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Anne Spalter "Precession" at SPRING/BREAK Art Show



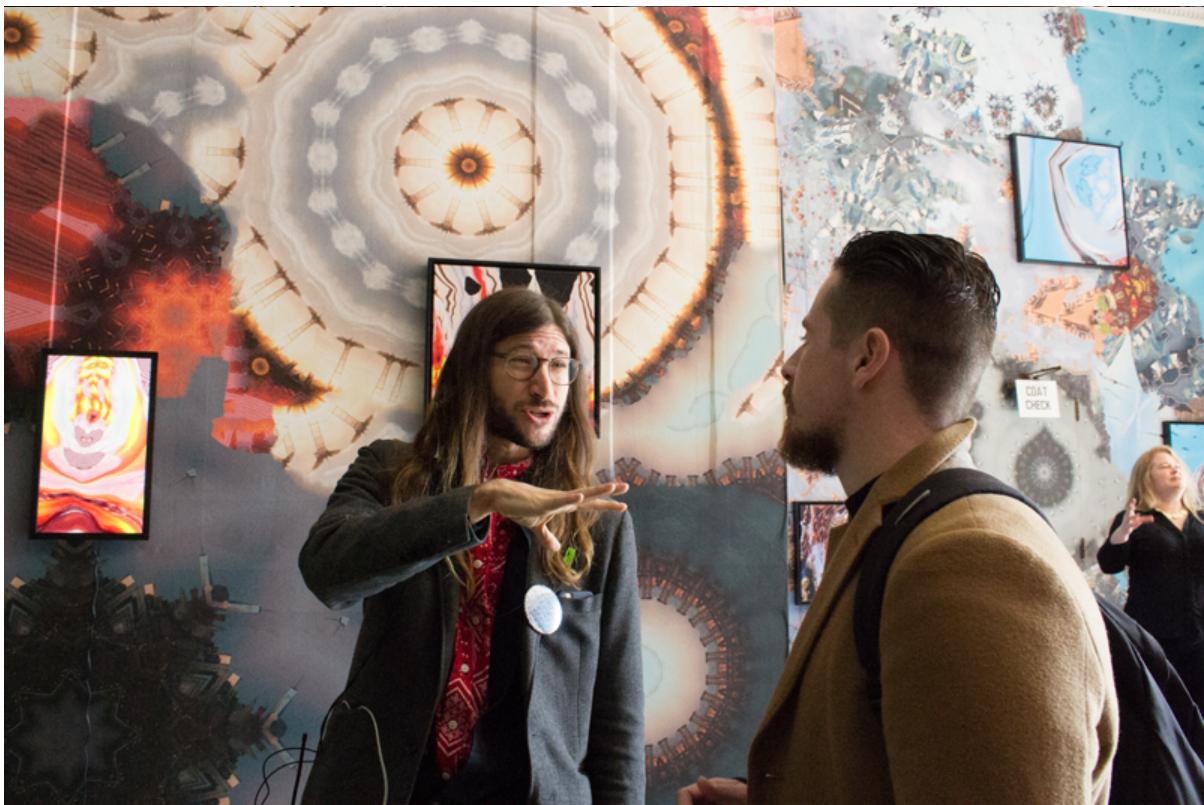
Anne Spalter; photo by Mizuki Iwase

Anne Spalter's "Precession"

By KURT MCVEY, MAR. 2016

"I went to college in the 80's and if you studied humanities in the 80s, you read Baudrillard," says Anne Spalter, a self professed RISD person and highly accomplished multi-media artist who's latest installation, *Precession*, a kaleidoscopic digital mandala of whirling New York ephemera, currently graces the lobby walls of the always playful SPRING/BREAK Art Show (<http://www.springbreakartshow.com>), now enjoying a considerably more confident second year (5th overall) at Skylight in Moynihan Station.

"I read it and was like, whoa," Spalter adds, referring back to Baudrillard's acclaimed philosophical treatise, *Simulacra & Simulation*, which seemed to have had a similar effect on Keanu Reeves in the first *Matrix* film, which also borrowed heavily from S&S's main idea that our current society has replaced all reality and meaning with symbols and signs, and that human experience is ultimately a simulation of reality. "We understand things through digital models, especially now with social media. I wish he [Baudrillard] lived to see it."



Andrew Gori and Adam Lehrer Photo by Mizuki Iwase





Kara Brooks, Photo by Mizuki Iwase



Raphael Spalter, photo by Mizuki Iwase

The title of Spalter's collective micro-cosmos of algorithmically manipulated digital wallpaper, video, and digital paintings, *Precession*, comes from a quote in Baudrillard's seminal 1981 masterpiece, where he claims that symbolic representations have come to precede organic perception. If our consumption, re-appropriation, and ultimate re-distribution of art works, installations, and performances (already simulations) at contemporary art fairs via our hand-held devices and applications like Instagram isn't a mutable "precession of simulacra," as the author puts it, than nothing is or will ever be. Spalter, like many contemporary artists, seems to openly embrace this idea, creating an admittedly decorative but highly complex installation that serves as an obvious photo opportunity for iPhone wielding fair-goers while never compromising her love of painting, primarily by acknowledging how computers can assist and propel her love of the medium as opposed to alienating her from it. "I still feel like I'm painting," says Spalter, who received her MFA in painting at the Rhode Island School of Design. "In fact, I feel like I paint better with this new medium. I can do things that I can't do with traditional paint, but a lot of the thought process and making process is the same."



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Phil Shaw, photo by Mizuki Iwase



Segment of Precession, photo by Mizuki Iwase

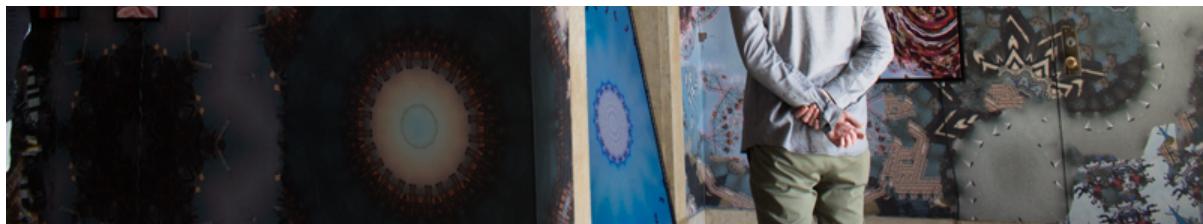
For all the works in *Precession*, which were gracefully curated by Anne's College Hill partner in crime, the lovely and talented Elizabeth Keithline, the process starts by collecting the original video, which the artist says she enjoys the most. Spalter went as far to collect aerial skyline footage via helicopter flown by a "crazy pilot" who luckily disregarded many regulatory mandates while flying dangerously low over the East River and tightly around the Chrysler building, which she sites as a thrilling project highlight. "Every time I go to record video, it's an adventure, an action piece, or a performance," she says. "It's very different from taking a photo. It's more meditative. You're really observing."

~~Spalter~~, who just recently moved back to NY from RI, where she spends quite a bit of time teaching at Brown and RISD—where she created the school’s first digital art course and published the highly influential textbook, *The Computer and Visual Arts*—seems to be looking at New York, whether it’s Coney Island, Williamsburg (where she currently lives), or Times Square—with fresh eyes. This allows her to glorify the city’s most iconic buildings, bridges and landmarks with the gleaming eye of a tourist while deconstructing their meta-cultural context with romantic professorial scrutiny. “In the amusement park, you’re paying to be afraid and have this whirlwind experience,” notes Spalter, who despite not having yet braved the famous Cyclone roller coaster, a NY right of passage, observed striking similarities between city architecture and other dubious structures at Coney Island. “In the real city you’re trying to get on the subway and not be afraid, which can also be a whirlwind experience. It seemed like they were both good models for each other.”



Rachel Monosov, photo by Mizuki Iwase





Kurt McVey, photo by Mizuki Iwase

After collecting the source material, Spalter uses various custom plug-ins, as well as Photoshop and Adobe After Effects to create the works, often pulling patterns, prints and video segments from one completed piece in order to make an entirely new image or video in an iterative, cyclical hyper-meta narrative using candid human subjects and modern landscape iconography, re-contextualized as equally represented heavenly bodies spinning on their own axis while moving on a larger, alternate axis, very much like our rotating Earth perpetually swirling around the Sun within our Milky Way galaxy, or if you prefer the micro-example, the dizzying “Tea-Cup” ride at Disneyland, a place which Baudrillard once said was the “real America.”





Coke Wisdom O'Neal, photo by Mizuki Iwase

If you were wondering if Spalter's enthusiasm for trippy digital expressionism is the result of a scrupulous history with psychedelics, you'd be mistaken. "I'm like Salvador Dali-I don't take drugs, I am drugs," Spalter says with a laugh and a faux mustache twirl. In fact, *Precession* owes a great deal to Spalter's time moonlighting as a Math major at Brown, where the tried and true rules behind algebra and geometry (sacred or not) soothed her wild artistic instincts. "There's the objective part of the landscape, which is the video recording and there's the internal subjective part, so to me, it brings order, which I like."



Joey Frank, photo by Mizuki Iwase

Precession will be on view at Skylight at Moynihan Station (421 Eighth Avenue at 34th Street) until 5pm Monday, March 7th. Generous sponsorship for *Precession* comes from Spoonflower, which fabricated the custom wallpaper, and Electric Objects, which provided the installations video screens. **WM**

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photo by Monet Lucki

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