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ARTS

# *We Miss You* Is a Site-Specific Look at One Artist's Pandemic Year

*Kaitlin Jensco used her camera to mark time during the lost year; her collection of more than 1,000 images is painstakingly mounted at Hamiltonian Artists.*



by **LOUIS JACOBSON**  
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Photo by Vivian Doering.

Like the rest of us, **Kaitlin Jencso** endured the coronavirus pandemic. As a photographer, she decided to mark time during the lost year through her photographs, turning them into something like tally marks scrawled on a wall to count the days as they pass.

The result is *We Miss You*, a site-specific collection of more than 1,000 images mounted at Hamiltonian Artists. Jencso has painstakingly hung this mass of documentary material on **Hamiltonian's** long, white walls—a wave of imagery that loops around horizontally, as if the gallery were one long, continuous strip of film.

Poignantly for a collection of imagery that documents a period of social distancing and quarantine, viewers should visit in person to fully appreciate the sweep of Jencso's documentation, rather than viewing the images remotely via computer—something that only became feasible once the coronavirus pandemic eased. The exhibit opened in May.

Jencso calls the exhibit a “diary of monotony and confinement.” A few individual images explicitly communicate a sense of claustrophobia—a male figure captured in the bathroom, for instance, or a woman photographed while hemmed in tightly by house siding. But others show the open (if desolate) spaces of the Chesapeake Bay region; Jencso is from Southern Maryland and made many of the images outside of locked down, urban D.C.

Jencso's works traverse a variety of genres—portraiture, still life, landscape, abstraction—but a few visual themes recur through her installation, including lampposts and fences at night, Terri Weifenbach-style close-ups of hedges, and lots and lots of moody water imagery, sometimes sun dappled, sometimes misty, sometimes pastel hued, and sometimes adorned by moonbeams.

At times, Jencso leverages bold geometry in her creations. She skillfully pairs a dock and water diagonally in one image, and captures a vertical zip of light splitting a red wall in two in another. (Cleverly, it is mounted directly opposite a rhyming image that depicts a blurry column of orange lights separating two sides of a window curtain). Elsewhere, Jencso channels early **Harry**

**Callahan** by pairing wispy, squiggly helices against a deep blue sky with a cluster of robust, orange leaves, put together in a satisfying triptych.

The images vary widely in size. Many are snapshot size, while others are 24 by 36 inches or larger, including the thematically appropriate image of a glitchy electronic sign for a middle school; its barely spelled out message lends the exhibit its title, “We miss you.” In one impressive arrangement, Jencso offers three similar but distinct images of a female figure in a clearing in the distance, gently lit in an Edenic garden.

Ultimately, though, despite such finely crafted individual images, *We Miss You* is best understood in its whole, as a near stream-of-consciousness tide of imagery, rather than seen as individual parts.

The pacing of the exhibit is improvisational, with elliptical gaps, rather than regimented and regular. Doing it this way was smart: The weakest portions of the exhibit are the ones in which Jencso mashed a lot of similar images into closely packed grids, without breathing space. These may have been intended to elucidate the psychic suffocation of quarantine, but they end up suggesting a kind of sensory overload that comes from being too close to other people, rather than being socially distanced. (Another nitpick: Jencso has mounted some of her images too high on the wall to see clearly, especially for those of us with aging eyesight.)

It’s also surprising and worth noting that, while the flow of images roughly documents a chronological year, the changing seasons play a minimal role as the works proceed from the start of the pandemic to the end. This only bolsters the notion of a messed up flow of time during the pandemic.

Unsurprisingly, and perhaps understandably, Jencso’s images become somewhat less absorbing as the pandemic year crawls to its end, and many become moodier and darker. But her final images include a series of seven photographs hung vertically in a row, each offering a black-and-white variation of dancing points of light on water. Together, these seven at once communicate a sense of calm—and a dash of hope—that suggest that the lost year is finally morphing into something new, and more familiar.

*At Hamiltonian Artists through June 19. 1353 U St. NW, Suite 101. (202) 332-1116. More information, including coronavirus safety measures, at [hamiltonianartists.org](http://hamiltonianartists.org). An artists' talk (in person and streamed virtually) is scheduled for 7 p.m. on June 16.*