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BYT Interviews: (e)merge art fair co-founders Leigh Conner and Jamie Smith

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This weekend, [\(e\)merge art fair](#), DC's premier fall art event returns for the 3rd year in a row. We sat down with Jamie Smith and Leigh Conner, co-founders of the fair, and caught up on their plans for this year's fair (on from October 3rd through 6th), expectations for the future and beyond.



photo credit: Lucien Perkins

BYT: Tell us briefly how you came about the idea of starting an art fair in DC? What made you think DC was ready/needed one?

We sensed that something was happening in D.C. in 2010, when we celebrated the gallery's tenth annual Academy show with a panel discussion called "(e)merge". We didn't know what to expect, but, much to our surprise, it had a huge attendance, and generated a lot of excitement. We saw a growing appetite in the city for events that connect art supporters not only with current movements in emerging art, but also with each other. That energy within the community signaled the time was right for innovation.

BYT: This is your third year, how do you think the festival fair has evolved since 2011?

Wow, (e)merge has developed and grown in many ways. The fair's mix of exhibitors has become more international. We've added a special section for artist run spaces based in D.C. and Baltimore. We are thrilled that the Phillips Collection established the Emerging Artist Prize, which will award a purchase prize to an artist exhibiting at (e)merge. We are also excited that the Washington Post is our presenting sponsor for the (e)merge panel series.



Christto & Andrew / *Era Without Era* / 2012

BYT: How do you go about selecting the participants? What is the process like?

Early each year, we put out an open call for exhibitor applications from galleries who promote emerging art and independent emerging artists who are currently without gallery representation. Our criterion for "emerging" is an artist who hasn't had a solo show in a major museum. Applications are reviewed by our advisory committee for

galleries and our vetting committee for artist proposals. This year artist projects were selected by National Gallery of Art curator, Molly Donovan; Warhol Museum director, Eric Shiner, and artist, Shinique Smith.

BYT: The fair features local and international galleries – what is the key to success of striking the right balance there?

The most important consideration is the quality and diversity of the works of art that will be exhibited together at the fair. We love to present galleries and artists from the DC-Baltimore area within a roster with many national and international exhibitors. Cultural diplomacy is one of the things Washington does best and, this year, we are partnering with several embassies to emphasize the international nature of the fair.

BYT: In a dream scenario-who would you have at the fair?

Well, we would really love it if Lady Gaga would fly in! We are looking forward to welcoming thousands of collectors, curators, artists, art supporters, and anyone who may never have attended an art event, but is interested in the culture of their time.

BYT: Anyone you are particularly excited to have at the fair this year, and why?

We are excited to have [all of our exhibitors](#), cultural partners, sponsors, panelists and musical guests.



Lottie Davies / *Viola as Twins* / 2008 / Cynthia Corbett Gallery, London

BYT: If this is someone's first time at the fair, what would you say would be THE MUST-SEE stops for them to get a well rounded idea of what the fair is all about?

Definitely visit the galleries in the guest rooms on the second floor of the hotel. It's a

great chance to meet knowledgeable professionals who are exhibiting quality works by up and coming artists from around the world. Be sure to see the installations and works of art displayed throughout the public spaces of the hotel and don't forget the garage. Performances will occur in various locations in the hotel throughout the run of the fair. Check out the performance art schedule and catch as many as you can.

BYT: Where do you see the fair going next year, five years from now, ten years from now?

We feel that (e)mmerge will continue to grow in size and stature as the D.C. audience steps up its presence as a major force in the global art world.

BYT: Anything you'd like to add?

Don't miss the [opening night party and concert by the pool Thursday, Oct. 3, 7-11pm](#). Singer Maimouna Yossef will perform a live set and John Thornley of US Royalty will do a DJ set. It's going to be an art party to remember!



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