

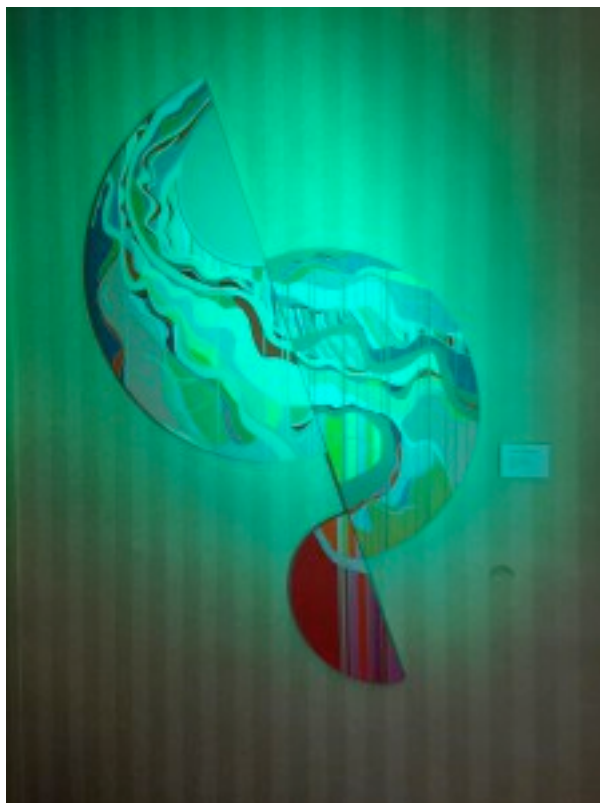
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## The Best of the Fest: (e)merge art fair Superlatives

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You've spent enough beautiful weekends outside this season. Isn't it time you spent an entire day rubbing elbows with tipsy scenesters in tiny hotel rooms filled with international art? If you've ever wanted to climb over a mattress to get a better look at a wood-and-resin sculpture or admire a collaged portrait propped up where tiny shampoos and body lotions should be, the [\(e\)merge art fair](#) is your dream come true.

This year's roster features more than 150 artists hailing from 30 countries (and many rockstars from right here in the District), and after three hours spent roaming the Capitol Skyline grounds last night, I was giddy on an art high. Go, embrace serendipity, and aimlessly wander into rooms and closets and elevators and pools, but don't miss these highlights.



**Best Mindfuck:** Ai-Wen Wu Kratz's work in the Touchstone Gallery room. Three semi-circles covered in fluorescent, psychedelic shapes hang on the wall, lit by a light that flashes a sequence of neon colors, making it difficult to tell what colors the artist actually used in her piece. Each tone reacts differently to the light, making it a mesmerizing, glowing show.

**Loudest Melters:** Johannesburg's **Jake Singer** has installed big, frozen chunks of gravel that drip water droplets and stones into metal buckets as they melt on the pool deck in rhythmic plops.



**Best Eyeball Fixation:** Polarraum, a gallery in Hamburg, Germany, is showing oil paintings by **Justine Otto**—many of which are surrealist imaginings of eyeballs popping out of sockets, gazing like laser beams, and being pulled by ropes, beautifully rendered in soft strokes and pinkish tones.

**Best Unintentional Performance Piece:** Signage next to the Capitol Skyline gift shop naming an (e)merge artist and work title led me to believe that the gift shop was, in fact, a piece in itself. It's a testament to this art fair's nook-and-cranny approach to exhibiting art that it

took me more than a few seconds of poking around the Washington Monument keychains and bags of Skittles, dodging polite "hello"s from the cashier, to realize that the sign was indicating a sculptural piece outside the gift shop door. I think.

**Best Use of Old Materials:** **Edel Gregan**, an Irish artist and former fashion designer who recently moved to McLean, used vintage couture silk piping she bought at a fabric-store sale 15 years ago to make bulbous wrapped sculptures that look like chrysalises.

**Least Appealing Performance Piece:** Dear God, I hope this was a performance piece. On the pool deck, in a plywood box decked out in Washington football team posters and liquor paraphernalia, a bunch of hollering bros were playing beer pong, smoking, and playing kazoos. It was obnoxious to listen to, and I purposely didn't get close enough to attract their attention. If it was performance art, it



certainly affected me. If not, the Capitol Skyline should look into further security measures.

**Best Meta-Photo:** Miami artist **Ian Deleón's** photo of a photo of **Fidel Castro** taking a Polaroid photo,

which Deleón says would be hard to show in his hometown for its political implications. (e)merge goes *Inception* with this one. Find it in ARC & NLS's exhibition of artists from the Caribbean and the diaspora.



Mercedes Teixido making an art for *City Paper* art director Carey Jordan.

**Best Free Souvenir:** A drawing from **Mercedes Teixido**. Sit in her cozy living room-like set-up for "Notes for the Capitol," choose a book from the shelf, read an excerpt out loud, and Teixido will take doodly notes with a pen attached to a machine that only lets her hand move in right angles, like an Etch-a-Sketch. In a move that surprised

none, *Washington City Paper* art director **Carey Jordan** chose *All I Could Bare: My Life in the Strip Clubs of Gay Washington, D.C.* Teixido chuckled. "You might have to stop reading if any kids come by," she said. Luckily, families stayed at bay, and Jordan ended up with a cool drawing to take home (below). See if you can make out the words "chance," "favor," "dancers," and "dick."





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Handwritten musical notation consisting of a series of vertical stems and horizontal lines, resembling a staff with notes. The notation is written in black ink and is positioned in the upper right quadrant of the page.

Handwritten musical notation consisting of a series of vertical stems and horizontal lines, resembling a staff with notes. The notation is written in black ink and is positioned in the lower left quadrant of the page.

Handwritten musical notation consisting of a series of vertical stems and horizontal lines, resembling a staff with notes. The notation is written in black ink and is positioned in the lower center of the page.

**Best Not-Free Souvenir:** A take-home picture from Hamiltonian fellow and noted local photographer [Larry Cook](#). Pony up \$20, and you can pose in front of a "High Rollers" backdrop while a DJ spins funk and go-go.



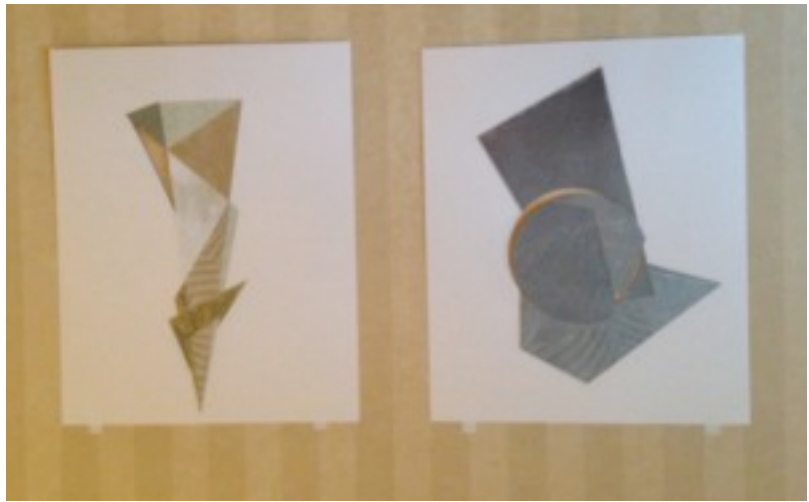
The bottle was corked.

**Best Analogy:** Summer camp. "I feel like some of these galleries literally just brought back the same pieces they showed last year," said a staffer from a local gallery who asked for anonymity while discussing her peers. She emailed me later: "I feel like it's sleepaway camp or something—same kids every year, just a little bit

'older.'" Apparently, (e)merge staff gave a cheery knock on the gallery's hotel room door this morning for a wake-up call of sorts, too.

**Best Site-Specific Use of a Hotel Room:** It's a tie!

This category was perhaps unfairly weighted in favor of D.C. galleries who could scope out the digs ahead of time. Flashpoint is showing works on paper by **Rachel Schmidt**, who adapted three of her pieces into window decals for the gallery's (e)merge room. Her themes of urban wilderness are almost too appropriate



for the room's view of knotted highways and the fake ducks in the Capitol Skyline pool. And in Transformer's showroom, which features 2-D works from three [FlatFile](#) artists, **Megan Mueller** is exhibiting collages of found wallpaper in shades of taupe and gray that complement the Skyline's neutral striped tones.





**Best Play at Democracy:** Washington Project for the Arts, which just launched an improved [online database](#) of local artists, is showing a wall full of 8"x8" works on paper by dozens of area up-and-comers.

**Best Blinding with Science:** At first glance, they look like beanbags. Then, spiky sea urchins. Get closer, and they resemble the ribosomes in my old biology-class diagrams. Get even closer and you finally notice it: They're made of zip ties. The whimsical irony of **Sui Park**'s flexible organic forms charmed me. I wish I could have hugged one.



**Worst Blinding by the Light:** As I rounded the last corner of the last floor (the underground parking garage) of the fair, I saw an epilepsy warning sign outside a partitioned area. I suspected, though I wasn't sure, that this might be part of the fair, and I'm brave as fuck, so I stepped inside. I don't know what I was expecting, but a motion sensor triggered a series of bright flashes that almost made me trip over myself. I was seeing stars all the way out to my bike. Learn from my mistake, and happy art fair, y'all.