

Dupont Gallery Heading to New Digs in NE

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Posted: September 4, 2007

THE LOCAL GALLERY WORLD has been buzzing for some time over rumors that Leigh Conner would move Conner Contemporary from its second-floor home in Dupont Circle to a storefront location elsewhere. Today, the news is official: Conner tells us she's moving to the far end of the H Street NE corridor.



Purchased for \$1.4 million, the new space — a former auto body shop located at 1358-60 Florida Ave. NE dwarfs the space she's occupied for the last eight years. At 12,000 square feet, the new site means that Conner's space in Northeast will be the largest commercial gallery in the District. The gallery is scheduled to open in the spring.

As a dealer, Conner has focused on exhibiting in the international arena — adhering to a calendar packed with art fairs in Miami, New York, London, Mexico City, and elsewhere. She has more experience showing in international fairs than any dealer in the city. Nevertheless, Conner has maintained a strong local brand by exhibiting quality shows throughout the art season and by introducing *gogo art projects, a farm league of younger and less commercially palatable artists.

Gallery-goers will surely breathe a sigh of relief that they no longer face the march up to the second floor at 1730 Connecticut Ave. NW for another hot, crowded opening. The new location promises space in spades, with indoor exhibition area totaling 6,500 square feet. The enclosed outdoor space — where Conner plans to show "large-scale sculpture, video projections and installations" — is an alluring prospect. Certainly, the Dupont space was

too small for Conner's programming — for any dealer, really, who hopes to show more than prints and paintings.

Conner's Florida Avenue space will also feature a 4,300-square-foot second level, which the gallery is developing. Sources say the gallery intends to lease the space to another art gallery, though Conner will only confirm that the gallery hopes to find the right fit and that they are talking to several parties, local and non-local, at this time.

The question for Conner is one any developer faces: If she builds it, will they come? Time will tell.

The move will cost Conner some foot traffic, at least in the short term. But the category of collectors who buy a piece after glimpsing it from the street and wondering inside is not the category of collectors who support a gallery. Some viewers might not find it worth their while to hike the, say, 2.7 miles from 1515 14th Street NW, where G Fine Art is located, to the intersection where H Street NE meets Florida and Maryland avenues on busy opening nights.

But on those evenings, Conner might draw in the curious from H Street establishments like the H Street Country Club or Dr. Granville's Brickyard. A community that can support a Belgium ale draft house in a Metro-inaccessible area can surely pack art-gallery parties.

Of course, the fun, hip atmosphere only matters insofar as it's something Conner has cultivated and it's a feature that casual viewers prize. As far as collectors are concerned, Conner won't suffer any bleed whatsoever. In fact, when rumors first circulated about a move for Conner, some speculated that she might close the storefront altogether and focus on showing privately to collectors and in fairs — following in Cheryl Numark's footsteps.

Elsewhere in the city, gallery-goers are making do with less: Andrea Pollan tours the international art fair circuit but still keeps a micro gallery in the city.

For the short term, though, it means that viewers will have one fewer gallery to attend as the fall art season picks up. Now that she's closed on the place, Conner has her work cut out for her. Through the fall, at least, viewers won't see works from her stable unless they travel to Pulse London in October and Pulse Miami in December. So viewers have until the spring to figure out how they'll fit H Street into their gallery crawls.

Photo courtesy Conner Contemporary