

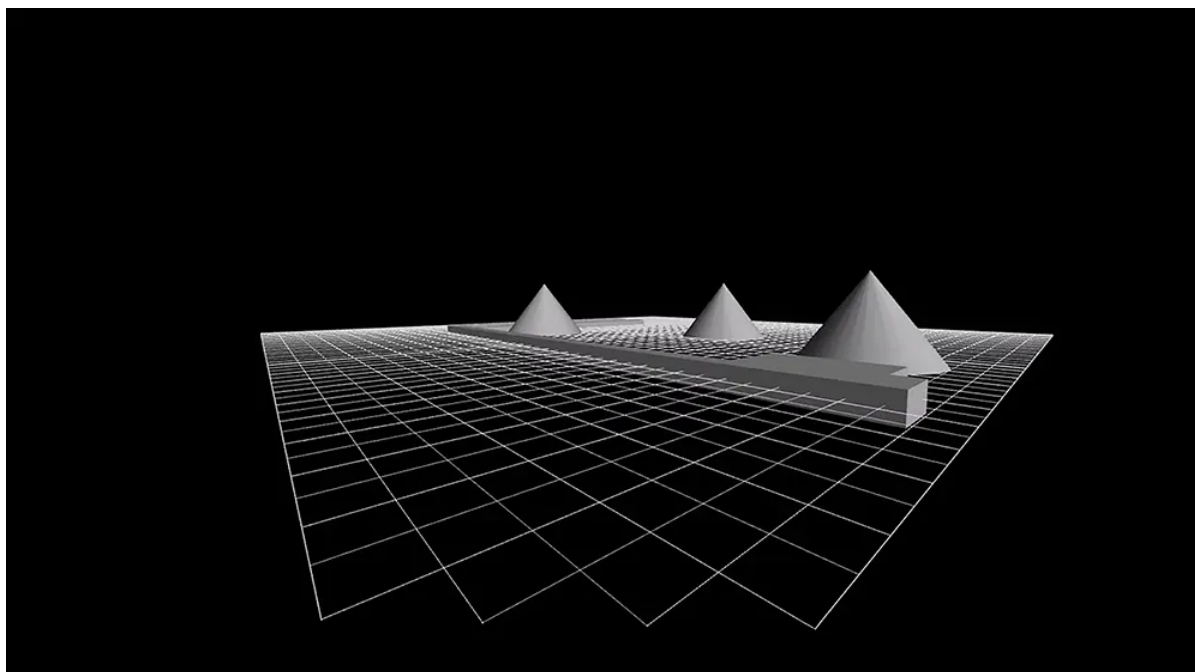
BLOG, MUSEUMS/GALLERIES

Hamiltonian Gallery's Latest Group Show Finds Camaraderie in Loneliness

For a show assembled on an intentionally insular, obscurantist theme, this one gels.



by **KRISTON CAPPS**
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"We Are Not Alone: A Digital Exploration of Planet X" by Christine Neptune (2016)

Labored descriptions distinguish *[recombinant] fellows: RA* from the typical group show at Hamiltonian Gallery. For example, a convoluted wall text from guest curator **Camilo Álvarez**, director of Boston's innovative Samsøñ

Projects, wouldn't be out of place in the critical-theory journal *Semiotext(e)*. A sample: "Eight isolates collected in the region were analyzed using available ontological sources and molecular typing assays."

For practical purposes, all that really means is that the show's eight artists, all Hamiltonian fellows, descended on Boston and made works about their experiences. Or at least, that's where the show begins. For *[recombinant] fellows: RA*, two artists set out to make works about the show itself, illustrating the lengths to which artists will sometimes go to pursue some insular end—and how this isn't always a bad thing.

The best way to see the show is to don **Allison Spence's** "In the absence of" (2016), an audio guide to the exhibit. The piece is a pure homage to the work of **Janet Cardiff**, an audio-artist known for making guides that take viewers through or around museums. (Cardiff made one of them, "Words Drawn in Water," for the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in 2005.) Spence's clever piece invites viewers on a specific march through Hamiltonian, asking them to walk under Nara Park's suspended painting, "Shatter" (2016), and look up before continuing on. The piece is nominally connected to the stunning theft of several paintings from the Isabelle Stuart Gardner Museum in Boston—a heist that still inspires book-length investigations today. That's not important context for Spence's tour of a show she never saw fully installed.

Nancy Daly's installation is the other meta-work in the show. For her piece, "What's Yours Is Mine" (2016), she has crafted souvenirs for several of the artists on display (as well as other Hamiltonian alumni). **Jim Leach** is represented in Daly's display case by signed pieces of shattered dinner plates, an allusion to "Shutter Stands" (2016), an all-too-serious installation piece (documentation, really, of an unseen performance). Leach's work is more likable with Daly's work there to take the piss out of it.

Not all these works necessarily need one another. **Dan Perkins's** cluster of small, hand-some, abstract landscapes occupy a gallery corner without paying much mind to any of the other "isolates." **Christine Neptune's** digital-video project, "We Are Not Alone: A Digital Exploration of Planet X" is an

introverted retreat from both Boston (where the artist reportedly felt uncomfortable) and the viewer. **Naoko Wowsugi** approaches isolation in a different way, through a series of photographs depicting various times she arrived in a shop to find no shopkeeper on duty. At each of these establishments, she left a small cowbell imprinted with the words: “Please Ring Cowbell for Service.”

Loneliness is not always a wellspring of comedy for visual artists, so it’s refreshing to see so many artists from this Hamiltonian class touch lightly on the subject. For a show assembled on an intentionally insular, obscurantist theme (“these isolates represent a novel st(r)ain, for which the name, relative assertion [RA], is proposed”), this one gels.

To Dec. 17.1353 U St. NW. Free. (202) 332-1116. hamiltonianartists.org.