

Misha Ilin's Fossilized Fragments, Surreal and Shimmering



Pale Grass Blue is awash with an eerie, static blue light. The introductory piece confronts the viewer with a disclaimer. It, in part, reads: "The gallery was instructed to comply with the following radiation safety standards." These are the instructions for viewing unshielded radioactive elements as a part of the twenty-three piece exhibition.

Misha Ilin's interdisciplinary practice investigates constructed realities as forms of human and environmental responses to excess authority and control. Ilin studied art at the National Centre for Contemporary Arts in Moscow, and moved to the US in 2016 to pursue an MFA from the Maryland Institute College of Art, graduating in 2019.

Misha Ilin's solo show, *Pale Grass Blue*, hosted at [Hamiltonian Artists](#) in Washington, D.C., invites viewers into a surreal and shimmering landscape. It explores how events such as ecocide, war, body politics, and capital exist as radioactive events, altering our relationship with reality. The exhibition features installations, found objects, sculptures, and videos that exploit natural and artificial materials alike, all with a fossilized quality. Ilin asks: How does trauma permeate the spaces where it happened?



The architecture of the house, with its singular entrance and exit, dictates the flow of the exhibition; it starts in the narrow entrance, opens up into the hallway, and spills into the back of the space. Ilin created the exhibition's works with these parameters in mind, knowing the viewer must walk through the space in a loop, seeing each work twice in order to exit the space. His show is the culmination of a two-year fellowship at Hamiltonian Artists.

In a nod to Franz Kafka, *Cares of a Family Man* (2024) is composed of a mound of sand on the floor, partially concealing an iPhone endlessly scrolling a TikTok feed. In a walkthrough with the artist, Ilin explained that this work is meant to mimic the site where he conducted research for the show, displaying his reclined impression in the sand. People carefully walk around the pile, aiming to not track it around the gallery, but as it fills up with visitors, traces and prints of sand become inevitable. Sand lingers and splays, disturbed by its audience, marking human presence.

Most of Ilin's works hide or reveal some bit of text. Sentences are impressed into the drywall and plaster, both etched and laser printed. These pieces serve as instructions for viewing the works on the floor and invite the viewer to step closer and become enveloped in the work. While language can often illuminate, the guidelines are intentionally dysfunctional, indicating how words can often be misinterpreted and fail us. One becomes lost within the words, phrases, and fragments that remain; words like "obsessive" and "care" are strung one after another in a seemingly nonsensical order. The fractured quality of form points to how disparate pieces rise from destruction.



In *Witnesses* (2024), excerpts document first-person narratives of those displaced by the war in Ukraine. Hung from the ceiling like shredded fabric banners, the stories read as if one continuously scrolls an Instagram feed, some parts illegible under the paint. Here, Ilin references philosopher Timothy Morton's theoretical assertion of the hyperobject: an object or event that is massively distributed in time and space that transcends spatiotemporal specificity. A hyperobject can be climate change, nuclear weapons, or evolution. *Witnesses* distinctly highlights the impact political decisions have on individual people; their narratives gather here, ossified in space.

Radiation, in several different iterations of the word, wholly encompasses the exhibition: radiation as something toxic and dangerous, radiation as what remains, radiation in a religious context, in the sense of emitting a higher message. *The room* (2023), an eight-by-twelve foot wall piece, *vanitas* (table series) (2024), an abandoned tablescape, and *Witnesses* all sit in conversation with one another.



The title of the show references a recurring pattern of butterflies seen throughout Ilin's works, the species of which was found near the Fukushima nuclear site. Some insects are cut out carefully from paper and bent from wire; some are fully formed and made of plaster, spray painted over, their shape almost unrecognizable beneath a gray mass. Do they offer hope or a warning?

Pale Grass Blue does not exist in the abstract. These objects, suspended in time and space, draw our collective attention to what it means to survive as an artifact. What will the legacy of these works be? Ilin makes permanent these ephemeral moments of upheaval. What will the materials like drywall and plaster, which will likely outlive us, communicate to their future viewers? Will future generations see these objects as what remains—artifacts of a destroyed world?

***Pale Grass Blue* is on view at Hamiltonian Artists until December 7, 2024.**

REVIEW - EXHIBITION - PALE GRASS BLUE - SOLO



Nina Oleynik

Nina Oleynik is a writer and designer based in Washington, D.C. She's interested in ephemerality in design, and how design can be used to engage the public in sustainable futures. Nina graduated from Colby College in 2018 and recently completed her MFA in Communications Design from Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, NY.