

# The Washington Post

## The Eclectic Front and Center

By Mark Jenkins, Published: October 5

Floating in the pool of the Capitol Skyline Hotel, [Chajana denHarder](#) has begun "Singularity," a performance-art piece involving a clear plastic ball. Nearby, the turntables and mixer are in place for a DJ set by Thievery Corporation's Eric Hilton. In the underground garage, two Corcoran students in eight-foot-high satyr/centaur get-ups readily pose for photos, although they decline to speak. Outside, on South Capitol Street, cars and trucks thunder by artlessly.

The annual (e)merge art fair has just begun.



The event, which started Thursday evening and runs till Sunday at 5 p.m., is Washington's version of the larger fairs that have become integral to the international art world. So far, it's not a major stop on the circuit. But the Thursday night preview and party crowd, dressed mostly in black, is big and happy.

"We all get so busy," says a beaming Victoria Reis, executive and artistic director of [Transformer](#), a tiny but inventive Logan Circle art space. "It's wonderful to see everybody. It's celebratory."

The fair's second edition "is about the same size as last year's," says Jamie Smith, one of (e)merge's three principals. (The others are [Leigh Conner](#), Smith's partner at Northeast Washington's [Connersmith](#), and New York-based art-fair organizer Helen Allen.) "We have 80 exhibitors representing 152 artists from 24 countries."

The vibe is not especially commercial. The fair is hosting more than 40 artists who aren't represented by galleries and is devoting much of the garage space to work by students from the [Corcoran College of Art and Design](#) and Baltimore's Maryland Institute College of Art. Performance art, something that's difficult to merchandise, is one specialty of (e)merge.

In one of two ground-floor conference rooms showcasing unaffiliated artists, local video artist Joyce Yu-Jean Lee is offering buttons that riff on Apple's China-manufactured products with the slogan "Made in China. Bought in the U.S.A."

In fact, Lee had the buttons fabricated in this country. "I had to pay twice as much," she says. "It's a piece uniquely about the art fair," she adds, but also "about our distance from the people who make our goods."

Fewer European galleries are represented than at the [previous fair](#), in September 2011. But several, including Basel, Switzerland's [Aureus Contemporary](#) and Amsterdam's [Amstel Gallery](#), did return.

"We didn't sell anything at the fair last year," Amstel's Petra Leene said. "But we had good after-sales," justifying a second visit.

This year, Leene is economizing by combining a trip to (e)merge with one to Art Platform in Los Angeles; she's showing the same artists at both. The works include images of under- or undressed people in hotel rooms, as well as still-lives involving fruit and animals, including an octopus. Both series are photographic but show the influence of Dutch Old Masters.

"Jamie and Leigh are great girls," Leene says. "They do a good job of bringing people together."

She adds: "This art fair is about the artist. It's great that they show artists who don't have galleries."