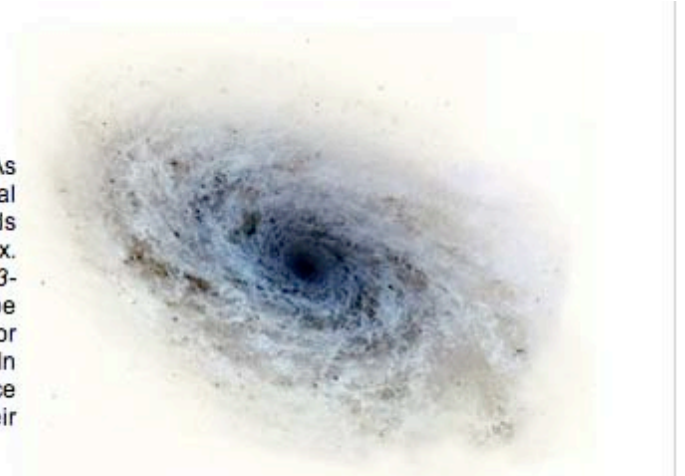


Karapetian, Farrah. "Mungo Thomson at the Hammer," *ArtSlant.com* (July 2008).

Mungo Thomson at the Hammer

Entering the Hammer lobby from the parking lot, I am met with whalesong. As I climb the stairs, the sound changes to the chirping of birds. In this aural perception, I am incorrect: in fact, the whalesong is a recording of birds slowed down 16x, and the birdsong is the sound of humpbacks sped up 16x. On the walls, as well, there are tricks: *Negative Space (STSci-PRC2003-24)* 2006 and *Negative Space (STSci-PRC2007-41a)* 2007 seem to me to be enlargements of microscopic photographs of skin tissue, disease, or something otherwise resembling – but not being – a galaxy of pinkish stars. In fact, the images derive from starscapes taken by the Hubble Space Telescope, and are inverted (blacks to whites, whites to blacks, colors to their opposites) by Thomson in Photoshop.



Puns and impersonations, then, populate this venture into the sacred sounds and sights of nature, deployed with institutional precision – as always – in the pristine – but not negative – space of the Hammer stairs. My favorite thing about this is that Thomson seems conscious of the multiple architectural levels he has been asked to consider with his work. Though perhaps birds and stars are a simple reference to what's above and whales are a similarly straightforward response to the idea of below, he's thinking about this space and our place in it. This is a metaphysical question in some circles, though art has come to regard it as rather stripped of its consequence; perhaps here the issue is invested again with some of that starry-eyed significance.

(Image: Mungo Thomson, *Negative Space (STSci-PRC1999-25)*, 2006, Color photograph, Dimensions variable, Courtesy the artist, Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles, John Connelly Presents, New York, and the Hammer Museum.

Posted by [Farrah Karapetian](#) on 7/06