

**Anne Spalter: PLAGUE PLANET**  
Curated by Margot McIlwain Nishimura  
SPRING/BREAK Art Show NYC 2021  
ROOM #1113  
625 Madison Ave, NYC, NY  
September 8-13, 2021

PRESS CONTACT  
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Images: <https://tinyurl.com/rs3hrb75>

## Anne Spalter's Narrative Tapestries are Portable Art to Escape a Dying Planet

New York, NY— September 2021 – *As the world buckles down for another round of pandemic-induced restrictions, we are starting to understand that our lives may be changed forever. This project envisions a near future in which computer models have severely underpredicted polar glacial melting, and vast portions of today's land areas have flooded. Global warming has led to a series of fires that burn unpredictably and are almost impossible to extinguish. At the same time, sudden cold snaps and ice storms form out of nowhere, bringing freezing temperatures and damaging hail, destroying the earth's remaining crops.*



Plague Planet, Installation Views

As the wealthy did in Medieval times, the uber-rich of this catastrophic future activate their escape plans. Some move to floating cities on endlessly drifting yachts and others board spacecraft heading to find new worlds beyond our own. In the same way that the courts of the Middle Ages would bring their tapestries with them to each seasonal castle, so the escapees from our Plague Planet will be able to fold up the art that tells the story of these times for future generations. Digital Jacquard weaving references the Jacquard loom's key role in history as the first computational device programmable with punch cards.

Content ranges from apocalyptic scenes of the Plague Planet to vessels drifting forever at sea and new forms of space travel. The final products display status and wealth, preserve historical narrative, and express the hope of new beginnings.

To honor the pros and cons of today's technology, all the images in this installation are created with artificial intelligence (AI). (For the technically inclined, the process used a combination of GANs based on custom image sets, style transfer techniques and VQGAN+CLIP, aka text-to-image.) Just as the lack of linear perspective characterizes the approach to plastic and narrative space in Medieval tapestries, so AI goes beyond Renaissance and photographic perspective to bring a new approach to defining space.

Tapestries were typically hung in many different architectural settings during their lifetime, making the impromptu nature of a Spring/Break Art Show installation particularly apt. Growth sequences of AI-created gems are the basis for the room's wallcovering, further customizing the space.

Spalter was inspired by several key 14th century tapestry series but none more than the Apocalypse tapestry in Angers, France, depicting scenes from The Book of Revelation. Pundits have claimed the current global pandemic is a signal of the end of days, and thus textiles seemed an appropriate medium to help her ponder our moment in time and potential future. She was also influenced by modern "war rugs," hand hooked carpets from war-torn areas in the Middle East incorporating military iconography.

"Using tapestry helped me connect with the recurring fears of mankind during historical plagues, wars, and political unrest," Spalter says.

All tapestries are unique.

PRESS PREVIEW: Wednesday, September 8 // 11am - 5pm FIRST LOOK COLLECTORS PREVIEW: Wednesday, September 8 // 11am - 5pm COLLECTORS PREVIEW DAY (extended): Thursday, September 9 // 11am - 5pm VIP PREVIEW NIGHTS: Wednesday, September 8 // 5pm - 9pm, Thursday, September 9 // 5pm - 9pm REGULAR SHOW DAYS: September 10 - 13 // 11am - 8pm Tickets: [www.springbreakartshow.com](http://www.springbreakartshow.com)



**Margot McIlwain Nishimura** is a specialist in medieval and Renaissance art with a Ph.D. from the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University and a B.A. in art history from Smith College. She has written numerous articles on illuminated manuscripts and is author of *Images in the Margins*, published by the Getty Museum as part of their "Medieval Imagination" series. Margot has taught the history of medieval art at the University of Cape Town, Smith College, Mt. Holyoke College, Brown University, and the Rhode Island School of Design and curated or contributed to exhibitions for the Getty Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Newport Restoration Foundation. From 2011 to 2014, she was Deputy Director and Librarian of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University. From December 2014 to May 2018 she served as the Deputy Director for Collections, Programs, and Public Engagement (to June 2017) and then the Director of Museums for the Newport Restoration Foundation (NRF), which was founded in 1968 by the philanthropist Doris Duke. Since July 2018, she has been the Dean of Libraries at the Rhode Island School of Design, where she also shares her knowledge of medieval and Renaissance art practices, iconography, and modes of visual presentation with art and design students and faculty working on twenty-first-century creative challenges.

**Anne Spalter** is a digital mixed-media artist and academic pioneer who founded the original digital fine arts courses at Brown University and The Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) in the 1990s and authored the internationally taught textbook, *The Computer in the Visual Arts* (Addison-Wesley, 1999).

Her artistic process combines a consistent set of personal symbols with a hybrid arsenal of traditional mark-making methods and innovative digital tools. A new body of work, further developed at a Winter 2019 residency at MASS MoCA, combines artificial intelligence algorithms with oil paint and pastels. She is currently creating work for the blockchain.

Spalter is also noted for her large-scale public projects. 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) for just under a year. Spalter's 2019 large-scale projects included a 47,000 square foot LED video work on the Hong Kong harbor.

Spalter's 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); The Museum of CryptoArt, and others. Alongside her studio practice, Spalter continues to lecture on digital art practice and theory.