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ARTS

# Artists Remain the Focus at Hamiltonian Gallery Despite Leadership Changes

*The Hamiltonian Fellows will open up about their artistry tonight for An Evening with the Artists.*



by **JENNIFER ANNE MITCHELL**  
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Yacine Fall Credit: Denny Henry

From D.C.'s historic U Street Corridor, the Hamiltonian Gallery has been launching careers for emerging artists for more than 11 years through the **Hamiltonian Fellowship Program**. The intensive two-year program gives fellows perks, like professional development programming, show space, and gallery representation. Five new artists joined the fellowship program in July: **Amber Eve Anderson**, **Tommy Bobo**, **Akea Brionne Brown**, **Yacine Fall**, and **Madeline A. Stratton**. The gallery is featuring them tonight in **An Evening with the Artists**, an event during which the second-year cohort of fellows will interview the first year's and discuss their current exhibition **new. now.**

Though the Hamiltonian Gallery has a relatively small physical imprint (1,800 square feet, plus a basement for storage), it has a big impact on the local arts community and draws immense talent. Brown is a photographer with a long list of accolades, including winning Baltimore's \$25,000 **Sondheim Artscape Prize**, and only just graduated with her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the Maryland Institute College of Art in 2018. The community of artists in the Hamiltonian Fellowship is what drew Brown to apply.

"It's something I really value, which you don't really value 'til you're out of school," Brown says.

Second-year fellow **Sera Boeno** is from Istanbul. She graduated from Dartmouth College and earned a Master of Fine Arts degree at MICA in 2018. Since she is not an American citizen and was on a student visa at MICA, she says she couldn't legally work outside of school without having each opportunity approved by immigration services. "For art, that includes selling your work, showing your work, going to places to talk about your work because they're all—if they're outside of your school—they're thought of as employment for an artist," she says. The fellowship has been a way for Boeno to get involved in the arts community now that she has graduated and is in the process of petitioning for an artist visa.

Hamiltonian co-directors **Nancy Daly** and **Alexandra "Rex" Delafkaran** say filling the gap between artists' education and their careers is precisely what **Paul So** had in mind when he founded the Hamiltonian during a

sabbatical from his career as a scientist. He is the chair of the department of physics and astronomy at George Mason University, where he has taught for more than 21 years. And, according to Daly and Delafkaran, he wanted the Hamiltonian Fellowship to be similar to postdoctoral programs for scientists.

The co-directors credit former gallery director **Amanda Jirón-Murphy** with building the Hamiltonian's reputation. Jirón-Murphy left the gallery in June after serving in the position for seven years.

"We're just taking that reputation that she built and trying some new things," Daly says. Tonight's event is one new element: Fellows were previously featured on separate nights, but the co-directors wanted to include all the fellows at once to consolidate the audience.

The Hamiltonian is currently going through major changes. Paul So is stepping down from his role as executive director, which will impact funding as he had generously donated to the organization. Outside of donations, art sales, corporate contracts, and grants have generated revenue for the Hamiltonian. The gallery and fellowship program have historically been separated into a for-profit portion and a nonprofit portion, respectively. Now, the Hamiltonian is becoming one nonprofit entity, and will rely more on grants.

Amid all these changes, Daly and Delafkaran are staying focused on the needs of the artists. "They are the most important thing in this whole project," Delafkaran says.

In addition to providing fellows with valuable opportunities that most artists don't get until later in their careers, like gallery representation, the Hamiltonian is also a resource for members of the D.C. arts community. Bobo attended public programs at the gallery for about a decade, and is finally joining its fellowship program after applying on and off for a few years. Being selected for the fellowship is a relief for him. "It kind of takes some of the guesswork and kind of the hustle out of having art made and shown," he says.

These artists value the practical elements of the program, including a workshop about how to do taxes as an artist. The Hamiltonian gives each fellow an annual \$2,000 stipend to cover career-related costs like travel. Fellows are able to explore the art world outside of the District, attending events like **Pulse Art Fair** in Miami, and learn how to sell their art work.

“I think that [selling work] is something artists want to do but sometimes feel awkward talking about,” Stratton says.

Trips outside of the District expose artists to new markets and that is what draws many of them to the program. Yacine Fall joins the Hamiltonian Fellows straight out of undergraduate school at the Corcoran School of the Arts and Design at George Washington University, where she studied sculpture and performance. She wants to expand beyond D.C., and sees the Hamiltonian Fellowship as a way to do that. “The fact that they have a reach outside of D.C., that’s been the biggest, for me, at least, the biggest thing that they offer,” she says.

The reputation of the Hamiltonian Fellowship already attracts applicants from outside of the Washington region, some coming from major cities like Los Angeles and New York. But Amber Eve Anderson sees the value of the Hamiltonian’s reach a bit differently. She hopes it will “bring eyes to the region for the work that’s already happening here.”

*Learn more about the Hamiltonian Fellows and their work at **An Evening with the Artists** tonight, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. at the Hamiltonian Gallery, 1353 U St. NW.*