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(E)MERGE ART FAIR: WHAT TO EXPECT?

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With the annual [\(e\)merge art fair](#) only days away, now might be a great time to take your piquing interest in art away from Gallery Girl reruns and into the Capital Skyline

hotel's showrooms and poolside lounge. Here you can explore contemporary paintings, drawings, photographs, videos and performances and enjoy live music while mingling with upcoming artists, gallerists, collectors and thrill-seekers.

October 4th-7th, is the second edition of the DC (e)merge Art Fair, featuring over 80 exhibitions and 152 artists from 24 countries. Co-organized by Leigh Conner and Jamie Smith, directors of **ConnerSmith Gallery**, and Helen Allen, former director of the **PULSE Art Fair**, the event is a conscious effort to bring together DC's many cultural communities. It sets itself apart from other art fairs by providing free space for artists without gallery representation and inexpensive space for burgeoning galleries and non-profits featuring artists yet to have solo museum shows. Lucky for all you broke young people, the budget friendliness continues with the price points for artworks, which are all below \$3000.



Interview with Leigh Conner and Jamie Smith

For me personally, growing up in DC, it's been really interesting to see the art fair lineup and actually recognize people that I've encountered in random spaces outside of art. Like looking at [artist] Ian McDermott and realizing that he was that blond boy in my class who walked in one day in a kilt. What do you think is unique about (e)merge that allows it to cross over from a specific art public to a more broad audience?

JS: I think that it's a model that brings together a lot of different segments of the DC community, but also it has this international element that creates a lot of creative exchange between artists working in DC and in many different facets of the art community with the national and international art world.

LC: I think an art fair can bring together so many different facets of the community, period. National, international, but also people who art into music, people that are into food, architecture, design. You find with (e)merge not only fine art, visual art people coming together. You know BYT, bringing together a lot of people for different kinds of reasons as well. It's the perfect audience for (e)merge, because the audience is young, very culturally curious, which means you're interested in the architects who are helping us design the fair and the people who are playing the music at the fair, as well as performance artists and individual artists.

Do you think that the strong focus on performance is helpful to reach a wider audience?

LC: The short answer is no, if you ask me. I think it is a kind of art and though it does have a very active element to it, the fair brings together installation, traditional painting, traditional photography. My partner is disagreeing; she's saying yes.

JS: I think it's exciting; there's an element of chance unfolding moment by moment and everyone can be part of that. So, yes, I think it's something that's not common at most international art fairs, but it's something that we really try to make a place for here. I think performance does bring something special, but also I agree with Leigh that it's not just about performance; it's about painting and sculpture, installation, gallery programs. Galleries coming from all over Europe and the US.

LC: And Cuba, and Canada and Puerto Rico. We're very pleased.

JS: Performance art is an aspect of it. It just happens to be a very dynamic aspect that sometimes is a little bit more digestible than trying to understand an installation. That's what's great about art; it brings all the people to it. Very young, culturally curious people are going to want to be in an art fair because you get to learn, buy something, talk to an artist or gallerist.



That was a perfect segue for my next question; I was wondering if you were trying to create a guide of sorts for the curious, young DCer trying to discover the local scene but maybe not knowledgeable about art, what would specifically would you recommend that they seek out at (e)merge?

LC: Well, first of all, you need to block some time. What I'd actually recommend for people who are very interested in art and trying to get a grasp of what they like about contemporary art, what they don't like, is to spend an hour, go through the whole fair, come back again. Then really take a look and say, "This is what I like, this is what I don't like". That's great; people are forming an opinion and talking to each other and the artists. That's the great thing about the (e)merge art fair: the young person or anyone who wants to walk in, young collector, older collector, enthusiast, wants to come in and talk about art, you can talk to everybody. In a lot of other fairs you just don't have access to these people, especially the artists.

JS: I think the format of the fair allows for many different styles of experience. Some people will know exactly what they want to see and other people will just go through as the whim strikes them. The great thing is that we have a welcoming atmosphere for any style of interaction; it's a very comfortable, very easy to absorb exhibition layout.

Do either of you have any personal picks that you are looking forward to seeing?

LC: Oh, you can't pick among your children! That's not fair! There's nothing I'm not looking forward to seeing. I could name some things, but that's not fair, because I look forward to going to every one of the galleries, seeing what young artists have brought, what they can bring from overseas to interact with each other. I deal with more of the gallery stuff. Jamie, what do you think?

JS: I think we've got a really strong program this year and one of things I enjoy that came out of last year's experience was that it's not necessarily just individual works of art by specific artists that I am looking forward to, but seeing how it all interacts together. They come together as an organic whole experience and the artists will make connections and friendships among themselves and have spontaneous ideas while setting up for the fair. It happens minute by minute and that allows for some really nice surprises.



From talking to the artists, beyond commercial success, what do you think they hope to gain from participating?

LC: I was actually talking to a very seasoned artist the other day and I understand that being an artist can be quite lonely. You're in your studio, you're by yourself, you're working with big ideas and you make these things and put them in front of everyone to

critique, laugh, cry, whatever. It's very intimidating and I would think that part of the strength of anything, whether you're a young gallery showing your vision of what young art is, or an emerging artist, is that there's strength: there's a lot of you out there, there are a lot people working with ideas. You are not alone, you can share your ideas and there is strength in that.

JS: I think the sense of communities that came out of last year's art fair is really important to artists and exhibitors. I also think that new opportunities can open up by virtue of exposure of work at the fair. Just taking the experience and getting feedback, from visitors to the fair, other artists, curators. Of course the galleries that are coming to DC to exhibit, they want to get a new audience for their artist's works and meet new collectors and curators here in DC. It's a synergy.

Do you have similar goals?

LC: One of the things we have believed in very strongly, after having engaged with this art community for almost 20 years, and through the gallery for almost 15 years, is that DC has a very poignant and very.... Oh hell. It just has a great arts community. It's DC; we're not London, we're not Chelsea, we're DC. DC is not just a museum town. This is a town for young, creative people to come to.

JS: Yes, I think in the last few years you see all kinds of art enterprises going on from every form and level imaginable. It's nice to have one event that kind of brings all that energy together for a few days, plus mixes in an international element. Leigh and I have seen DC for a long time as a great place for contemporary art and we're excited about letting the rest of the country and the world know what's going on here.



(e)merge art fair happens this October 4-7. For a full schedule of events, click here:<http://www.emergeartfair.com/>