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The Hamiltonian Gallery



"It's like any gallery." She says it. I've taken it completely out of context. The statement was offered by Kristi Mathews, the Development Coordinator for Hamiltonian Artists, in reference to the gallery touch-ups that are always necessary post installation. As soon as she said those words, I realize that's the point I'm trying to vocalize to the two before me. The spectacular thing to me about the Hamiltonian Gallery is that the casual viewer has no clue about the extraordinary project that has been hatched inside. "Who are these Hamiltonian Artists?" you ask. Read on.

First off, you should know that the program is large in scope. The program is growing in scope. It is reflective of its founder Paul So.

Paul So is a physics professor at George Mason University. He is also an artist currently on display at Millennium Arts Salon. A

progressive thinker, he came up with an idea to incubate emerging artists and also to educate them on the business side of the art world. This is his program:

<http://www.hamiltonianartists.org/program.html>

Roughly two and half years ago he began looking for a space in which to do this. He landed on 14th and U, a "prominent location for the fellows," surrounded by other contemporary art galleries. Held up briefly by construction delays, Hamiltonian Artists began their programming with their Artist Speaker Series – a succession of lectures given by art professionals on topics geared toward artistic and entrepreneurial development of the So-Hamiltonian Fellows and other emerging artists - prior to the opening of the independent but connected Hamiltonian Gallery. Once construction was finished, they fully started the fellowship program. Paul So did this, like all decisions he has made with this endeavor, for the benefit of the fellows.

"The heart of this mission is to provide the platform for the career development of the Fellows and to build a community of artists based on this dynamic space," says Paul. "For our artists to be seen as commercially viable and relevant artists, I think they need a great space to mirror that aim." Hence the look and feel of a contemporary art gallery that will provide a professional showcase for the artists within the program. As Paul says, and to which I can attest, "When people walk in they don't see it as an alternative space -- they see it as a contemporary art gallery."

This is integral to the Hamiltonian Fellowship program, and its purpose is to provide real-world experience for emerging and mid-career artists. Fellows are expected to be involved in every step along the way. Their contribution to the program and a high degree of artistic merit are the only two requirements for being a Hamiltonian Fellow. In return for their participation they receive representation by the Hamiltonian Gallery and instruction on some of the more technical aspects of being an artist. For instance, they learn how to design a show and install their work. A regular seminar series is also offered to the fellows with talks ranging from art-related legal issues to advice and suggestions from local art collectors. One of the board members is an accountant, and so they learn how to properly do their taxes from a professional. A major component of the program comes from employing more established artists, who contribute one-on-one mentorship to the Hamiltonian Fellows. One of the Hamiltonian Mentor Artists, Mark Cameron Boyd, an artist and professor at the Corcoran College of Art and Design, spoke to the Fellows about one of his specialties, art theory. This is what he said of the program, "I found my experience with the So-Hamiltonian Foundation as a Mentor Artist to be both rewarding and challenging. Besides giving me a chance to show my artwork in a professionally designed gallery, I was intrigued by the possibilities for helping Paul So establish the Hamiltonian Foundation as a kind of 'post-graduate' training program, where emerging artists would be able to engage in discourse about the art making experience and to be further immersed in its relationship to art theory."

Given these opportunities, the fellowship program, as you would imagine, is highly competitive. 5 out of 173 applicants were chosen for this year. The program lasts two-years. During that time, fellows participate in group shows and two-member shows. The closing group shows of this current season will open on May 9th where all returning second year fellows will be on exhibit at Hamiltonian Gallery. Following that show, on June 13th, we will see the introduction of the newly inducted first-year fellows' work. The new season will start in the fall. Here's a sample of the full program schedule:

<http://www.hamiltonianartists.org/schedule.html>



Already providing an excellent opportunity for artists in the community, Paul and the Hamiltonian group want to do more. They want to offer a residency program for their fellows. They'd like to set up exchanges with other city's artists both nationally and even internationally. They are participating in the ongoing discussion DC is currently having about how to bring more attention to local artists. Ever aware of the responsibility they have to their fellows,

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they are working on their infrastructure to reach these lofty, but attainable, goals. The addition of Kristi as the Development Coordinator for Hamiltonian Artists is proof of that fact. "We need to be more sustainable in terms of funding," Paul says, and so they are taking the steps to make that happen.

They are doing what they can, given the present economic situation. Last year they participated in SCOPE Miami, a global art fair featuring emerging contemporary artists, and is something they will continue to do. As far as creating a residency program goes, Paul is already looking at a property that might facilitate this in the future. For the upcoming season, the fellowship program will basically stay within a similar format, the only change being the introduction of more prominent themes to the shows. Paul wants the conversation between Mentor and Fellow to continue and grow. He is happy with the format but understands that it is still developing. He says, "It's training for me as well."

The most unique attribute of this program is the continued focus on the development of the fellow. While there exist other opportunities for emerging artists, there does not exist one as intensive or long-lasting as the Hamiltonian's. The physical space of the Hamiltonian Gallery is as beautiful as it is conducive to Paul's program. Independent of what is going on inside, the building is magnificent. The fact that it houses the Hamiltonian Artists only adds to its beauty. Every aspect of this gallery, program, and building itself is progressive. Throughout the first year, a few of the Fellows moved on to different professional or gallery opportunities, and will not continue with the program into the second year. When they leave, there will be no sense of sorrow, since they will continue their art career with new representation by other commercial galleries in the area. "That's the goal, these Fellows have essentially graduated from the program," Paul says. "It speaks highly of what we're doing," Kristi adds.

Paul likes being a part of the community -- his program fosters community. The exchanges he hopes to see in the future will be done to further introduce DC artists to the world. In responding to my question about the DC art scene, he and Kristi agree that there are many levels to this city. Paul says that "personally we'd like to see more interaction between these levels." It should be noted that I met Paul at another gallery's program.

As the interview ends, he takes me up to see the green roof. Along the way we pass through Project 4, another prominent DC art gallery that lives atop Hamiltonian Gallery. From there, one is presented with a great view of the city. You can't help but notice that this building is significantly different than its neighbors. It seems to suggest what DC could be, not just what it is. But then, everything Paul So has done has been forward-thinking, so why shouldn't his building be. "It's a community that we're trying to build, and I think that is what separates us from the rest." Absolutely it is.

The Hamiltonian Gallery is located at 1353 U Street NW, Washington DC 20009. They are open Tuesday through Saturday, 12pm until 6pm, or by appointment.

On the web the Hamiltonian Gallery can be found at:

www.hamiltoniangallery.com

The Hamiltonian Artists can be found at:

www.hamiltonianartists.org



You can also find "Friends of Hamiltonian Gallery" on Facebook, [HERE](#) or check out their blog at <http://hamiltonianblog.blogspot.com>

The artists on display at the Hamiltonian Gallery at the time these photographs were taken were Tom Block, Michael Sirvet, and Lisa Montag Brotman. These artists retain all rights to their work displayed in this article. You can contact the Hamiltonian Gallery for any information about these artists, or visit the gallery to view their artwork. Behind Paul So in the last photograph is part of a painting by James Rieck entitled *Chairman*. ©2008James Rieck, All Rights Reserved.

Mark Cameron Boyd has taught art theory for the Corcoran College of Art + Design for six years. Says he of his work and connection to the Hamiltonian Artists, "I am always enthusiastic about sharing my thoughts on the importance of combining theory with practice. My experience as a Hamiltonian Mentor allowed me the opportunity to work specifically with two Hamiltonian Fellows in the installation of our show, and to critique their art in the supportive forum of the Fellowship." Mark has also given a talk on his work and its relationship to theory in the Hamiltonian Gallery. He intends to continue his relationship with Paul So and the Hamiltonian Foundation supportive of their "evolving mission in support of young artists". Find him on the web at: www.markcameronboyd.com

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