

WHITNEY

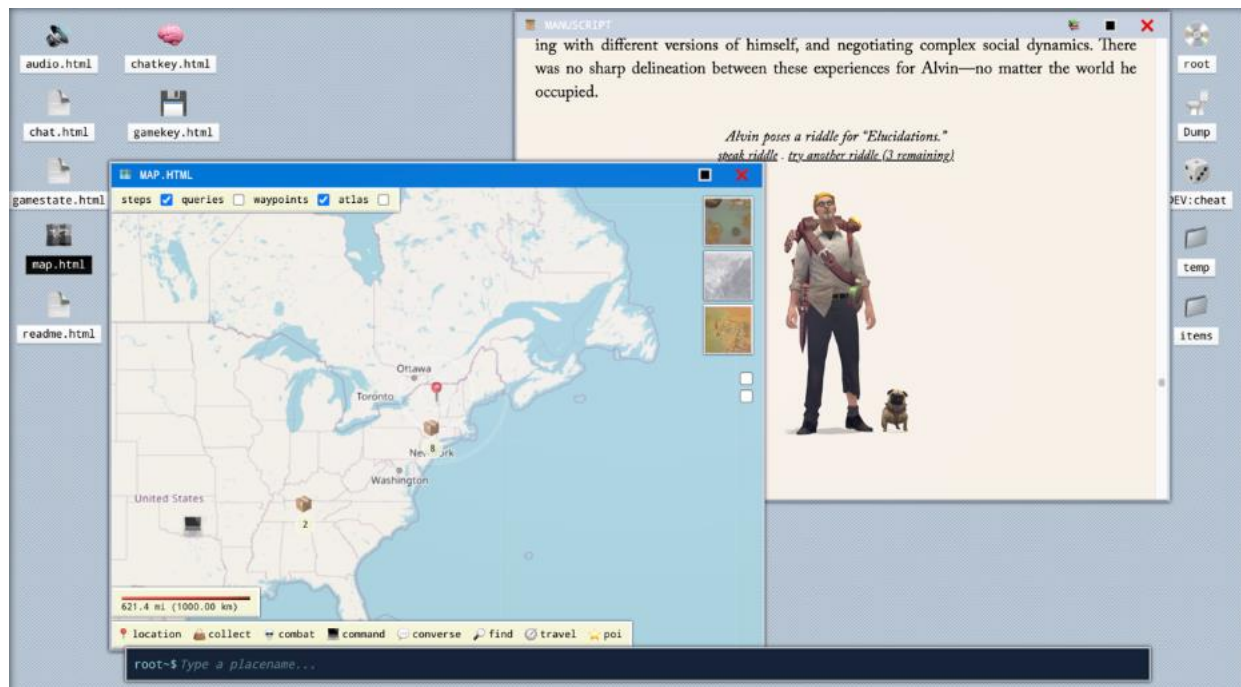
Whitney Museum
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PRESS RELEASE

WHITNEY MUSEUM LAUNCHES ROBERT NIDEFFER'S NEW DIGITAL ARTWORK BLENDING AUTOBIOGRAPHY, FICTION, AND GAMING



Artist Robert Nideffer's latest project launches on whitney.org and explores how identity, memory, and history transform through long-term immersion in virtual worlds.

New York, NY, November 4, 2025 — The Whitney Museum of American Art launches [12 Years in Azeroth – The Journey Begins](#), a digital art project by Robert Nideffer commissioned for artport, the Museum's online gallery space for Internet art. With *12 Years in Azeroth – The Journey Begins*, Nideffer blends autobiography, fiction, and game design to examine a 12-year engagement in the online game *World of Warcraft*. Serving as the entry point, *The Journey Begins* is the initial section of the artist's interactive fiction, which follows with four additional parts Nideffer is launching throughout the coming year.

12 Years in Azeroth – The Journey Begins is an exploration of how identity, memory, and history intertwine and are shaped by long-term immersion in virtual worlds, specifically Nideffer's experience in the digital space of *World of Warcraft*. Tracing the artist's 12-year immersion in the game's virtual world, the project narrative spans 2006 to 2018 and unfolds across three avatars, three historical periods, and three interlaced worlds: Earth, Azeroth, and Middle-earth. The project is anchored by a browser-based electronic manuscript and a companion game.

Through this digital artwork, Nideffer investigates the blurring of boundaries between self and avatar, fact and fiction, and reality and the game.

“Robert Nideffer’s *12 Years in Azeroth* is a highly original take on the auto-fiction genre that makes gaming the form and content of the experience,” said Christiane Paul, Curator of Digital Art at the Whitney. “Using conventions of gameplay and ethnography, the work fuses a personal journey with a long-time experience of playing *World of Warcraft*.”

Upon entering the experience Nideffer has created, visitors will engage with a retro-style virtual desktop where they can access files, read the manuscript, or enter the game world through a prompt that accepts the player’s typed commands and responses. Players can alternate between three map views in the game—Earth represented by a geographic world map, Azeroth referring to the imagined world where a major portion of the *World of Warcraft* game is set, and Middle-earth alluding to the fictional continent from J. R. R. Tolkien’s fantasy series. While players advance through *The Journey Begins*, the real-time 3D simulation is dynamically shaped by their actions and responses within the game. As they progress, players will converse with AI-driven characters whose personalities and memories evolve over time, discover hidden manuscript fragments, and solve narrative puzzles.

Robert Nideffer’s *12 Years in Azeroth – The Journey Begins* was organized by Christiane Paul, Curator of Digital Art at the Whitney and commissioned for artport, the Museum’s portal to Internet art and an online gallery space for commissions of net art and new media art. More information about artport can be found at whitney.org/artport.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Robert Nideffer (b. 1964) is a Professor at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI) where he served as Head of the Department of Arts until 2018. From 1998-2013 he was a Professor of Art at the University of California, Irvine, where he founded the Game Culture and Technology Lab (1999) and was Co-Director (2005-2007) and Director (2007-2009) of the Art Computation Engineering (ACE) graduate program. His work has been exhibited at a variety of national and international venues including the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte in Spain; the Laguna Art Museum in Laguna Beach, California; the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and the 2002 Whitney Biennial. He has lectured extensively both inside and outside the academy, and his projects have been discussed in major media outlets including books, journal articles, television, the internet, film, and radio.

ABOUT ARTPORT

artport is the Whitney Museum’s portal to Internet art and an online gallery space for net art and new media art commissions. Launched in 2001, artport provides access to original commissioned artworks, documentation of net art and new media art exhibitions at the Whitney, and new media art in the Museum’s collection. Recent commissions include Frank WANG Yefeng’s *The Levitating Perils #2* (2025); *INFANT’s BANNED SKILLS* (2025); Ashley

Zelinkskie's *Twin Quasar* (2024); Maya Man's *A Realistic Day In My Life In New York City* (2024); Holly Herndon and Mat Dryhurst's *xhairymutantx* (2024); Nancy Baker Cahill's *CENTO* (2024); Peter Burr's *Sunshine Monument* (2023); Rick Silva's *Liquid Crystal* (2023); Auriea Harvey's *SITE1* (2023); Amelia Winger-Bearskin's *Sky/World Death/World* (2022); Mimi Onuoha's *40% of Food in the US is Wasted (How the Hell is That Progress, Man?)* (2022); and Rachel Rossin's *THE MAW OF* (2022). Access these and more projects at whitney.org/artport.

PRESS CONTACT

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ABOUT THE WHITNEY

The Whitney Museum of American Art, founded in 1930 by the artist and philanthropist Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney (1875–1942), houses the foremost collection of American art from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Mrs. Whitney, an early and ardent supporter of modern American art, nurtured groundbreaking artists when audiences were still largely preoccupied with the Old Masters. From her vision arose the Whitney Museum of American Art, which has been championing the most innovative art of the United States for ninety years. The core of the Whitney's mission is to collect, preserve, interpret, and exhibit American art of our time and serve a wide variety of audiences in celebration of the complexity and diversity of art and culture in the United States. Through this mission and a steadfast commitment to artists, the Whitney has long been a powerful force in support of modern and contemporary art and continues to help define what is innovative and influential in American art today.

Whitney Museum Land Acknowledgment

The Whitney is located in Lenapehoking, the ancestral homeland of the Lenape. The name Manhattan comes from their word Mannahatta, meaning "island of many hills." The Museum's current site is close to land that was a Lenape fishing and planting site called Sapponckanikan ("tobacco field"). The Whitney acknowledges the displacement of this region's original inhabitants and the Lenape diaspora that exists today.

As a museum of American art in a city with vital and diverse communities of Indigenous people, the Whitney recognizes the historical exclusion of Indigenous artists from its collection and program. The Museum is committed to addressing these erasures and honoring the

perspectives of Indigenous artists and communities as we work for a more equitable future. To read more about the Museum's Land Acknowledgment, [visit the Museum's website](#).

VISITOR INFORMATION

The Whitney Museum of American Art is located at 99 Gansevoort Street between Washington and West Streets, New York City. Public hours are Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday, 10:30 am–6 pm; Friday, 10:30 am–10 pm; and Saturday and Sunday, 10:30 am–6 pm. Closed Tuesday. Visitors twenty-five years and under and Whitney members: FREE. The Museum offers FREE admission and special programming for visitors of all ages every Friday evening from 5–10 pm and on the second Sunday of every month.

Image credit:

Robert Nideffer, screenshot of *12 Years in Azeroth – The Journey Begins*, 2025

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