

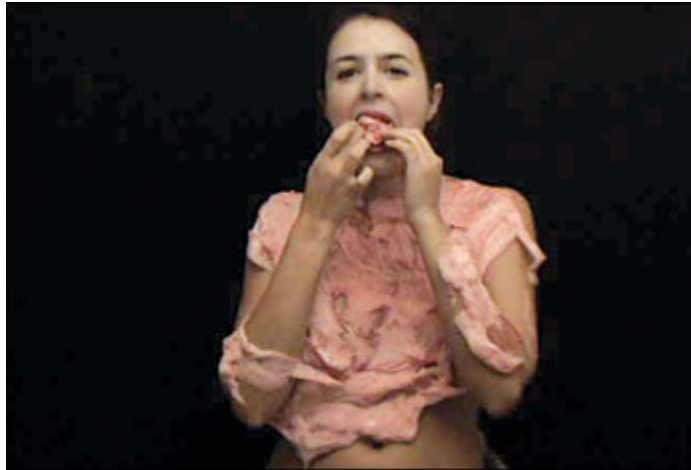
# CityPaper

WASHINGTON  
WASHINGTON'S FREE WEEKLY

## "Academy 2007"

To Saturday, Aug. 18,  
at Conner  
Contemporary Art

By Kriston Capps  
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The shape of things to come isn't exactly what "Academy" surveys. The curators of Conner Contemporary's annual show of work by recent art graduates make it a point to select widely from area art schools, meaning that some works are selected simply to represent institutions. The highlights include sculpture and paintings by Brian Sykes and Jessica van Brakle: Sykes' Boulder is a wood-chip-and-straw bale bound in plastic wrap; essentially about materials, the piece has an uncanny surface, both reflective and transparent, and the playful juxtaposition of kitchen and garden materials leaves the viewer wondering whether the piece weighs a ton or no more than a bag of leaves. For her prim composition Free Standing, van Brakle draws a simple construction crane over feminine wallpaper prints to question the role of gender in markmaking. Other artists, such as Natalia Panfile, eschew the contemporary for the personal, especially in the video department. Panfile's compelling, if ultimately ineffective, Pretty Girl shows the artist as she tells a harrowing narrative about being raped by multiple men. Over her body, she wears hot-pink taffy like a confectionery cilice; it irritates her skin as she gradually peels and devours it while she speaks. Panfile chooses the performance language of body artists such as Janine Antoni for her crisp-looking confessional, but she doesn't reach beyond the miserable facts of her own recounting for any broader artistic statement. And Panfile doesn't land the metaphor between self-eating and self-recrimination, so there is little the viewer can take away beyond the artist's vulnerability. The exhibition is on view from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays, to Saturday, Aug. 18, at Conner Contemporary Art, 1730 Connecticut Ave. NW, 2nd Floor. Free. (202) 588-8750.