

# The Washington Post

Posted at 7:00 PM ET, 12/ 2/2010

## Emerging Artists to Grab the Spotlight

By Jacqueline Trescott

In the last decade Leigh Conner has witnessed the increased interest in Washington in new artists. And she has been right in the middle of the developments.

Along with Jamie Smith, she founded Conner Contemporary, a gallery that looks for the undiscovered. "We started a program called 'Academy.' It got to be popular, bringing together emerging collectors, emerging curators and emerging artists," Conner said.

An idea to have a fair that would focus on this burgeoning sector of art was hatched, borrowing from successful models in New York and Washington.

(e)merge, Conner announced on Thursday, will be held in late September 2011 at the Capitol Skyline Hotel.

Conner and Smith have been joined by Helen Allen, founder and former director of PULSE Contemporary Art Fair. The enterprise has been endorsed by Mera Rubell, a well-known collector of contemporary art whose family owns the Skyline.

The fair will have the standard attractions with art exhibitions and sales, bolstered by galleries, curators and collectors. The program will include panels on fundamental issues, including gallery representation and winning commissions.

Washington is ready for more consideration of the emerging artists, said Conner. "Since the recession a lot of artists have fled dense urban areas, like New York and Chicago, and are looking for places to live and create. The Baltimore-Washington area is prime for that," Conner said.

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