



Academy 2010 @ Conner Contemporary Art



Installation image of "The Wait", by Joyce Lee, courtesy of Conner Contemporary Art

Conner Contemporary Art co-founders Jamie Smith and Leigh Conner believe in the viability of emerging artists from the D.C. area, as displayed in Academy, their yearly survey of MFA/BFA standouts from the D.C.-Baltimore area and *gogo emerging art projects, which evolved from Academy and serves as their arts incubator program. You'll be hard-pressed to find another gallery in the area that is as successful and as committed to local artistic potential.

Currently in its tenth edition, Academy is the brainchild of Smith, who's curated nearly every iteration of the show since its inception. Her selections are chosen from annual visits to thesis shows, and although they are as subjective as anything else in art tends to be, her preferences draw from her academic background (she holds a doctorate in the History of Art from Johns Hopkins) and extensive professional experience.

Smith explains that while the purpose of Academy is to provide exposure to exciting young artists, it's also an opportunity to recognize the strengths of the local art schools that keep the D.C. artscape vibrant and in constant renewal. In the process, Smith and Conner's intention is to contribute to the developing idea that D.C., like New York or Chicago, can also be a viable place for emerging artists to show their work and be commercially successful.

It's therefore no surprise that over the last decade, Academy has introduced us to a litany of artists that remain actively engaged in the local arts community, such as J.J. McCracken, Patrick McDonough, and

Ding Ren (who we interviewed earlier this week), and a few others who have exhibited in museums nationally and internationally. So when you go see Academy 2010, you may want to make note of whom you think you might see again in the future.

One artist you're certain to see again, and soon, is Joyce Lee, who was recently selected for the Hamiltonian Artists fellowship program. She produces pastel drawings that are reinterpretations of classic paintings, such as Ed Hopper's *Nighthawks* or *The Allegory of Faith* by Johannes Vermeer, and uses them as backdrops for video pieces featuring herself and other participants in the illustrations. The videos are projected onto the corner of a wall and seem to hover somewhere between two and three dimensions, almost interactively suggesting a tactile depth to the work.

Image of "Untitled Unit .002" by Benjamin Kelley, courtesy of Conner Contemporary Art



Benjamin Kelley's sculptural work is an exploration of technological advancement and its dehumanizing potential. His piece *Untitled Unit .002* provides an understated view of our fascination with high tech aesthetics and the "machine cult" through the object's cold, technologized form that ominously alludes to function. Composed of vinyl, plastic, and aluminum, the piece explores the sublimation of art and technology, and presents an argument for the aesthetic dimension that is intrinsic in contemporary definitions of "high tech."

Kelley's other pieces, *Universal Symbol of Achievement .001* and *Universal Symbol of Achievement .002*, are Cadillac Hood ornaments made of human bone, which are hung low on the wall near the floor. Almost literally, these works are human remnants shaped by productivism that are then discarded by the wayside.

Other notables include Kate Demong's subdued paintings, which belie the laborious production process and the personal histories attached to the materials she uses (she produces non-manufactured pigments by grinding soil, wood, or ash collected from sites of personal significance); Katie Miller's strikingly realistic oil paintings, which skillfully explore our uncomfortable and excessive fascination with images of children; and Calder Brannock's mobile gallery *Camper Contemporary* (parked on the outdoor space at Conner), which occupies a modified camper trailer and is exhibiting work produced through its very own artist residency program.

Academy 2010 is on display at Conner Contemporary Art, 1358 Florida Ave, NE, through August 21. On July 31, Pink Line Project hosts an (e)merge discussion panel + party at the gallery, 4 to 8 p.m.