



## AS IT IS

# South African Company Helps Create Local Art for Virtual World

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When South African artist Fhatuwani Mukheli paints at his workshop in Johannesburg, he creates two works at once. There is the traditional piece, an image on cloth, but also another that exists in the **virtual** world as **digital** art.

Mukheli uses The Tree, an online market for South African artists to share and sell their art as non-fungible tokens, or NFTs.

An NFT is based on a technology called blockchain, which is also used with digital money known as cryptocurrencies.

An NFT can be attached to a piece of digital artwork or other things existing in digital form. The NFT can be used to provide proof that the pieces are real. While anyone can view the work, the buyer has official ownership rights over the pieces.

Mukheli said, “There's a virtual world where people are buying land in it.” He was talking about the metaverse. The metaverse is a non-physical world in which individuals interact through different kinds of digital technology. Technology companies like Microsoft and Facebook say it is the future of the internet.

“People have properties there,” Mukheli said, adding “and your art can be on those walls.”

Buyers of Mukheli’s art receive both the physical art he makes in his workshop and the digital NFT. Other artists on The Tree sell up to five limited edition NFTs for each piece, or digital prints. Mukheli has already made thousands of dollars by using the service.

Trevor Stuurman is one of the artists on the Tree. He said, "I think it's important as an artist and a creative to always play where the ball is going and not necessarily where it's at."

Critics say blockchains, digital places used to store information, are not climate-friendly because they use a great amount of computing power.

The Tree says it saves energy by running on Polygon, a blockchain that uses much less power, and offsets each sale by sending money to Greenpop. Greenpop is an environmental organization that plants trees across much of Africa.

Dan Portal is one of the founders of The Tree. He said, "It's not just about art and artists and the story, it's about making sure that this growth in technology for artists doesn't come at a cost to the planet."

I'm Gregory Stachel.

*Sisipho Skweyiya reported this story for Reuters. Gregory Stachel adapted it for VOA Learning English.*

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## Words in This Story

**virtual** – *adj.* existing or occurring on computers or on the Internet

**digital** – *adj.* using or characterized by computer technology

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