

Emerging at (e)merge: Mandy Cano Villalobos

Posted by **Kriston Capps** on Oct. 6, 2012 at 4:55 pm



Mandy Cano Villalobos, "Voces," 2009-present.

D.C. is at peak performance art. At (e)merge Art Fair, which continues in Southwest at the Capitol Skyline through tomorrow, there's a good dozen performance artists taking over the hotel's poolside area as well as various hotel rooms, both authorized and not. (At the opening on Thursday, someone or someones dressed in what appeared to be viking gear wondered the hotel's crowded second floor making a mighty calamity. A few people there were playing craps, which may or may not have been a performance. Come to think of it, the vikings might have simply been rowdy Baltimore kids from MICA.)

The (e)merge-approved performers include all the usual D.C. suspects. Trickster artist **Andrew Wodzianski**, who lived in a U Street storefront for a week or so as a performance, sealed himself in a floating coffin in the Capitol Skyline pool on Friday morning; he emerges, so to speak, from his performance on Sunday. **Chajana denHarder** spent a couple hours on Thursday floating in the pool, too. **Holly Bass**,

never one to miss an opportunity to get into the mix, let folks wash her hair for a performance yesterday and today. Then there's **Sheldon Scott**, a D.C. impresario perhaps known best for his general stylishness, who is also doing a performance, in the storytelling mode that is so popular these days.

Against this backdrop of performance artists—whose sheer ubiquity can make their performances feel, at times, tossed off or opportunity-driven—the work of **Mandy Cano Villalobos** stands out as subtle and strong.

Villalobos is no stranger to D.C.: She put on an installation that still stands in my book as one of D.C.'s top-five gallery works of all time (or my time, anyway). Some background: At the 14th Street NW building that now houses elite furniture retailer Room & Board, Villalobos and a bunch of other artists assembled by Transformer put together a gritty sculpture show, one that was quickly shut down by city inspectors. Inside, Villalobos (née Burrow) built a sort of vestibule out of trash and remainders she found lying around.

Villalobos takes the same magpie approach to her work at (e)merge: For "Voces," She builds what would appear to be a Mexican roadside prayer altar, complete with icons and votive candles. As a continuing performance element, Villalobos is sewing names onto hundreds of plain white shirts, each one for a victim of the ongoing femicide in Chihuahua, Mexico. (Villalobos lived in El Paso, Texas, sister city to Ciudad Juárez in Chihuahua.) Her act of devotion will outlast (e)merge: She has been sewing the shirts, which are presented in massive laundry mounds outside her poolside altar at the fair, since 2009.

Beyond the performance element, "Voces" demonstrates Villalobos's demonstrated affection for craft, assembly, construction, tradition, femininity, and research—an extension of the self into areas of concern beyond her immediate self. That quality alone may put Villalobos's work in a class of its own at (e)merge.

See more of the best from (e)merge here.