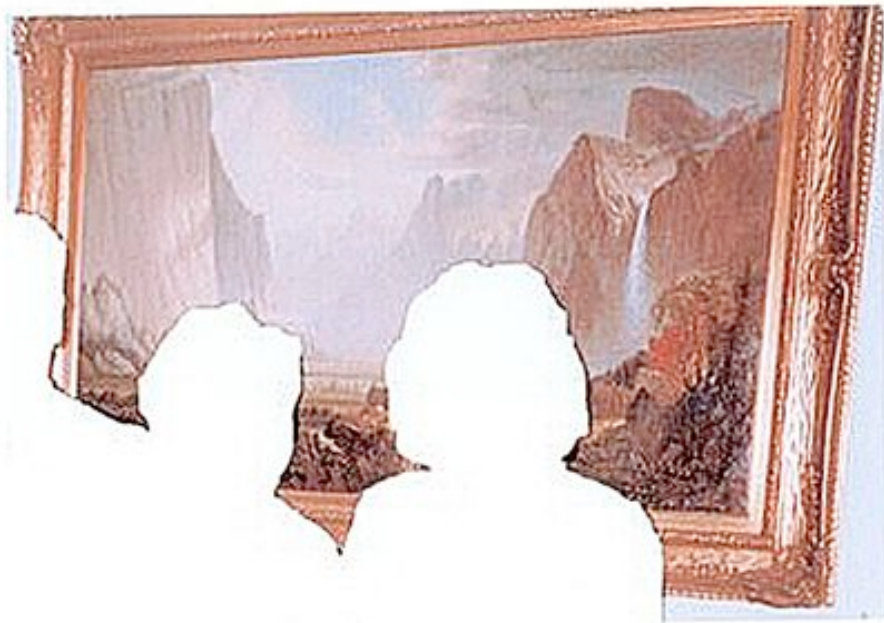


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ART FOR OUT SAKE: D.C.'s premier art festival boasts global appeal with emphasis on local scene

By: Kayleigh Bryant-Greenwell
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"Yosemite Valley" by Evan Hume, 2014

Whether you're a longtime art lover or a fledgling fan, you will not want to miss this weekend's fourth annual (e)merge art fair at the [Capitol Skyline Hotel](#) in Southwest.

D.C.'s premier art festival, (e)merge displays the works of more than 150 local and [international](#) artists in various places around the hotel — the lobby, the pool, the lower level of the garage — wherever there is space to fill and eyes to see.

And, as always with (e)merge, the emphasis is on the local: More than one-quarter of the painters, sculptors and other [artists](#) hail from the D.C. area, allowing local art admirers (and potential buyers) to develop connections with hometown creatives amid an international backdrop.

This year, Chinese artist-dissident Ai Wei Wei — perhaps best known for being a thorn in the side of Beijing’s communist [government](#) — has brought his defiant sensibilities to the festival, serving on the vetting committee to review artist submissions for the show.

Organizers have divided the art fair into two parts — one displaying the acquired works of galleries in the city, across the country and around the world; the other featuring individual artists in their varied media.

The gallery [platform](#), which occupies many of the hotel’s rooms, shows off collections of 85 galleries representing more than 150 artists from more than 30 countries. About one-fourth of those artists are from the greater Washington area.

Issues of race pop up thematically throughout the fair, including in the gallery platform, as Hamiltonian presents a photographic series but by local [artist](#) Larry Cook, featuring images of black men in various forms of regalia.

The coveted artist platform — for solo or collective exhibits — makes use of “alternative” spaces in and around the hotel venue, such as beside the pool, the basement garage, the lobby and other available areas.

What’s more, about 58 percent of those featured in the artist platform are from the local area — artists such as assemblage sculptor [Anne Bouie](#), whose beaded vessels and tribal-like statues challenge our ideas about race and culture.



“Testament # 3” by Anne Bouie, 2012. Photo by Jarvis Grant.

“As a local artist, it’s great being a part of the energy and excellence (e)merge is coming to represent,” [Ms. Bouie](#) said.

Unmistakably progressive and polarizing, [Ms. Bouie](#) has deep roots in the D.C. art scene. [Ms. Bouie’s](#) longstanding [career](#) may cause some raised eyebrows in considering the ever-fluid definition of (e)merging art, and the fair does little to clarify the elusive term.

“One of the things I appreciate about (e)merge is that it focuses attention on Washington, D.C.’s art scene and presence ... It is international in scope, but it does happen here, and people who visit will take in other sites as well. Regardless of naysayers, it takes a lot of faith and work to pull it off, and it gets better each year,” [Ms. Bouie](#) said.

Though, “emerging,” like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder at the (e)merge art fair, the artist platform exposes visitors to a diverse breadth of working artists, including newcomer digital photographer Evan Hume, whose pixelated aesthetic is an intentional engagement with [modern](#) photography.

“What’s most exciting for me about exhibiting at (e)merge is getting a chance to display my work in a [different](#) context. I think what I’m showing this year is actually more suited to being shown in a space like the [Capitol Skyline Hotel](#) than a gallery and I’m interested to see how it shapes the viewers’ reactions,” Mr. Hume said.

Visitors will have plenty to react to, including in [performance](#) art, which was a big hit at last year’s fair, and returns to the spotlight scheduled nearly around the clock poolside, on the front lawn and elsewhere around the hotel.

For example, local favorite Holly Bass is scheduled to [perform](#) “Black Space Rent Party,” which examines the house-rent parties of black neighborhoods in the 1920s-40s.

This year, (e)merge has continued to push art’s relationship to technology by partnering with the location-based journal [app](#) Maphook, which will allow visitors to use geo-location to promote, map and share their art experiences with fellow enthusiasts around the world — taking the fair far beyond the walls of the [Capitol Skyline Hotel](#).

Taking it even further, the fair engages with digital memory and [social media](#) dialogue with the inclusion of Claire Felicie in the gallery platform. Internet savvy art enthusiasts may remember seeing Ms. Felicie’s series “These are the young men” pop up on Twitter and Instagram feeds earlier this year. The photographic series presented at the fair by Amstel Gallery of the Netherlands features depictions of Dutch soldiers before, during, and after the Afghanistan war.

The (e)merge art fair is not to be missed — especially since there are so few opportunities to see this breadth of [international](#) contemporary art in the city.