

The Washington Post

Conner Contemporary's 'Academy' exhibit features work by D.C. area art students

By Blake Gopnik
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They look at tyro art, so you don't have to.

Every year for a decade now, curator Jamie Smith and the other staff at Conner Contemporary Art have vetted their way through all of our many local art schools and university programs, choosing the best emerging work for Conner's summer "Academy" show.



The 10th edition, now at the gallery, is a typical mix: some very good, some so-so, almost all deriving from the work of older artists -- which is a good thing, since it shows these students have their eyes open.

I was impressed by the images of Katie Miller, which show newborn children nude on white backgrounds. Blown up to maybe three times life-size, the babies look more like extraterrestrials than anything that might become an adult human. They're far more creepy than cute. My only question was why the artist chose to show them as fancy photorealistic paintings rather than simply giving us the photos her paintings were based on.

Elsewhere in "Academy," the street photos by Corcoran graduate Michelle Yo were as good as ever. (I profiled her in The Post last fall.) Equally fine were photographs by her Corcoran colleague Jenny Yang, which document the liquor store that her family owns in south Baltimore. My colleague Jessica Dawson chose her as a finalist in The Post's Real Art D.C. contest. And I was taken with the 32-inch spark plug made from paper and foam core by Chie Iwasaki, a student at Gallaudet.

But I was especially keen on a project called Camper Contemporary by Calder Brannock, a 25-year-old from the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore. He gave up the standard job of making the art in favor of providing an occasion for others to make work and show it.

Brannock presents an offer to his peers: If they put themselves in his hands, he will take them on a one-day excursion to an interesting site that should serve as artistic inspiration. Once his invitees have made their place-inspired art, Brannock shows it in what must be the world's smallest gallery, a 1967 Yellowstone trailer

that he's refitted with white walls and hardwood floors, like a 98-square-foot fragment of a deluxe Chelsea space.

At the moment it's parked in the Conner courtyard, where it presents the products of five artists' excursions with Brannock to places in the District, Pennsylvania and Virginia, to explore sites linked to the flight and death of John Wilkes Booth. The works on the gallery's small walls are perfectly good but not notably great. It is the micro-gallery itself, and the semi-satirical situation it constructs -- the art world, miniaturized -- that is worth tending to.

Others are tending to it. Out of all of the "Academy" projects, Brannock's was selected for inclusion in the Pulse art fair in Miami in December as part of its Pulse Presents program. He gets a free exhibition space... to show his exhibition space.

Academy continues through Aug. 21 at Conner Contemporary Art, 1358 Florida Ave. NE.
Free and open Wednesday through Saturday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Call 202-588-8750 or visit <http://www.connercontemporary.com>.