

**Smithsonian.com**

SmartNews Keeping you current

## Reach Out and Touch This Virtual Reality Art Installation

**“The Sands,” currently on view at Essex Flowers, projects elaborate creations in a physically empty space**



A screenshot of William Wheeler’s VR creation showing a barren, sandy landscape to explore (Essex Flowers)

By [Ben Panko](#)  
smithsonian.com  
August 18, 2017

There’s only so much space in a gallery to hold art, but one New York venue has figured out a clever way to get around this problem, reports Benjamin Sutton for *Hyperallergic*.

For its latest show, the Chinatown gallery Essex Flowers is showcasing the work of 15 artists in a 400-square-foot space. How? Thanks to some virtual reality wizardry. Rather than having the works physically occupy the space, the exhibit, titled “The Sands,” lives entirely in the VR headsets that visitors don when they enter the exhibit.

The innovative solution allows the works on view to be rotated through an endless virtual space. Visitors can reach out and interact with, and even walk through, the curated displays.

“The works in this show...simply share the same space and time in ways that are sometimes funny, sometimes poignant, and occasionally even discordant,” the gallery writes in a [description](#) of the exhibit.

The show’s name draws inspiration from the legendary Las Vegas hotel and casino of the same name, where Frank Sinatra and many other stars of the mid-20th century could often be found. Even though it was demolished more than 20 years ago, the casino lives on strongly in the American cultural memory today, serving as a shorthand for a [golden era of Las Vegas in the 1950s](#)—full of ambition, glamor and arrogance.



(Essex Flowers)

“It was a place both physical and imaginary, where fantasies came true and where realities transformed into myth,” the gallery writes.

Essex Flowers isn't the first artistic venue to make use of burgeoning virtual reality technology. Last year, The Dalí Museum in Florida [allowed visitors to literally step inside a surreal painting](#), while London's [Tate Modern museum plans to employ VR technology](#) to simulate the early 20th-century Paris in an upcoming exhibit on the career of artist Amedeo Modigliani.

11/15/2017

Reach Out and Touch This Virtual Reality Art Installation | Smart News | Smithsonian

*The Sands will run in Essex Flowers, located in New York City's Lower East Side, until Sunday, August 20.*

**About Ben Panko**

Ben Panko is a staff writer for Smithsonian.com