

MARIANNE BOESKY GALLERY



ROCKEFELLER CENTER



ARTIST SARAH MEYOHAS BRINGS A MUSICAL ALTERNATE WORLD FEATURING HOLOGRAPHIC BIRDS TO THE TOP OF THE ROCK

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JULY 25, 2022

There is a lot of talk these days about alternate realities, the Metaverse, and artificial intelligence. Technology has altered our daily lives, changed the way we communicate and consume, and, in some cases, forced us to reexamine our needs as human beings. It's only natural that technology reconfigures our idea of art as well — and no one understands this quite like Sarah Meyohas.

A conceptual artist who studied finance at the University of Pennsylvania before receiving an MFA at Yale University, Meyohas uses her unique background to study the role of cutting-edge technology in modern life. Her latest work, *Dawn Chorus*, incorporates a virtual reality headset from Microsoft, the HoloLens, to immerse viewers in an alternate world — and it's now on display at Top of the Rock. Described as “a musical augmented reality experience,” the piece features a physical piano that is surrounded by fluttering holographic birds. The birds seem to play the music themselves, their bodies pulling at the strings of the instrument.



With *Dawn Chorus*, Meyohas uses augmented reality as means of visualizing the invisible. If you hold out your finger, a red and yellow bird, its wings flapping so hard you can almost feel the air shift, will come and rest on it. Look to either side, and a new horizon appears, the city skyline beyond disappearing beneath a sweeping field. As the holographic birds swoop and dive above the piano, waves of sound and light are illuminated before your eyes. The goal is a reorientation of the way we engage with our world. “It’s choreography,” Meyohas says. “The merging of animation and music.”

The piece, Meyohas reveals, has “a bit of Disney” to it. You might be reminded of *Fantasia*, that experimental 1940s vision of Walt Disney’s that merged animation and music. This isn’t a coincidence. Just as Disney himself pioneered motion graphics techniques during his time, Meyohas has also examined the bounds of art and technology; she’s widely known as an art-tech pioneer. Her 2015 launch of Bitchcoin, a cryptocurrency that could be exchanged for her work, is now recognized as one of the first NFTs ever to be minted. Bitchcoin was backed by a unique pressed rose petal.

Several pieces from her *Speculations* series — photographic imagery that portrays infinite tunnels of color — are also on view at Rockefeller Center, one level up on the 69th floor north terrace. The bottomless mirror of Meyohas’ photographs is set against an all-encompassing city skyline, creating a new and captivating visual synergy. This work is more typical of Meyohas’ oeuvre, while *Dawn Chorus* feels like a departure, the beginning of a new experimental horizon. Yet while they exist in separate realms, there are certain shared aspects, like the chromatic color palette and a marriage of the physical and virtual realms. Above all, both are completely unique.

To create anything cutting-edge takes time, and Meyohas dealt with some setbacks while building *Dawn Chorus*, a project that took more than three years to complete. “When you’re dealing with speculative technology, there are some risks,” she explains. While working on the experience, Meyohas was coordinating numerous pieces, including sound technicians, animators, VR experts, and her own creative vision. The musical composition itself is enormously complicated, integrating recordings of “electromagnetic dawn chorus,” a flute, and piano song. The first composition was created algorithmically while the second was commissioned for the piece itself from French composer David François Moreau. Despite the many moving parts, however, the work has paid off. “The pro,” says Meyohas, “is that you’re showing people something they’ve never seen before.”

Delving into the unknown is always a risk. There is the possibility of becoming an oddity or spectacle, of misunderstanding or outright failure. Luckily, Meyohas knows what she's doing. To step into her augmented world is not just an unusual experience, it's a true joy. Dive in while you can.