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The Best Photo Exhibits of 2016

Our photography critic picks his 10 favorite photo exhibits of the year.

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DECEMBER 28TH, 2016

The finest photographic exhibits in D.C. this year offered a mix of far-flung locales and quintessentially American—and Washingtonian—images. In contrast to years past, they consisted largely of recent work by active photographers. For the 13th not-quite-annual time, this author presents his top-10 list of photographic exhibits in D.C. for 2016. Separately, he has ranked the [top five individual images of the year](#).



1. Soomin Ham, *Sound of Butterfly*, Flashpoint Gallery

Soomin Ham's elegy for her late mother offers a stunning blend of genuine pathos and stylistic creativity. Ham channeled her heartache by sifting through her mother's possessions and photographing them. Many of the items are prosaic—articles of clothing, a watch, bottles of pills, even her mother's fingerprint on a jar—but they are

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elevated by Ham's decision to freeze the photograph she made in a layer of ice and then re-photograph it. Doing so deadens the clarity of the image and adds a sprinkling of air bubbles around the edges, producing an almost mystical effect. A second series is even more engrossing. It consists of a dozen reproductions of old family photos—vacations, weddings, group portraits (example pictured). Ham scanned these images, printed them on rice paper, left them in water, then washed and dried them repeatedly until the images became murky. Then she left them out in the falling snow and photographed them again after they were almost covered by the elements. The process dulled individuals' faces to blankness and turned panoramic views into indistinct fantasies. The resulting works demonstrated that one can transform artworks through something as ephemeral as snow or ice—a poignant metaphor for the fragility of life itself.