

The MASON Gazette

Off the Clock: Physics Professor Starts Program for Emerging Artists

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By [Catherine Ferraro](#)



Paul So

Photo courtesy of Paul So

The idea of a physics professor becoming an arts entrepreneur may seem odd. But Paul So's interest in the arts dates back to his college days at Scripps College in Claremont, Calif., where he received a studio art degree while pursuing a bachelor of science in physics at Harvey Mudd College.

Today, So, an associate professor in the Department of Physics and Astronomy and the Krasnow Institute for Advanced Study, is the founder of the Hamiltonian Gallery and Hamiltonian Artists, a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping emerging artists by providing professional development opportunities.

The renovated gallery space is in a historic building near 14th and U Streets in northwest Washington, D.C. The fully "green" facility, which had its grand opening in October 2008, will eventually have 2,000 square feet to showcase artwork.



The interior of the Hamiltonian Gallery at 14th and U Streets, in northwest Washington, D.C.

Photo by Sean Logue

The gallery is named after two Hamiltons: West Hamilton, an African American Army general who owned the building in the 1920s and ran Hamilton Printing; and William Rowan Hamilton, a well-known 19th-century mathematician and physicist.

The Board of Hamiltonian Artists helped to create the Hamiltonian Artists program. Its members included So and several other Mason faculty members: Harold Linton, chair and professor in the Art and Visual Technology (AVT) Department; Richard Kamenitzer, director of the Arts Management Program; and Helen Frederick, associate professor in AVT.

Artists who exhibit at the gallery are fellows chosen for a two-year program. They will learn the business side of art, including how to write grants and how to market their work. In addition, the program includes lectures and seminars by local educators, gallery owners and artists; regular critiques of the fellows' work; and mentorship opportunities.

"When young artists first start out they are mainly taught the artistic aspect of the art world, but not how to effectively

market themselves or create a good portfolio," says So. "I hope that this program will help young artists to understand the skills they need in the professional world and encourage local artists to stay here."

So likens his idea of creating the gallery and nonprofit organization to getting a postdoc in art.

Most of the fellows are individuals who have recently graduated from college and are just beginning their careers. All the fellows in the program are provided with a stipend that will allow them to advance their careers and contribute to the art community.

Each year, each fellow participates in a two-person focus show where they exhibit their artwork for six weeks. A more established artist is assigned as a mentor to the two exhibiting fellows and also exhibits work during the focus show. The mentor is responsible for helping the fellows develop the concept and design for the show and lead an internal critique during the exhibition with all the fellows. According to So, this is the heart of the program.

The 10 first-year fellows recently opened a group exhibition marking the culmination of the Hamiltonian Fellowship's first season. "Fellows Converge: Redefining the Environment" features artwork by Frederick, who served as a mentor for the program. The exhibition runs through June 6.

In the coming month, a new group exhibition will also feature the group of newly selected fellows on June 13.

For more information about the Hamiltonian Gallery and Hamiltonian Artists, contact [So](#) at 703-993-4377.

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