

ARTIST STATEMENT|MUSHROOM CLOUD

In the face of ongoing catastrophic climate news, I find myself vacillating between abject despair and stubborn optimism. The *Mushroom Cloud Project* was forged in that dynamic nexus and dwells in both spaces simultaneously.

I created an animated AR artwork of a mushroom cloud over the ocean to underscore both the destruction and fragility of all interdependent ecosystems, and to signal human responsibility. As a destabilized ocean stealthily encroaches on all coastlines, the mushroom cloud by contrast arguably remains the most recognizable symbol of man-made cataclysm. Our extractive disrespect for nature has turned nature against us, and we are unprepared for its impact.

The AR drawing explodes up from the ocean surface and then transforms overhead into a cloud of a different kind; a resilient and generative mycelial network (fungal colonies which form the connective tissue of all carbon-based life on earth) in the sky. I'm considering the aftermath. How might we survive our imperiled future without coordinated leadership? And if current models are failing to produce that leadership, where should we turn?

I have summoned the decentralized and equitable model of mycelium once before, in a recent AR monument geolocated over Los Angeles City Hall, imagining a new civic accountability rooted in efficient regeneration and community care. In *Mushroom Cloud*, I want to extend this dialogue into the threat of extinction—a morbid subject of increasing urgency.

This project invites direct action in the form of NFT video captures, related sculptural objects or “nodes”, and purely digital images of abstract spores. Each represents a stage of engagement and participation in a newly imagined system of accountability. In collaboration with art attorney Sarah Conley Odenkirk, we are deploying the transparent, contractual language of blockchain in a web 3-friendly “network blueprint” to frame value as ethical *values*, asking collectors to seed regenerative networks of care by gifting one or more of the “node” sculptures to a person or people to whom one is deeply connected. Digital “spores” might be more widely distributed as an appeal to build infinite hyphae- the branching filaments of mycelium. Slowly but powerfully, we could grow a supportive network, like mycelium, based on self-repairing structures. By blanketing the sky with this poetics of interconnectedness, I invite viewers to perceive a multi-nodal, communal, often invisible cloud—one that might privilege interdependence and generosity. With reconceived accountabilities, perhaps we could prompt a productive balance of grief and hope, shattering and coalescing, and decomposition and rebirth.

-Nancy Baker Cahill