

ART REVIEW

In 'Playing on a Loop,' video artist Maggie Stark captures life's revolutions

What can we learn from merry-go-rounds? A new show at HallSpace in Dorchester considers the question.

By **Cate McQuaid** Globe Correspondent, Updated January 10, 2023, 11:40 a.m.



Maggie Stark, "Children of the Regiment," 2022, Boston Common, video still. MAGGIE STARK

Like Joni Mitchell, who refers to “the carousel of time” in her 1966 classic “[The Circle Game](#),” video artist Maggie Stark likens life’s progress to the revolutions of merry-go-rounds in the HallSpace exhibition “Playing on a Loop.”

In her video “Children of the Regiment,” fragments of the [Boston Common Frog Pond Carousel](#) pass by and split and double kaleidoscopically, suggesting that while life’s circle is full of returns, it also expands.



Maggie Stark, "Replay: Balboa Park Spin," 2021/22, Balboa Park, San Diego, Calif., video still. MAGGIE STARK

The installation “Replay: Balboa Park Spin” features video shot at San Diego’s century-old [Balboa Park Carousel](#) — the same video projected on adjoining walls, not quite in sync. It begins in color, the camera pointed at the sky through the merry-go-round’s turning hub and spokes. A plane flies by, and because of the perspectival phenomenon of [motion](#)

[parallax](#), seems momentarily to speed up as it passes directly overhead. It's a picture of how we vault mindlessly through the present.



Maggie Stark, "Replay: Balboa Park Spin," 2021/22, Balboa Park, San Diego, Calif., video still. MAGGIE STARK

Stark cannily toggles from color to black-and-white, a contrast of lush immediacy with a nostalgic air that hints at memory's fixed yet turning chronicle. Then she focuses on the ride, as children and adults swing by astride giraffes,

ostriches, and horses. Many riders wear masks to fend off infection — making this image both now and forever.

Memory is nebulous, and so are video projections. HallSpace has weight-bearing poles in the middle of the gallery, and images skitter over them, echoing the plane's apparent brief acceleration. Such things have to do with distance and perspective more than they have to do with time, but that seems to be, in part, Stark's point: We can get lost in the loop, but if we change our point of view, the experience changes.

The artist pointedly refers to the end of the ride in “Windmills,” a video of a gravestone at Dorchester's [Cedar Grove Cemetery](#). Even here, there's a circle game: Two spinning pinwheels decorate the grave. The artist again uses both black-and-white and color. A blue sky throws gray trees into vivid relief, and over the inscription on the grave, she places a small inset of the whole scene in color.



Maggie Star, "Windmills," 2022, Cedar Grove Cemetery, Dorchester, Mass., video still. MAGGIE STARK

Here, too, life doesn't simply end. It reverberates inward, outward, and through time — if only we grow still enough to pay attention.

MAGGIE STARK: PLAYING ON A LOOP

At HallSpace, 950 Dorchester Ave., Dorchester, through Feb. 4. 617-288-2255, www.hallspace.org

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