

THE NATURE OF REALITY

By Lillian Shanahan

📍 The Birdcage San Francisco | 816 Sutter Street
December 4th 6pm-9pm- February 2nd 2026



In The Nature of Reality, San Francisco based artist Lillian Shanahan investigates the shifting boundary between our physical and digital worlds. Through a mashup of organic and inorganic forms, her work reflects the tension between tactile experience and simulated existence.

Drawing from the pixelated language of early computer graphics, Shanahan uses Perler beads, the creative building blocks of her childhood- to question how technology is reshaping human perception. As the line between lived and digital experience continues to blur, she invites us to consider: how quickly can our understanding of the world be transformed?

For her second solo exhibition at The Birdcage, Shanahan focuses almost entirely on Perler beads, a type of “fusion” bead commonly used in children’s crafts. Each piece is meticulously constructed by placing thousands of beads onto pegboards and fusing them with heat. She pairs this structured medium with watercolor, juxtaposing the rigid precision of plastic with the organic fluidity of paint, creating a visual dialogue between the mechanical and the natural.

About the Artist

Lillian Shanahan is a multidisciplinary artist from San Francisco with an emphasis in printmaking. Her work has been featured in several public art projects, including San Francisco General Hospital’s Heroes & Hearts Foundation, Aquarium of the Bay’s 30th Anniversary of Sea Lions in San Francisco, and The Box Shop Mural Project. Shanahan earned her BA in Art from the University of California, Santa Barbara’s College of Creative Studies, and she currently lives and works in San Francisco.