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Conner Contemporary Art turns auto body shop into gallery

by Erin Killian
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Artists Leigh Conner and Jamie Smith are moving their art gallery from Dupont Circle to the more affordable Trinidad neighborhood in Northeast Washington.

After operating Conner Contemporary Art for eight years at 1730 Connecticut Ave. NW, the duo bought a 12,000-square-foot former auto body shop building at 1358-1360 Florida Avenue NE for \$1.4 million.

"At a time when galleries face rising rents in commercial sectors of major cities including D.C., New York and London, the acquisition of this building is an investment in our artists' futures aimed at sustaining the integrity of our gallery program and securing its self-determination," said Leigh Conner in a statement.

The building has two stories -- the first of which will be used for the studio's art projects. The second level is under development.

The studio that houses work from such artists as D.C.-based based Mary Coble and Kenny Hunter, who lives in Scotland, will be open this fall during the week while under construction.

Over the past year, a smattering of art galleries in D.C. have moved from the well-established Dupont Circle neighborhood to the U Street NW and 14 Street NW corridors.

Paul So, a physics professor at George Mason University, is also planning to open an art gallery and a nonprofit to help other artists at 1353 U St. NW next year.