



ART

## Mentor Exercise

Transformer's developmental program offers support to up-and-coming artists

By Zoe Pollock

"Emerging" is such an odd buzz word," says Victoria Reis, executive director of Transformer and co-founder of the gallery's Exercises for Emerging Artists program. "It has more to do with experimentation than with younger artists. Artists can be emerging at all different stages of their careers."

That's certainly true for 43-year-old Rob Parrish, one of the artists in Transformer's upcoming exhibit, "E4: Station to Station." Parrish, who's been creating video art for the past 16 years, joins three other artists participating in the latest installment of the four-month developmental program. Launched in 2004, Exercises brings artists

together to discuss ideas and processes, as well as to undergo peer and mentor critiques on a bi-weekly basis. The whole project culminates with an exhibit of their work.

"It's an opportunity for artists to connect with their peers and mentors, once they're outside of the art-school experience," Reis says of the program. "Unless you're being nurtured by a gallery, you're not always engaged by fellow artists.... We provide support for them, whether it's finalized projects or just a presentation point."

Reis says she initially sought out guest curator Niels Van Tomme—who serves as the co-director of the International Curators Program Antwerp and, in April, curated the four-day "Multimediale" arts festival

here—because of his background in film and mixed media. He and an assortment of artists, including visual artist Alberto Gaitán and Corcoran Curator of Photography and Media Arts Paul Roth, offered guidance and feedback to the program's artists as they developed their work. The idea is that work will be first shared within the immediate circle of the participating artists, then with the mentors, and then opened to a public audience for feedback, says Reis.

"It was a little nerve-wracking, allowing perfect strangers to look at things that aren't finished," Parrish notes, before adding that "the process branched me off into some other projects that wouldn't have bubbled off, left to my own devices."

Due to space restraints and the expansive nature of multimedia, Van Tomme decided early on that each artist would require a four-day solo installation. "We knew it wouldn't be a normal exhibition with paintings or photos, but an experiential space for each station of work," he says.

"E4" opens with Carolina Mayorga's "New Trends in South American Cuisine" (July 11-14), which explores themes of social politics and protest through video,

performance, and installation art. Parrish's "Jack" (July 18-21) mixes television and archival footage in the examination of propaganda and manipulation. Former figure skater Rebecca C. Adams analyzes the pedantic tracing of figure eights in "Compulsory Figures and so" (July 25-28). In her environmental performance piece, "You're Not as Green as You Are Cabbage-Looking" (Aug. 1-4), Fereshteh Toosi will calculate carbon emissions for audience members.

As Reis' program continues to develop up-and-coming talent in the D.C. area, it also continues to solidify Transformer's reputation as a site for experimentation, capable of both creativity and professionalism. "In their approach, Transformer is very European and reminds me of alternative, underground art spaces in Brussels and Antwerp," says Van Tomme. "Many times art tries to take itself so seriously; Transformer does take art seriously, but they are also rock and roll."

*"E4: Station to Station" opens Wednesday, July 11, and is on view from 1 to 7 p.m. Wednesdays through Saturdays, to Saturday, Aug. 4, at Transformer, 1404 P St. NW. Free. (202) 483-1102.*