

Name of Project:

Sim Sim

List three words that describe your proposal:

VR

Carpentry

Startup

One-sentence description of the work for which you are seeking support:

Can a tech startup be art?

Full description of the proposed project (500 word maximum):

Sim Sim (short for *Simulation Simulation*) is a performance of conscious capitalism, in the form of a fake/real tech startup called FTW, Inc. (short for Fix the World, Incorporated).

FTW proposes to get its start with seed funding from angel investment group LACMA, which recently put out a call for non-traditional ventures in emerging technologies and exploratory ideas. FTW proposes to answer this call with its flagship product: a carpentry simulator (called *Carpentry Simulator*).

The aim of *Carpentry Simulator* is to teach basic carpentry skills and construction methods for real-world, hands-on applications -- by using virtual reality to actively engage users in many of the physical and spatial nuances of the trade.

The aim of FTW is to help provide shelter to those who need it most -- by donating its profits to humanitarian housing organizations (e.g., Habitat for Humanity, Red Cross, Mercy Corps, UNHCR, etc.).

The aim of *Sim Sim* is to suggest a new model for arts philanthropy, tech startups, and social practice in the arts -- by using LACMA's money to make more money (to give away).

Within six months, FTW hopes to have developed enough of a working prototype for a more fully featured *Carpentry Simulator* to attract further investment -- whether it's from wealthy donors (like LACMA) or the public (i.e., Kickstarter, IndieGoGo, Patreon, etc.).

FTW proposes to hire a rockstar team of nice, hard-working hustlers moving fast and breaking things in the burgeoning VR space. FTW will be looking for potential collaborators primarily in the Portland metro area, with recruitment aimed specifically at Xhurch, Ctrl-H, VR Meetup groups, and WeWork (where FTW intends to rent an office). Master carpenters from high-end residential construction firms (e.g., Don Tankersley & Co., Green Gables, Hammer & Hand, Otis Construction, etc.) will be interviewed for their interest in advising FTW, as well.

Carpentry Simulator itself would use the free-to-play model (popularized by games like *Fortnite* and *Candy Crush*), and would be supported by in-game purchases (e.g., new tools, gear, materials, special techniques, etc. designed to enhance workflow and the gameplay experience generally) and in-game advertisements (for real-world home improvement brands and resources).

As a gamified teaching tool, *Carpentry Simulator* is not a traditional video game, exactly, nor is it a musty instructional seminar. Like many games, players progress through a series of tutorials and challenges designed for the maximum extraction and indulgence of compulsive behavior, and are rewarded with ever more challenges, skills, tools, and options. Players can work together online as a team, or in competition, teaching or learning as they go, giving feedback, trading barbs, and sharing ideas and designs. And at its heart is a craftsman's obsessive attention to detail. To build a wall, for example, players would have to physically reach for a (virtual) tape measure, make their marks, cut their lumber and plywood, hook a nail gun up to a compressor, and pop each individual nail in place.

Carpentry Simulator hopes to occupy a singular position in the VR market -- not only for leveraging the strengths of the medium (its uncompromising commitment to total immersion), or overlapping neatly with the subject of its representation (the *embodied* experience of carpentry and construction work), but for giving VR (and technology (and art)) a uniquely compelling *raison d'être*: not to take people further away from the real world, but to bring them closer to it.

Similarly, as a conscious capitalist enterprise, FTW, Inc. hopes to occupy a singular position in the tech industry by *actually* delivering on its utopian/evangelist promise of a better world -- not by virtue of brute force marketing or hopelessly internalized branding, but by *literally* building it.

And finally, *Sim Sim* hopes to carve out a singular space in art history -- by being the world's first conceptual tech startup.

Please include a bio of the principal artist or collective who will be responsible for this project (this may be in the form of a CV):

Joey Edwards (born 1984 in Arcata, CA) is a Filipino-American multi-hyphenated creative with a background in art, design, illustration, photography, and writing. He grew up in the US, the Philippines, Morocco, and India. He earned a BA in Art (2008) from Lewis & Clark College, and an MFA in Applied Craft and Design (2014) from the Pacific Northwest College of Art. His MFA thesis was a 3D-printed meditation on the small-mindedness of big data. He is currently a prospective candidate for a Master's in Architecture at the University of Oregon.

Please describe the artistic or creative merit of the proposed project (250 word maximum):

In 2017, Ian Bogost wrote an article for the *Atlantic* called "Tech Start-Ups Have Become Conceptual Art," in which he describes many of the same ideas I have attempted to articulate here. (For what it's worth, I found this essay only after I'd begun research for this project.) Key among them:

"If markets themselves have become the predominant form of everyday life, then it stands to reason that artists should make use of those materials as the formal basis of their works. The implications from this are disturbing. Taken to an extreme, the most formally interesting contemporary conceptual art sits behind Bloomberg terminals instead of plexiglass vitrines. [...] Even so, finance is too abstract, too extreme, and too poorly aestheticized to operate as human culture. But Silicon Valley start-ups offer just the right blend of boundary-pushing, human intrigue, ordinary life, and perverse financialization to become the heirs to the avant-garde."

I am not certain that a conceptual project like *Sim Sim* has ever actually been attempted, and for that reason alone -- for its sheer novelty, audacity, and implausibility -- I believe it contains some degree of creative merit. But by no means does it exist in a vacuum. Everything from Duchamp's urinal, to LeWitt's instructions, to Tiravanija's *pad thai*, to Hirst's skull, to Stephanie Syjuco's fake shop of orange objects -- all constitute some aspect of *Sim Sim*'s lineage -- and all, I am sure, contain at least *some* degree of creative merit.

Why do you consider this project to be a meaningful exploration of emerging technology? (250 word maximum)

+

In what ways does your project inspire dialogue about the issues at hand, including the relationship between technology and culture? (250 word maximum):

What is more indicative of technology's power in the world today? Is it the latest whiz-bang tech, on its face? Or could it be the underlying structure of its profound financial power (as pure wealth) and socio-political power (as ambivalent mediation)?

It would be one thing to propose an art project employing new technologies; it would be another thing to propose a new technology, artfully implemented. This is neither of these, exactly. Rather than mirror familiar binary master/servant relationships, in which one party acts in the service of another (art/tech, artist/viewer, coder/user, institution/client, company/customer), this project proposes a confrontation with, and subversion of, the fact that both the art world and the tech industry are really just instruments (i.e., servants) of wealth above all.

Money is the medium. And the medium is the message. The question is: Can this be something other than ugly?

This project would be an attempt to find out. Like so much of the arts, the crux of the matter is generosity. Even if the methods and machinery stink, is the project ultimately more giving of itself, to the world, to culture, to people -- than it is to itself? As a project inextricable from capitalist modes, then, the question again is intent -- what to do with its profits -- and *Sim Sim* intends (in a rough appropriation of Sol LeWitt's words) to be a machine that makes the money that makes the art that gives itself away.

Please describe your proposed plan for public engagement. What opportunities do you foresee to share prototypes, demonstrations, and process with the public? (100 word maximum):

The primary venue for *Carpentry Simulator* (the VR game) would be online -- anyone with access to a VR kit would be able to access it.

The primary venue for FTW, Inc. (the fake/real company) would be its office at WeWork (or a recreation of it in LA) -- anyone can stop by and ask us about the ins and outs of the company's work (but probably not about *Sim Sim*, which may be over our heads in that specific context).

The primary venue for *Sim Sim* (the overarching conceptual art project) would be a more traditional installation, demo, and artist lecture at LACMA.

What data will your project produce that may be of interest to other artists, technologists, or arts organizations? (250 word maximum):

All user-created content shared within *Carpentry Simulator* may be repurposed in a manner similar to *Minecraft*, *TinkerCAD*, *Thingiverse*, etc.

Please list any other sources of funding for this project, including in-kind support, and, if applicable, any conditions related to that funding or support:

See project description above.

Total amount requested: \$50,000

Detailed project budget (please include direct costs, including materials, software licenses, etc., and any artist fees as well as fees for any other contributors to the project):

\$1,600: 2 x HTC Vive Pro VR kits

\$4,000: 2 x Alienware VR-ready PCs

\$3,000: 2 x Unity Pro VR annual software subscriptions

\$4,800: 8 months of rent at WeWork in Portland

\$25,600: 640 hours of labor for 2 employees at \$20/hr

\$10,000: artist fee

\$1,000: charity

KEY MILESTONES (Major steps in the project development)

25% (May - July 2019): Consultation, hiring, prototype development

50% (August - October 2019): Proof of concept complete, crowdfunding begins

75% (November 2019 - January 2020): Continue software development, begin developing public online platform, expand company

100% (February - April 2020): Prepare for final LACMA exhibition