

Museums

‘new. now.’ at Hamiltonian Gallery

By [Michael O'Sullivan](#)

September 25, 2014

[Hamiltonian Gallery](#) is part school, part art space. Known for its fellowship program — offering professional development and mentorship to a hand-picked class of emerging artists — Hamiltonian recently announced six new fellows, and the gallery is now showcasing their work. Although Washington gallerygoers may recognize some of these artists from shows around town, “new. now.” is their introduction at Hamiltonian, and over the coming months, each will be given another show.

The most humorous work on view is Naoko Wowsugi’s “Thank You for Teaching Me English.” Previously shown at the Katzen Arts Center at American University, where Wowsugi is a faculty member, the installation features formal-looking photographic portraits, each one characterized by a strange, inexplicably stiff facial expression.

The title of Wowsugi’s piece becomes clearer when you read the nameplates affixed to each portrait. Captioned with such words as “Caucasian,” “Gynecologist” and “Phantasmagoria,” the photos depict people in the midst of pronouncing various polysyllabic words for the artist, a Japanese Korean immigrant for whom the mastery of English is still a work in progress.

There’s also a bit of a joke going on in Nancy Daly’s interactive sculpture “Subject to Terms and Conditions.” On the right, a bank of toggle switches controls an array of light bulbs on the left. Flip one and a small lamp comes on or goes off. You can make your own illuminated artwork by flipping switches. But there’s more at play here. The device collects usage data, and the frequency with which toggles are thrown determines to which of 50-some charities the artist will donate money. (Togglers can find out where the money is going by reading small-print disclaimers hidden beneath each switch.)

Daly, whose work deals with the connections engendered (and broken) by social networks, wants viewers to realize that even the smallest action — such as clicking a “like” button — has a consequence. Like Wowsugi, Daly uses a playful sensibility to deliver a more serious message about communication.

Of the two painters in the show — Dan Perkins and Allison Spense — Perkins gets the lion’s share of wall space. The artist, who earned a master’s degree from American last year, is represented by several works that engage with the idea of landscape painting, deliberately corrupting our sense of three-dimensional space with visual tricks that reinforce the fact that we’re looking at a painting, not out of a window. By comparison, Spense’s one abstract painting — resembling something between a pile of meat and a birthday cake — lacks context. We’ll have to come back to see more of her work.

Dane Winkler contributes sculpture and video. His video work “The Great Divide; Halfway Up Mt. Frederica” is more intriguing than his sculpture. It documents a performance by the artist last year at the University of Maryland, where he is an MFA candidate. Shot in the two-story atrium of the school’s art-sociology building, the video documents Winkler in a position akin to a tightrope walker. Perched precariously on parallel metal chains, the artist proceeds to construct a bridge of wooden planks from one balcony to another.

In some ways, the piece is emblematic of the work in “new.now.” It may even offer the first lesson for these Hamiltonian fellows: The life of an artist, Winkler seems to say, is a delicate balancing act, a road perhaps to nowhere, defying logic and common sense. It is, however, as Hamiltonian argues, still worth doing.

new. now

Through Oct. 25 at 1353 U St. (Metro: U Street). 202-332-1116. www.hamiltoniangallery.com.
Open Tuesday-Saturday noon to 6 p.m. Free.

Public programs: The new Hamiltonian fellows will discuss their work at free gallery talks Oct. 7 (Nancy Daly and Dan Perkins), Oct. 15 (Dane Winkler and Naoko Wowsugi) and Oct. 23 (Adam Ryder and Allison Spense). All talks are at 7 p.m.

THE STORY BEHIND THE WORK

The photographs of Hamiltonian fellow Adam Ryder will probably be unfamiliar to Washington audiences, but they merit a close look. Taken from two large bodies of work, the images are not what they seem.

One series is billed as the work of the Joint Photographic Survey, which Ryder describes as a 1920s group that documented the architecture of the Holy Land. Yet the J.P.S. is entirely a figment of the artist’s imagination. Fascinated by the idea of plausible fictions, Ryder created the antique-looking photos himself, digitally piecing together images he downloaded from a Library of Congress archive on the Web.

The provenance of the second series — “Areth: An Architectural Atlas” — sounds even more far-fetched. As labeled, the photos document a trip the artist took to the abandoned planet of Areth.

In actuality, the buildings depicted are all to be found right here on Earth. You may even recognize one from the movies. Woody Allen used one, a futuristic Colorado house designed by Charles Deaton in 1963, as a setting for his sci-fi comedy “Sleeper.” Another building, identified by Ryder as “Hydration Tower Heta” is actually a facility at the Kitt Peak National Observatory near Tuscon. (Note: “Areth” is an anagram of “Earth.”)

— **Michael O'Sullivan**

 **0 Comments**

Michael O'Sullivan

Michael O'Sullivan has covered the arts for The Washington Post since 1993, contributing reviews and features on film, fine art, theater and other forms of entertainment to Style and Weekend. [Follow](#) 



The Washington Post

Reporting the facts for over 140 years.

Try 1 month for ~~\$10~~ \$1

Already a subscriber? [Sign in](#)