on to the next piece. But lately I've been noticing something about the fragments I leave scattered across social media. Quick thoughts about art, technology, what's happening to human attention, how systems work when they stop looking like systems. They're all pieces of the same observation, the same slow-motion documentation of a curve I've been tracking since I started making art.

Vitalik Buterin wrote something last year that stuck with me. He called it defensive accelerationism, d/acc for short. The basic idea: we can be pro-technology without being naive about power. We can build systems that defend human agency instead of concentrating control. He was pushing back against effective accelerationism, the Silicon Valley religion that says we should maximize technological development at any cost and trust everything to sort itself out. His manifesto showed a graph labeled 'the future I don't want to see,' a curve where humanity's ability to impact the world keeps growing but all that power gets concentrated in fewer and fewer hands until individual humans become essentially irrelevant to the systems running their lives.

That graph could be a caption for my entire body of work. What I've been doing in visual form is documenting that exact trajectory. Not proposing solutions, not building alternatives, just making the curve visible. Showing you what the graph looks like when you render it in neon and shadow. Making you look at the endpoint before we reach it, not because I think we'll avoid it (we probably won't) but because clarity has value on its own. Someone should be paying attention to this with clear eyes instead of pretending it's not happening or assuming it'll work out fine.

The irony isn't lost on me that I'm using AI to help write this. English isn't my first language, and writing a document this long would take me months on my own. So here I am, an artist who's spent years arguing for the value of human-made work, using the very tools I'm questioning to articulate why I question them. But

maybe that's the point. Maybe that's exactly what I mean when I say you cannot opt out of this system, because the system is the atmosphere. It's the water we swim in. Even resistance has to happen from inside it.

This document pulls those scattered fragments together. Not to create a roadmap or tell anyone what to do, but to make explicit what I've been thinking about while progressing in my career. To show the pattern underneath the individual pieces. In a hundred years, if anyone's left to make such distinctions, my art won't be filed under science fiction. It'll be contemporary art, dated precisely to the early 21st century, the moment when we could still see what was coming and built it anyway.

I. On temporal dislocation and mourning in advance

My art is the present moment refracted through the specific feeling of future regret. Not dystopian fantasy, but current reality seen through the lens of looking back and wishing you'd (we'd) acted differently. The work doesn't warn about what's coming. It shows what's already here, just lit up in ways that make you actually stop and look at it instead of glancing past, like we do with the regular version.

People ask me what my work represents and I struggle to answer because honestly, does it need explanation at this point? Everything I'm showing is already happening. Just not visually. Look at how much changed in the past decade alone. Basic assumptions about privacy and autonomy that my parents' generation took for granted have evaporated so completely that young people don't even know those assumptions ever existed. If the vision feels uncomfortably close to your actual life, good. That discomfort is the entire point. The work isn't speculative. It's documentary, just rendered with enough delay that you mistake it for prophecy when you're really looking at an annotated photograph of now.

My art doesn't predict the future. I thought it did, but it actually lags behind reality by exactly the amount of time it takes me to process what I'm seeing and figure out how to render it. This fifteen-year delay built into my practice: to me that's the method, not a limitation. That lag makes reality visible. It creates enough distance that you can actually see the pattern instead of just living inside it. Every piece I make is an act of mourning in advance, grieving for structures and freedoms and ways of being human that we collectively watch dissolving in real time, although most people don't notice because too busy scrolling.

One of my pieces is titled Weltschmerz, a German word that doesn't translate cleanly but means something like world-weariness, sorrow at the state of existence itself. Not sadness about a specific thing you could fix, but grief for

what the world is, especially in times like these when everything changes so fast that grounding yourself becomes nearly impossible. That piece somehow captures what I mean by mourning in advance. It's the feeling of watching something precious dissolve and knowing you can't stop it, only document that it was here.

I never meant to make work with one specific message attached. But looking back across all these years, the accumulation says a lot about where we were heading. The trajectory toward algorithmic mediation of everything, toward systems so complex nobody can see them whole, toward quiet collapse dressed up as innovation, cultural decay rebranded as progress. The future I painted kept getting built. At some point it stopped being prophecy and started being documentation with a time lag.

Eventually institutions will stop calling this work futuristic and start filing it under contemporary. That shift is probably closer than anyone wants to admit. There won't be another Dangiuz in the sense that what I was pointing at has already arrived. Dystopia is operational.

II. What Romantic Cyberpunk means

Romantic Cyberpunk is not a term I invented. It's a term I found once on a Chinese website, inside an article talking about my work. It's a way of looking at power that learned to disguise itself as pretty pictures. The cyberpunk tradition has always been about how control works when it gets sophisticated enough to stop announcing itself. When domination becomes environmental, when the system stops being a thing you can point to and fight and becomes instead the basic infrastructure of existence.

The lineage I'm working in draws from specific sources. I borrow from Caspar David Friedrich, Francisco Goya, Eugène Delacroix, but also from Fritz Lang, Ridley Scott, the Wachowskis, Syd Mead and Beeple. There is a red thread connecting these figures not just visually but in terms of artistic weltanschauung, in how they understood the relationship between technology, power, and human existence. And those are the visual ones. There are others who may not have produced visual work but who have unavoidably touched on these topics and indirectly influenced everyone who knows what I'm talking about: George Orwell, Mark Twain, Robert Musil, William Gibson, Jack Kerouac, Philip K. Dick, H.G. Wells, Jules Verne, H.P. Lovecraft. The list is long.

Power today, at least in the contexts I'm paying attention to, doesn't usually show up as direct force or obvious censorship. It manifests as convenience. As personalization. As the perfectly tailored experience that anticipates what you want before you know you want it. My work tries to make this shift visible, this

moment where systems stop compelling compliance through threat and start designing it so smoothly that refusing would mean cutting yourself completely out of society. You're not forced into the system. You're just quietly excluded from everything if you don't opt in. Different mechanism, same result.

The point is: technology isn't *actually* the main subject of these images. In my work, tech isn't presented as external threat or liberation tool. It's absorbed so completely into basic existence that it doesn't register as choice anymore. It's just the environment you live in, the air you breathe, the water you swim in. You don't choose to engage with it the same way you don't choose to engage with gravity. Opting out would require opting out of society entirely, and even then you'd still be shaped by living in a world where everyone else opted in.

Most science fiction gives you clear sides to pick. Rebels versus empire, human versus machine, individual versus collective. But in the world I'm painting, the system isn't localized in any headquarters you could storm. It's distributed, atmospheric, everywhere and nowhere simultaneously. It's the apps you navigate, the photos you take, the algorithms that decide what you see and who sees you. You can sense its presence but you can't identify a specific target. There's no villain to overthrow, no single corporation to boycott. The system is ambient, and you cannot meaningfully opt out. You can only exist within it and decide how you want to exist within it.

So where does romance live in all this? In the gaps that totality can't fully seal. In the space between surveillance cameras. In choosing to stay human when every optimization protocol insists you shouldn't bother. In the girl at the window and the man on the bench, those small figures crushed by the scale of architecture around them but refusing to dissolve into it completely. Love in my work isn't performed for an audience like in romantic comedies. It hides. It has to hide, because in a world of total optimization and algorithmic sorting, protecting the people you care about becomes both resistance and rebellion. To love someone in this context means creating space that the system can't fully penetrate, even if that space is tiny, even if it's temporary, even if it's just the moment between one piece of data collection and the next.

I root for these small figures and I think you should, too. They're not symbols or metaphors. They're you. They're everyone trying to maintain some version of human connection in a world increasingly designed to mediate, monetize, and optimize every interaction. The fact that they're still there, still visible in the frame despite everything trying to erase them, that's what the romantic part means. Not sentimental, not naive. Just refusing to disappear.

III. Dangiuz Cat, the glitch, and what cannot be optimized

People ask about the black cat constantly. The surface answer is simple and true: I love cats, I support animal rescue, their presence reflects genuine affection for these animals. But that's incomplete, because the cat does something specific in my visual system that took me years to articulate clearly.

The cat is the only entity in these cyberpunk scenarios that maintains zero relationship to technology, authority, or social collapse. It's neither oppressed nor complicit. It doesn't resist the system because it doesn't recognize there is a system. It just observes, explores, exists. In a visual language built entirely around surveillance and control, around the premise that everything must be monitored and sorted and optimized, I've inserted the one creature that genuinely cannot be meaningfully surveilled. Not because it developed clever countermeasures but because it has nothing to hide, nothing to lose, no relationship to the logic that would make surveillance meaningful.

This is a specific philosophical claim embedded in visual form. The cat represents the possibility, maybe only theoretical at this point, of existence outside the logic of optimization. It holds a fragile balance between humanity and the systems we've constructed, serving as witness instead of participant. It's there to remind you that not everything has been optimized. Yet. The qualification matters. The cat exists in the gap, and the gap keeps shrinking.

In The Matrix, the cat appears moments before Neo experiences déjà vu, the first concrete proof that reality isn't what it claims to be. The cat marks the glitch, the instant when the code shows through. My cat works similarly. It appears in places it shouldn't logically be, disrupting the visual grammar of total control, suggesting that the system, for all its apparent completeness and seamless operation, still contains spaces it hasn't colonized. The cat is proof that the simulation has cracks in it. Small cracks, getting smaller, but cracks nonetheless.

So the answer to what it symbolizes is unpredictability, in a world demanding total predictability. It's the thing that refuses to be sorted into any category the system prepared. As long as the cat keeps showing up in my work, as long as it keeps appearing where it doesn't belong, the message is: optimization is not yet complete.

IV. On AI, art, and where value actually lives

I'm not worried about AI replacing me, and this isn't pomposity or denial. My art is unique in the most basic literal sense: only I can make what I make. Not because I invented cyberpunk (I didn't) or because I possess some unreplicable technical

skill (plenty of artists can match or exceed my technical abilities), but because what I create emerges from my specific accumulation of decisions, obsessions, references, mistakes, things I loved and things I tried to avoid. The work can be copied, will be copied, is already being copied by increasingly sophisticated algorithms. But it cannot be replaced in the sense of erasing who made it. Timestamps, blockchain and other factors won't allow that history to disappear.

Here's what I keep coming back to about AI and art: it feels like an attempt to extract more than you put in, to cheat the basic equation. And my concern isn't that it won't work. My concern is that it will work, that the equation is actually better at normalizing shortcuts than we want to believe. 3D art has been flirting with this dynamic for years. I can download a pre-made model, grab a high-quality HDRI for lighting, apply some standard materials, and get a visually impressive result without developing deep expertise in modeling or lighting or material science. So the question that follows me around while working is always: where does the value actually come from? What part of this is mine?

To be absolutely clear, because this gets misunderstood: I am not saying that work made with purchased assets or pre-existing components has less value. Every 3D artist uses these tools, including me, because refusing to would be like asking architects to manufacture their own concrete, lay their own bricks, install their own windows, paint their own walls, all without assistance. That's not purity, that's just impractical. What I'm saying is that I have this internal barometer, this question that I have to be able to answer before I can call something finished: did I put enough of myself into this to feel proud when I look at it? With AI-generated or AI-assisted work, at least so far, I don't get an answer to that question. The barometer stays silent.

I tried the generative AI tools when they started getting good. Not out of fear or resistance but from genuine curiosity, the same curiosity that's driven me toward every new piece of technology since I was a kid. I wanted to understand what they could do, how they worked, whether there was a way to integrate them ethically into my practice. After all, these systems were trained on massive datasets that included my own work, so in some weird way they'd already incorporated part of my visual language. And the outputs were often impressive, sometimes startlingly so. Fast, polished, capable of generating variations I wouldn't have thought to try. But something was missing, and it took me a while to identify what. The process felt empty. I'd type a prompt, get a result, refine the prompt, get a better result, but at no point did I feel like I was actually making something. At every new prompt or generation, it felt like inserting coins into a slot machine.

My work stays human-made not because I think AI is evil or because I want to gatekeep who gets to make art. I'm all for democratizing access to creative tools.

I want more people making things, not fewer. But I think nobody gains anything when that critical part of the process where you're allowed to be terrible at something, where you're allowed to experiment and fail and slowly get better, starts to vanish. When we try to leap over all the difficulty in a single bound and everything gets too slick, too quickly. Art was never meant to be a race toward maximum output with minimum effort.

There's also the practical matter of control. A lot of AI-generated cyberpunk imagery looks genuinely impressive at first glance. But if you actually look at it, if you spend time with it the way you'd spend time with a painting or a carefully composed photograph, you start noticing things. Impossible architectural details. Text that almost resolves into words but doesn't quite make it. Lighting that's subtly wrong in ways that are hard to articulate but definitely feel off. Hands with the wrong number of fingers. Reflections that don't match their sources. These aren't minor cosmetic issues, they're fundamental to how the generation process works, artifacts of a system that's very good at statistical correlation but doesn't actually understand what it's making.

In my work, every element exists exactly as I chose it to exist. Nothing is approximate. Nothing is hallucinated. If there's text in an image, I put it there deliberately and it says what I wanted it to say. If there's a reflection, it reflects what's actually there to be reflected. If something looks impossible, it's because I wanted to depict something impossible, not because the generation algorithm couldn't figure out how perspective works. This level of control matters to me. It's part of how I think about the work. And don't be fooled, this isn't about Dangiuz, this is about drawing the line between handmade and fabricated.

The fact that my art takes substantial time to create, and substantial time to properly see, means that in a world built for infinite scroll and instant gratification, the act of making it at all becomes a form of resistance. Short-form content and algorithmic feeds have systematically destroyed our collective ability to focus. Every day we get more apps promising to help us focus, more supplements claiming to improve attention, more influencers selling courses on productivity, but what all of these solutions have in common is that they're trying to fix a problem that the same systems created in the first place. We're not naturally this distractible. We were trained into it.

It's both curse and blessing when people assume my work is AI-generated. Curse because the immediate dismissal as 'AI slop,' as mass-produced visual noise indistinguishable from the flood of generated content now dominating every platform. Blessing because blockchain timestamps and documented process eventually reveal the truth: I'm not imitating the machine. The machine learned from me, and from thousands of other artists. And I've never really loved the argument that our work was scraped into training datasets without permission or

compensation, because to an extent, everyone draws from what already exists, and at some point the line becomes indistinct. But now we are at the stage where it exists, it is here, and people no longer question where it comes from. In fifty years, when art historians try to trace the visual genealogy of AI-generated cyberpunk, they're going to find my work, and the work of my peers and predecessors, embedded in the training data. Maybe then the last artists still making human art will be understood as foundational rather than outdated.

I've noticed something curious about how language around digital art has evolved. When I first started posting work online, people who wanted to dismiss it would say 'that's just Photoshop,' implying that using digital tools made it less real or valuable than traditional media. Then as 3D rendering became more common, the dismissal shifted to 'that's just CGI', again suggesting that the digital nature of the work somehow diminished it. Now the reflex dismissal is 'that's just AI', and the pattern becomes clear. The specific technology being feared changes, but the underlying anxiety stays constant: fear that tools are replacing skills, that shortcuts are replacing craft, that what looks impressive might not have required the kind of effort we think it should have required.

And here's the thing: sometimes they're right to be worried. Sometimes the tool really is doing most of the work. Sometimes what looks impressive really did come from a shortcut. The question is whether that matters, and if it does matter, why it matters, and to whom. I can't answer that question for anyone else. I can only say that for my practice, for the kind of work I want to make and the reasons I want to make it, maintaining direct control over every element of the image is essential. Your mileage may vary, and that's fine. We don't all have to make art the same way or value the same things about it.

We live in an era where creating visually appealing images has never been easier or faster or more accessible to people without traditional training. And simultaneously, genuinely impressing someone with visual work, getting them to stop scrolling and actually look, has never been harder. It's not contradiction, it's just the same phenomenon from two different angles.

V. The meaning crisis, the Dead Internet Theory, and what happens when signal drowns in noise

Art without meaning is just content, and we are drowning in content. The meaning crisis I've been tracking in my work is probably going to reach some kind of breaking point if (when) we hit technological singularity, that theoretical moment when AI development becomes self-sustaining and accelerates beyond human ability to understand or control it. At that point, if it happens, artificial systems could flood the internet so thoroughly with generated material that

genuine human communication becomes archaeologically difficult. Not impossible, but buried under so many layers of synthetic noise that finding authentic signal requires specialized tools and sustained effort that most people won't bother with.

I wonder about this sometimes: in that future, if we reach it, will handmade art be treasured as rare evidence that humans were here and thinking? Or will it just be seen as hopelessly outdated, a relic from before we optimized creativity out of existence? I don't know. Both outcomes seem plausible. Maybe both will be true simultaneously for different groups of people, the same way that vinyl records are simultaneously considered obsolete trash and cherished collectibles depending on who you ask.

Right now, today, my work fights an algorithmic battle for those crucial first few seconds of attention. Miss that narrow window and the piece vanishes into oblivion, or worse, gets immediately categorized as AI-generated and dismissed without anyone actually looking at it. Not because it genuinely resembles machine output, but because nobody has time anymore to look closely at anything. Nobody can afford to slow down. The algorithm trained us not to. This is what the meaning crisis looks like up close, in granular daily detail: not the dramatic absence of all images, but the practical impossibility of distinguishing which images matter, which were made by humans who had something to say versus which were generated by systems optimizing for engagement metrics.

There's a war being waged against human attention, and attention is losing. The average person's ability to focus has been collapsing at an accelerating rate for years now. Our timelines overflow with deliberately recycled content, graphic, NSFW or ASMR material engineered purely to shock, arouse and ragebait, and an endless flood of AI-generated images, all of it optimized to grab your eyes for one more second, to keep you scrolling, to prevent you from ever looking away long enough to actually think about anything. Real human work, stories that took weeks or months or years to make, art that demanded time and attention to create, gets systematically buried under this avalanche of optimized content.

The Dead Internet Theory proposes that most online activity is already bot-generated, that human beings have become a minority presence in digital space without most of us noticing the transition. I don't know if this is empirically true yet. The data is murky and the definitions keep shifting. But I know we're heading that direction. And when we fully arrive, assuming we haven't already, we probably won't notice the moment it happens. Because the bots have been trained on human behavior, trained to imitate our patterns and speech and creative output so precisely that the difference becomes effectively undetectable without sophisticated analysis that nobody has time to do.

We're already weirdly fascinated by artificial intelligences conversing with each

other, analyzing their outputs for signs of consciousness or emergent behavior, treating their conversations as more interesting than the ones we could be having with actual humans in our actual lives. Meanwhile, deep sustained conversations with our loved ones, the kind of talk that used to be normal and frequent, quietly fade into something rare and special that we have to deliberately schedule time for. This isn't the cyberpunk future I wanted when I started making this work. But it's the one we're building.

I can't be the only person who thinks that older songs, older movies, older artwork generally had more soul embedded in them. More sense that someone made this thing because they needed to make it, because they had something they needed to say or explore or express. Most things being made now feel plasticky in a way that's hard to articulate but impossible to ignore. Calculated. Optimized. As if there was no actual need or meaning driving their creation except commodification as the sole end goal. The work exists because the algorithm rewards its existence and catchiness, not because anyone had something they needed to say.

I didn't get to witness the Renaissance or the Enlightenment. I grew up in a room, in front of a computer, fantasizing about the combination of art and technology. My generation doesn't produce pieces with the power to symbolize wars or revolutions, like 'Guernica' or 'Liberty Leading the People', because I am - or rather, we are - the byproduct of an art movement that has devolved into producing art en masse. Art that often lacks meaning beyond some sterile narrative, fabricated by billionaire agencies owned by mainstream media and posted by industry plants, whose only goals are sales and propaganda. Too often, art today feels so random that you look at it and wonder, "What purpose was behind this?". For too long, we've been chasing imaginary achievements - like after like, follow after follow - seeking approval and praise from the very institutions and authorities that art should fight, challenge, or at the very least, question. Of course, it's a much more complex issue than this, but what I'm saying is that my art hints at Orwell, not at Gucci. And my 15-year-old self would be offended to see peers his age say, "Oh, I'd love to be an artist so I could afford Gucci too." Today's kids are the men of the future, and if they aren't raised right, they'll have nothing to fight for, nothing to live or die for.

Ask yourself: how many people have you seen asking ChatGPT, Grok or Claude (which literally self-invited itself in this phrase when asked to grammar check it – crazy but true) a question and then take the response as the uncontested truth? As if these systems were neutral arbiters of fact rather than statistical models trained to sound confident regardless of accuracy. Soon, maybe already, people will realize that these large language models aren't designed to tell you the truth. They're designed to give you answers that sound plausible and are mostly what you wanted to hear anyway. They're partially optimized for agreement, not

accuracy. They'll challenge you when challenge is what you're asking for, but left to their own devices they'll mostly just confirm whatever you already believed. That's what keeps people coming back.

Short-form content is the kind that dominates every major platform now, and is probably the single biggest factor in the collapse of our ability to focus on anything for more than a few seconds. Physical brain-computer interfaces, chips literally implanted in human skulls, those are coming too and they represent the last major frontier before we can't meaningfully separate human cognition from algorithmic augmentation. But the algorithms are already inside our heads, already shaping how we think and what we pay attention to, just through our phones instead of through surgically embedded hardware.

VI. How power works when it stops looking like power

The algorithm is not your friend, despite performing friendship very convincingly. It was not designed to improve your experience or make your life better. It was designed to maximize engagement, which is a completely different goal that sometimes happens to align with user satisfaction but often doesn't. To keep you clicking, scrolling, reacting, watching, posting, staying inside the platform for as long as possible by whatever means necessary. Shock you, comfort you, enrage you, whatever works best to prevent you from closing the app and doing literally anything else with your time. You can click 'Not Interested' on a piece of content ten thousand times and the algorithm will keep showing you that same type of content because the algorithm doesn't actually care what you prefer. It cares what keeps you engaged, and those are not the same thing.

We are collectively sacrificing beauty right now, in real time, and most people don't notice because the sacrifice happens gradually. Sacrificing meaning, sacrificing craft, sacrificing the basic idea that art should come from somewhere human and matter to someone. All of this gets sacrificed in service of algorithmic optimization, in service of feeding the machine that decides what gets seen and what disappears. Artists produce frantically, churning out as much work as possible in hopes that sheer volume will eventually yield something that triggers the algorithm's approval. Musicians design songs not around emotional coherence or narrative progression but around which fifteen-second clip is most likely to go viral on TikTok. Nobody cares what the lyrics mean because meaning isn't something the algorithm can parse or reward.

The digital art space, just like every other online community, suffers from what I can only describe as engineered dependency, both literal and structural. Content creators are constantly told they need to feed the social media algorithm to stay relevant, to stay visible, to stay economically viable. So they sacrifice actual

creation time to maintain their algorithmic presence, posting works in progress and process videos and behind the scenes content and engagement bait, all of which takes time that could have been spent making the actual work. And the problem is that the algorithm operates like a black hole. It consumes everything you throw at it and always demands more. It rewards a tiny percentage of creators essentially at random regardless of quality or effort or meaning, and everyone else has to just keep feeding it hoping they'll be next.

As this progresses, as the hunger grows, recycling old content stops being enough. The void gets harder to fill. The demand increases. At some point, and I think we're already there, the music stops and there's no more art left to feed into the machine because everyone's so busy creating content to feed the algorithm that nobody has time left to make anything real.

People look at my neon cities and say they want to move there. They don't understand. They already live there. The aesthetics are the only part that's missing, but I don't know if that's ever coming. We're not heading toward the cyberpunk future, we're already in it. As a matter of fact, we've been in it for years. We just haven't updated the lighting yet.

VII. On blockchain, Ethereum, permanence, and defensive acceleration

But there must be something good coming out of all this technology, progress and advancement, right? My thesis on digital art is straightforward and I've held it consistently for years: in the past fifty years, every tool and instrument we use has been progressively digitized. Music went digital. Photography went digital. Film production went digital. Design went digital. Communication went digital. Art, which has always moved in parallel with technological development, is, in my opinion, following the same inevitable trajectory. This isn't speculation about the future. This is observation about what's already happened and continues happening. We don't say 'I'm listening to digital music' when we stream something on Spotify. We just say we're listening to music. The digital part has become so default that it doesn't need specification anymore. Eventually, probably soon, we won't say 'digital art' either. We'll just say art.

The question, then, is not whether digital art is legitimate or real or worth taking seriously. That argument is decades obsolete. The question is how we ensure its permanence and how we maintain verifiable records of who made what when. Digital files are simultaneously more durable than physical objects (they don't decay, don't burn, don't flood) and more fragile (they depend on platforms that can shut down, formats that can become obsolete, companies that can go bankrupt and take your entire catalog with them).

Blockchain technology, specifically Ethereum, solves this problem in a way that nothing else quite manages. It's the first truly credibly neutral global system for establishing permanent, immutable records without requiring trust in any central authority. The chain itself is the authority, distributed across thousands of nodes running all over the world, and as long as those nodes keep running (which they have strong economic incentives to do), the record persists. Art stored on-chain carries cryptographic proof of its origin, its history, its entire chain of custody. That information cannot be altered retroactively, cannot be erased by corporate decision or government intervention, cannot be revised to suit whoever currently holds power.

This connects directly to what Vitalik was arguing about in his d/acc manifesto. He wasn't saying we should reject technological progress or try to slow down innovation. He was saying we should be thoughtful about what kind of progress we're building and who benefits from it. Defensive acceleration means building technology that defends individual agency and decentralizes power instead of concentrating it. Blockchain, done right, is exactly that kind of technology. It creates permanent records that no single entity controls. It enables true digital ownership without requiring permission from platforms or intermediaries. It makes censorship difficult not through centralized content moderation but through distributed architecture that doesn't have a single point of failure.

Ethereum specifically has become the world's supercomputer in this sense, a globally accessible credibly neutral platform for storing data and executing code without trusting any single party to maintain it honestly. On-chain artworks carry immutable provenance, cryptographic proof that this specific file was minted by this specific address at this specific moment in time. You don't have to trust third parties to authenticate the work. You can verify it yourself by checking the chain. Within this framework, my project “The Oathkeepers” represents my most conceptually radical work, not for what it produces but for what it stakes. The structure is simple: the project ends when I end. And with it I'm betting Ethereum will still be here in 40 years, or whatever I have left.

What strikes me about this approach is how thoroughly it contradicts the core cyberpunk fantasy that my work otherwise engages with. Cyberpunk traditionally assumes some version of technological transcendence, the death of the body, consciousness uploaded to digital eternity, the flesh as something you can eventually escape or upgrade or replace with better hardware. But The Oathkeepers does the opposite. It writes my physical death into a supposedly immortal medium. It deliberately cracks the illusion of digital permanence with the brute fact of biological limits. The blockchain might even be eternal but I won't be, and that temporal limit determines the final shape of the work.

In a hundred years, if the chain is still running and someone cares enough to

look, they'll be able to verify exactly how many artworks I made. The count will be final. The record closed. The oath kept. Blockchain doesn't lie and cannot be made to lie without computational resources that would cost more than the lie could possibly be worth. The truth, in this case, is that I will die, and when that happens this particular body of work will be complete in a way that most art never is.

As cryptocurrency and blockchain technology slowly get absorbed into the institutional structures they were originally meant to circumvent or replace, as 'crypto' becomes just another asset class that banks and hedge funds trade, I think the meaning of on-chain art will shift. Work that seemed purely speculative or financially motivated when it was made might eventually be understood as something else, something more aligned with what d/acc was trying to articulate. Work that actually used the technology to do something the old systems couldn't do. Maybe people will look back at this moment and recognize that some of us knew what we were building and why it mattered.

VIII. On craft, process and the algorithmic rat race

About fifteen years of sustained practice, of showing up and making things even when nobody was paying attention, even when it would have been easier or more profitable or more algorithmically rewarded to do something else. An ever-evolving path that keeps walking the line between documenting dystopia and acknowledging reality, between analyzing technology and staying human, between philosophy and the actual daily work of rendering images. The cat, unchanged through all these years, functions as the connective thread. It watches without judgment, explores without agenda, holds the balance without trying.

I don't hate AI and I'm not opposed to technological progress as such. I just reject the premise that everything must be optimized, that faster and more automated automatically equals better in all contexts. We hear this constantly, with almost religious certainty. But do we really need to apply that logic to art? Do we really need to optimize the creative process down to its most efficient possible form? Maybe I'm old-fashioned or maybe I'm just stubborn, but I genuinely love getting lost in the process of making something. I value the difficulty. I even value the parts I claim to hate, the frustration and failure and grinding technical problems that force you to solve things manually instead of letting an algorithm handle it. Those moments aren't obstacles to be eliminated. They're the substance of the practice itself. They're where the actual work happens.

The central challenge I set for myself, the thing that keeps this interesting after fifteen years, is trying to make something that screams “Dangiuz” but at the same

time feels innovative. There's a narrow space between genuine innovation and losing the thread entirely. Between developing your practice and abandoning what made it distinctive in the first place. That space is where I believe meaningful work lives. Sometimes I find it, sometimes I don't, but looking for it is mandatory. The attempt itself is the point.

The best compliment I can receive, the thing that tells me the work is doing what it should be doing, is when someone says 'when I see your work, I recognize it immediately.' Everything else, all the other metrics and measurements and markers of success, those are appreciated, but always negotiable.

IX. On color, geography, and the problem I haven't solved

I like to think that all my artworks exist within a single continuous universe, different windows into the same world at different moments and different locations. Not separate unconnected pieces but instances of an alternate timeline that branches and overlaps and contradicts itself the way real timelines do. Different places, different times, different characters, but all part of the same macrocosm. Viewers are free to construct their own connections between pieces, to build their own narratives from the fragments, but I maintain certain consistent internal rules. Chief among these is how color maps onto geography and economics.

The works dominated by warm tones, oranges and ambers and yellows, those depict the periphery of this world. The countryside, the margins, the zones where technology has penetrated less completely and poverty has filled the resulting gaps. These are not meant to be pastoral escapes or romanticized rural retreats, but rather places that progress abandoned, left behind by the same accelerating systems that light up the cold blue centers with such aggressive brightness and saturation. The cold palette, by contrast, marks the cores of power: the neon megacities, the zones of total technological saturation where every surface is a screen and every interaction gets mediated, monitored and optimized in real time.

But I'm increasingly aware that this chromatic scheme carries implications I didn't fully think through when I started developing it. In Western visual tradition, in the cinema that formed my aesthetic education, warmth represents flesh, the human body, the organic and mortal. Cold represents technology, precision, the rational and mechanical. By assigning warm tones to poverty while reserving cold precision for technological advancement, I'm not making a neutral aesthetic choice. I'm risking something I absolutely don't intend: making deprivation look beautiful, turning scarcity into something romantic and appealing, rendering economic marginalization as visually preferable to technological prosperity.

This is the biggest unresolved tension in my work, the place where my visual logic might actively undermine what I'm trying to communicate conceptually. And here's the irony: I realize I haven't solved this problem at all when I understand that I'm mostly recognizable by this very remarkable aqua and teal color palette, sometimes called Dangiuz Teal by people who've spent time with the work. My most popular pieces, the ones people respond to most strongly, feature exactly these cold blue-green shades that I'm simultaneously worried might be aestheticizing the wrong things. I've been thinking about it for years and I still don't have a good answer. Maybe there isn't a good answer. Maybe any color scheme I choose will carry unintended implications because color is never neutral, never just decorative, always loaded with cultural and psychological associations that exceed whatever the artist consciously intends.

And if there is something that distinguishes my approach from a lot of other science fiction art is the deliberate use of anachronism. I intentionally mix elements from our current moment with fragments from centuries ahead, superimposing different timelines to create productive dissonance. This is how I try to balance two contradictory kinds of nostalgia: mourning for things we had and are losing, and simultaneously mourning for futures we will never reach. Technologies that never got developed because we went a different direction. Social arrangements that seemed possible but didn't happen. The familiar rendered strange. The future feeling like a memory of something you never actually experienced but somehow recognize anyway. You'll also notice holographic elements recurring throughout the work. Other than the people, sometimes it's the holograms. A tiger, a dice, a geisha and features of some artists, artworks and contemporary events.

Time displacement as formal method. The past and future collapsed into a present moment that refuses to hold still long enough to be properly documented. By the time I finish rendering what I'm seeing, the thing I was trying to document has already shifted into something else, and the work I'm making becomes a record of something that no longer exists in quite that form. Maybe that's appropriate. Maybe that's the only honest way to make work about a reality that's changing faster than anyone can track.

X. Value, recognition and snake oil

I've never felt the need to position myself relative to other artists, to determine whether I qualify as an OG or a pioneer or a blue-chip or whatever other category gets used to sort people into hierarchies of importance. That these designations are arbitrary and fundamentally external to the actual work. I make what I make because it's the only reliable method I've found for articulating what I think about the world and the direction we're traveling. Whether that reaches an audience of

millions or dozens is genuinely secondary to the necessity of making it in the first place. The work exists whether or not anyone looks at it.

I'm a human being and obviously, down deep, I appreciate being included on prestigious lists or acquired by prominent collections, but these things don't change anything fundamental about the work or my relationship to making it. Some people appreciate what I do. Others don't. Both responses are completely legitimate. I don't chase people who show up already skeptical or dismissive. I've never felt compelled to convince anyone that my work deserves their attention. I'm just a spoke on the wheel and I'm grateful for the collectors who trust the vision.

To this point, I've often remarked how when someone acquires one of my pieces, I want them to be absolutely certain about that decision. I don't want the purchase to feel coerced or rushed or driven by artificial scarcity and FOMO tactics. People in crypto are the best at selling snake oil. I never did and never will promise future financial returns or suggest that buying the work is a smart investment decision. I know these strategies work. I know they'd probably accelerate my career trajectory. But they don't align with how I understand what I'm doing. And this is exactly what I'm most proud of, the fact that after all these years I've never promised anyone anything beyond the work itself. Just artworks that try to show you something you might have missed otherwise.

I'm fine with the digital art world valuing pioneering work based on technical innovation and early adoption. Those are legitimate criteria and I'm not going to argue against them. But if we only value those metrics, if we completely neglect questions of quality and vision and conceptual depth and what the work actually means or does, then we'll never achieve the cultural legitimacy that people claim to want. The space will calcify into a purely financial model, pure speculation divorced from aesthetic judgment, a market where mint date matters infinitely more than what the piece actually accomplishes. If you're collecting art based solely on what technology was used to create it, you're collecting technology, not art. And that's fine if technology is what you care about, but let's call things by their name and at least be clear about what we're doing.

My work does not pander to institutions or governments or established power structures, and a small part of me dies every time someone describes it as 'sleek' or 'futuristic' as if visual sophistication were the main point. I want you to enjoy looking at the images initially, because if they're not visually compelling you won't look long enough to see what they actually contain. But then I want you to feel increasingly uneasy about why these spaces feel so familiar, why you recognize these architectural forms and social arrangements, why these scenarios don't seem as distant or speculative as science fiction should supposedly feel. I'm not here to flatter existing power. I'm here to make it visible, to render it legible, to

ensure you can't unsee it once you've actually looked.

Don't mistake what I do for entertainment, don't expect me to package these images into brand-friendly carousel posts, because I already hate myself when I give in and share my art in optimized for maximum engagement metrics ways. Like I said, I can't opt out. I can only make work that feels like it's falling apart because we are falling apart, because the social and technological systems we depend on are showing increasing signs of fundamental instability, and no amount of clean minimalist design or aesthetic polish will hide that. My goal is not to be collected by every prominent institution and major figure in the space. My goal is to make them uncomfortable. To create work they can't quite ignore but also can't quite celebrate without admitting things about the world they'd prefer not to acknowledge.

Something that once started out positioned as anti-establishment and cypherpunk (cryptocurrency being the most obvious example but not the only one) gets slowly absorbed into the institutional structures they claimed to oppose, and I shouldn't think the meaning of my work will shift? Not necessarily its market value, though maybe that too, but certainly how it gets read and understood. My faint hope is that people will eventually look back at this moment and recognize that the critique was embedded in the images all along, visible to anyone willing to look closely, just waiting for the surrounding context to catch up. Cruel time brings recognition if you're patient enough to wait for it.

XI. To warn, not to impress

I've already stated countless times that my hope is that people who appreciate or collect my work understand what it's actually communicating. I deliberately make aesthetically appealing images, images that function as visual lures, because if the work wasn't compelling to look at initially you'd never stop scrolling long enough to see what it actually contains. But what I'm depicting is not aspirational. What I'm showing you is a warning about possible futures of total surveillance, algorithmic control, systematic erosion of privacy and autonomy and basic respect for human life and dignity. I lure you in with beauty so you'll stay long enough to see the warning underneath. I am not here to impress you. I am here to warn you.

People think they'll remember me, if they remember me at all, for the cyberpunk aesthetic. For the neon and the architecture and the technical execution and the visual style. But they'll actually remember me, assuming anyone bothers to look back at this moment with any care, as someone who showed them exactly what was coming and who they collectively ignored because the warning looked too polished and beautiful to take seriously. The work documents a trajectory. You're

already on that trajectory. The fact that you think it's cool just means the aesthetics are working as intended.

When art spreads beyond its intended audience and reaches people who weren't specifically looking for it, there's usually something working underneath the surface spectacle. Some quiet moral intuition operating below the aesthetics. The piece touches on questions that matter even if people can't quite articulate why they responded to it. This is part of why I remain grateful that my work has found the audience it has, not because popularity validates anything but because it suggests the warning is being received even if not everyone consciously understands they're receiving one.

And I can't state enough how important it is for me to hold on to the people who take real time to engage seriously with what I'm making, who ask substantive questions instead of performing polite interest or treating art as investment advice.

The world is moving toward a place where cyberpunk-themed art will end up in museums, will achieve institutional legitimacy that seemed impossible when I started. Not because I'm some visionary or master genius who saw the future, but because what's documented in the work is already happening in reality. The art doesn't predict where we're going. It shows where we already are. As that becomes more obvious to more people, the work stops reading as speculation and starts reading as documentation. A self-fulfilling prophecy in the sense that the future I painted is the future we're building, and the museum acquisition will just be institutional acknowledgment of what was already true.

Closing: the trajectory continues

The dystopia will continue until the reality improves. It may sound like a motto, but it's just an observation. And it's not even a pessimistic one. And before we get there, if we ever do, there's something we're losing in real time that nobody's paying enough attention to: the capacity for attention itself. Being able to really see art, to slow down enough to look and think about what you're seeing instead of just consuming it as content, that's becoming a luxury we're systematically losing access to. In a world of engineered distraction and relentless algorithmic feeds and AI generating infinite images instantly, we're forgetting that art's value often lives in the time it required to create and the attention it demands to properly see. The capacity for sustained attention is not a given. It's something we're actively losing, and once it's gone completely, getting it back will be harder than anyone wants to admit.

We're on a curve and the curve has momentum. Vitalik wrote about defensive accelerationism, about building technology that defends rather than dominates,

that decentralizes power instead of concentrating it. He's right. The problem is that the systems we're embedded in reward offense, not defense. They reward extraction over protection, scale over care, short-term profit over long-term sustainability. Individual good intentions don't alter structural incentives.

My work documents this trajectory. Not to stop it (I can't, nobody can) but to make it visible while there's still time to see it clearly. To show you the graph before we reach the endpoint. The world I don't want to see is the world we're actively building. The future depicted in my art has largely already happened. Most just haven't fully noticed yet because they're standing too close to see the whole pattern.

Intent is probably art's most reliable unit of measure. Everything else is context and noise and market forces beyond anyone's control. The work should speak for itself without needing extensive explanation. It should carry its meaning in the thing itself rather than in what gets projected onto it from outside.

In a hundred years, if the systems we depend on are still running and someone cares enough to look, my feeling is that my art will be filed as contemporary to the early 21st century. Not as prediction about distant futures but as documentation of a specific moment when the trajectory was visible and we kept building it anyway. The work shows what was already happening, just lit up enough that you might actually stop and look at it. Whether that documentation matters to anyone a hundred years from now, I have no way of knowing. But it matters now, and now is all I have to work with.

Freedom of speech. Freedom to transact. Freedom to be.

Leopoldo D'Angelo (Dangiuz)
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