

ARTINFO

Why D.C. Needs an Emerging Art Fair

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Published: July 14, 2011



Photo courtesy of Leigh Conner

(e)merge partners, left to right: Leigh Conner, Jamie Smith, Helen Allen

WASHINGTON, D.C.— Why start a new fair for emerging art in Washington, D.C.? As collector Mera Rubell puts it, "Politics is not the only game in D.C., just like Hollywood isn't the only game in L.A. Washington spends more money on art than any other place on earth. Culture is a monster industry here, and D.C. is poised to become a powerful art destination. This city is a diamond in the rough."

As the creators of the (e)merge art fair, which will debut in D.C. this September 22-25, we believe that the nation's capital is a burgeoning market for contemporary art. In recent years, D.C.'s art community has grown and diversified, while strengthening its interconnections and forging new relationships with the business community. Along with artistic advancement, the region's private business and tech sectors have expanded. The mutually reinforcing factors of creative artistic energy, entrepreneurial innovation, and economic growth provide a stimulating environment for emerging art. With enthusiastic support from D.C.'s museums, galleries, collectors, nonprofit spaces, city officials, and residents, this event is positioned to tap directly into the region's evolution.

The Capitol Skyline Hotel is the perfect venue for (e)merge. The building, designed by Miami architect Morris Lapidus and constructed in 1964, has 200 rooms and an Olympic-

size swimming pool. The hotel, acquired by the Rubell family 12 years ago, is a favorite hangout of D.C. hipsters and art insiders. It provides a relaxed setting where artists, gallerists, and collectors can meet and enjoy the exhibitions, performances, storytelling, lectures, and panels discussions occurring throughout the run of the fair. "We are very proud and grateful that Leigh, Jamie, and Helen selected the Capitol Skyline," says Mera Rubell, who advises the fair's organizers. "If you are thinking of collecting, this is where to buy your first piece of art. If you are promoting emerging artists, this event has something special to offer your gallery. If you are an emerging artist, this is your place to be seen."

(e)merge is establishing itself at a time when the global art world increasingly is becoming saturated with art fairs in well-mined territories, but for Rubell, (e)merge stands out in the crowd. "The Rubell family wholeheartedly supports (e)merge," she states. "This art fair is creating a dynamic cultural experience in Washington, D.C. It's fresh, and nothing like it is happening anywhere else in the world." In addition to featuring international galleries and nonprofits in hotel rooms, (e)merge will provide free exhibition space to unrepresented artists to show their vetted works throughout the public areas of the hotel. The dual platforms are designed to fuel the careers of emerging artists and the galleries that exhibit their art by creating a place for artistic discovery that can inspire a new generation of collectors.

(e)merge offers inside access to decision makers in an expanding cultural market with immense economic power. D.C. has the strongest economy in the country, the highest salaries, and the top job market. Metropolitan D.C. is home to four of the nation's five wealthiest zip codes. Washington has one of the strongest real-estate markets in the U.S., and surpasses New York in rankings of best cities for small businesses. Shifting demographics and social commerce are reforming D.C.'s reputation as a single-industry town. The capital has transformed into a young, highly educated population of urban explorers who have an expressed interest in cultural adventures, as is evidenced by the meteoric success of local tech start-up LivingSocial.

What better place to encourage new talent than in a city that boasts many of the nation's leading cultural institutions? D.C. is home to dozens of arts institutions, not to mention government agencies, humanitarian trusts, art colleges, embassies, and cultural think tanks. The thousands of arts professionals and cultural diplomats working in Washington generate more support for the arts than any other city in the world. Several of D.C.'s most prestigious museums, including the National Gallery of Art, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, the Phillips Collection, the Corcoran Gallery of Art, and the National Museum of Women in the Arts, are supporting (e)merge as cultural partners by hosting special events during the fair.

"The Washington, D.C., art community is ready to welcome the rest of the world to our city," says National Institutes of Health clinical research training director Frederick P. Ognibene, an avid art collector who recently became chairman of the Washington Project for the Arts's board of directors. "What better way to do this than with a hotel art fair? It's a social, engaging and totally affordable endeavor."

"For years, the Washington art scene has been a well-kept secret among a limited number of collectors," Ognibene continues. "Because it's a ground-floor opportunity for new collectors, (e)merge is a real game-changer."