

Heinrich, Will. "What to See Right Now in New York Art Galleries", *The New York Times*, 19 January 2020.

## The New York Times

'The Extraordinary'

Through Feb. 29. Hunter East Harlem Gallery, 2180 Third Avenue, Manhattan; 212-396-7819, [huntereastharlemgallery.org](http://huntereastharlemgallery.org).

Image



In the foreground, Woomin Kim's "Minerals in Use" (2018); on the screen, Yue Nakayama's video "You're Every Song I Ever Sing (Version 1)" (2019). Credit...via Hunter East Harlem Gallery; Argenis Apolinario

The life-altering peculiarities of the American immigration system collide, in Hunter East Harlem Gallery's group show "The Extraordinary," with the slippery problem of defining artistic success. The show, curated by Arden Sherman with Nora Maité Nieves, began with an open call to artists who had or were pursuing the O-1 visa for extraordinary ability: Promising works by Yue Nakayama, Woomin Kim, Shimpei Shirafuji, Firoz Mahmud, Catalina Tuca, Anna Parisi and Sarah Mihara Creagen might earn them permission to live and work temporarily in the United States, or renew the permission they already have, if their inclusion in the show helps persuade the immigration service that they're renowned in their field.

Ms. Nakayama's video of child actors performing incongruous monologues is strangely fascinating, as are the tabletop "minerals" that Ms. Kim makes from everyday materials like colored chalk or acrylic nails. But the show's distinct highlight is a short narrative video, "The Challenges of Imagination," made by the Iranian artist Ramyar Vala, who has an O-1 visa with no re-entry stamp, with his older brother Rambod, whose O-1 was rejected. The only piece to treat the show's premise explicitly, the video includes amazing real-life details like an immigration officer pointing out to Ramyar Vala that he's not as famous as Jeff Koons. But it's equally a critique of the art world itself, which can be just as blithe about treating market

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success as a proxy for inherent merit. As an Iranian exile, Mr. Vala would clearly find the most success here by making work about his situation – but what if he wants to make work about something else? The video's last scene, which captures Rambod Vala in the tub, eating Haagen-Dazs and singing along to Lou Reed's song "Perfect Day," is an exhilarating rebuke to the very notion of success.