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Ant Group's Topnod Brings Blockchain to Art

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Ant Group is pushing the boundaries of blockchain use beyond finance with the launch of its digital art platform *Topnod*, signaling a broader strategy to apply decentralized technologies in China's cultural and creative sectors. The move reflects growing interest in using blockchain for more than just transactions, targeting the rising demand for digital ownership and micro-investments in the arts.

According to a report from *Sina Technology News* on August 4, Topnod introduced its “Online Digital Art Exhibition” as a new model for creators and collectors. Unlike traditional business-to-consumer (B2C) platforms, Topnod allows artists to upload their work only

after passing a strict copyright review. Each piece, once sold, is permanently recorded on the blockchain with a unique digital identification number, providing secure and verifiable ownership and copyright protection.

The platform follows a “pre-sale + public sale” approach. During the pre-sale phase, public interest helps determine whether an artwork will be issued, how many copies are minted, and its pricing. Public sales then open to a wider audience based on those decisions. Prices range from 8 to 28 yuan (approximately \$1–\$4), allowing users to support creators in a tip-like fashion rather than through high-cost purchases. Within three hours of launch, users had already reserved over 4,000 pieces, showing early signs of interest.

Participants in this first wave include painter *Dai Dunbang* and recent graduates from art academies. Topnod’s goal is to provide visibility for emerging and established artists, while using real-time feedback to guide future work. A program manager noted that Topnod will allocate internal and external resources to drive traffic to artist shops and support fan engagement, indicating a serious push to build a vibrant digital creative community.

Topnod is also laying the groundwork for a broader digital artist ecosystem, connecting online exposure with offline events and collaboration among creators. If successful, this strategy could serve as a model for other marketing-seeking companies to integrate blockchain into the art and cultural industries.

Ant Group, a key affiliate of *Alibaba Group* and operator of the popular mobile payment service *Alipay*, has long been involved in blockchain development. Previous applications have included tools for supply chain tracking, cross-border trade, and intellectual property (IP) protection. With Topnod, Ant Group is expanding its blockchain reach into everyday consumer experiences. Beyond payments and into digital identity, data management, and now, creative expression.

While challenges remain, such as regulatory scrutiny, public trust, and long-term creator sustainability, Topnod offers a glimpse into how blockchain might reshape the future of digital art and ownership.