

Anne Spalter: *Down is Up*

Curated by Francesca Franco
SPRING/BREAK Art Show 2019
866 United Nations Plaza, Suite 15
March 5 – 11, 2019

PRESS CONTACT

Molly Krause
molly@molly.nyc
Molly Krause Communications
Images: www.molly.nyc/downisup

New York, NY – March 2019 – Anne Spalter, creator of Brown’s and RISD’s original digital fine arts programs in the 1990s – and author of the seminal textbook, *The Computer in the Visual Arts* (Addison Wesley) – is exhibiting a psychedelic mixed-media installation for her fifth presentation with SPRING/BREAK Art Show. The installation, entitled *Down is Up*, is curated by Venetian-raised, U.K.-based art-and-technology historian Francesca Franco.



Installation views of *Down is Up*

This year, to address the fair’s theme of ‘Fact and Fiction,’ Spalter explores the absurdity of the current state of public affairs by literally flipping the world upside down: the sky on the floor, and the ground on the ceiling. In order to achieve a fully immersive effect, every pattern in the room, on every surface, is of Spalter’s own digital creation. The sky floor, a custom-printed foam puzzle mat, is dotted with six custom-printed cloud beanbags that visitors are invited to sit down on. The ceiling, with its road pattern, is the result of Spalter methodically replacing the vinyl ceiling panels (of the venue’s corporate office past) with custom-printed foamcore segments. The imagery of the foamcore ceiling seamlessly transitions to a custom-printed fabric curtain, which lightly veils a set of six four-foot LED rods illuminating the installation’s beacon-like focal point.

On a conceptual level, *Down is Up* uses Carl Jung’s early writings on UFOs (*Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Sky*, 1958) as a way to visually examine the alarmingly widespread societal belief in conspiracy theories and “fake news.” The installation is packed with iconography and symbolism in what collectively becomes a sort of parallel universe with visual cues like cactuses, highway signs, and open roads reminiscent of the extraterrestrial-evangelist hotbed of Roswell, New Mexico.

Expanding on Spalter’s practice of digitally manipulating source footage with custom software, *Down is Up* incorporates five framed drawings, hung salon-style, that meld traditional markmaking with digital manipulation. In each work, Spalter has punctuated the crystalline symmetry of her digital prints with an overlay of hand-drawn iconography. A tangible representation of Carl Jung’s writings, the resultant artworks contrast simple, analog truths with elaborate, digital manipulations.

According to a National Geographic survey, nearly 40% of Americans believe that aliens have visited earth—and a whopping 20% believe that people from earth have been abducted by said aliens. Carl Jung explains the rationale behind this belief through the idea

that our collective unconscious might feel a need for something strange and beautiful to come from the beyond and rescue us from troubled times. This notion is further explored by a school of modern-day psychologists, who correlate the fall-off in religious beliefs with an increase in belief in the paranormal and occult.

While reflecting on the paradoxes connected to an alarming portion of the population's psychological desire to believe in things that may not be factually true (like UFOs), *Down is Up* also offers a vivid snapshot of today's collective social insecurities and anxieties. In keeping with the theme of 'Fact and Fiction,' the installation presents a psychedelic, hallucinatory, kaleidoscopic, and mandala-like atmosphere that, in a timely analysis, touches on the need for escapism felt by large parts of society in the current political landscape.

Back in the 1950s, Jung called UFOs "technological and salvationist fantasies;" "symbols of unconscious psychic projections." In other words, the truth is in the mind of the perceiver. The same can be said about the current state of our country and administration; combined with constant news updates that we expect again and again—to no avail—to be the "smoking gun," we are truly living in a world where up is down and down is up.

Overall, *Down is Up* draws on the discourse theories of Foucault and Latour, and the psychological theories of Carl Jung, to question how we understand science and how "truth" is socially constructed through images, media, and technology.

Following a preview day on Tuesday, March 5 from 11 a.m. – 8 p.m., Down is Up will be on view at SPRING/BREAK Art Show (866 United Nations Plaza), open daily through Monday, March 11. Opening hours are 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Visit www.annespalter.com for more information.



ABOUT ANNE SPALTER

Digital mixed-media artist Anne Spalter is an academic pioneer who founded the original digital fine arts programs at Brown University and The Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) in the 1990s. With a decades-long goal of integrating art and technology, Spalter has authored over a dozen academic papers and the seminal, internationally taught textbook, *The Computer in the Visual Arts* (Addison-Wesley, 1999).

Spalter's classical arts education (she received an MFA in painting from RISD) combined with her foundational command of digital art theory and practice suited her well when she transitioned from academia to a full-time studio practice in 2009. Her work is in the permanent collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum (London, UK); the Albright-Knox Art Gallery (Buffalo, NY); the Rhode Island School of Design Museum (Providence, RI); and others.

She is also noted for her large-scale public projects; in 2016, MTA Arts commissioned Spalter to create a 52-screen digital art installation, *New York Dreaming*, which remained on view in one of its most crowded commuter hubs (Fulton Center) through Fall 2017. Through early 2019, Spalter's video work, *Turning Festival*, was on view in the Hong Kong Harbor, displayed by LED at a dimension of 47,000 square feet on the Tsim Sha Tsui and Empire Centre buildings.

Spalter's artistic process employs a hybrid arsenal of traditional and innovative digital tools. For her digital mark making, Spalter uses custom software to transform source footage—which she captures during multisensory experiences such as riding the Coney Island Cyclone; walking through an open-air flower market in Bangkok; and gazing down from a helicopter over downtown Dubai—into kaleidoscopic, algorithmically manipulated "Modern Landscapes." Having studied mathematics as a Brown undergraduate (and with additional cross-disciplinary masteries including a 2010 black belt and 2011 Sensei designation in Kenpo Karate), Spalter's eclectic influences in the studio are as diverse as Buddhist art, Jungian archetypes, Surrealism, and pure mathematics. Spalter regularly lectures on digital art practice and theory, with recent speaking venues including the National Arts Club (New York) and Design Miami, for the latter of which she discussed the cultural impact of new technologies.