



Introductions6 @ Irvine Contemporary

As the title of the show implies, this is the sixth year that Irvine Contemporary is presenting their BFA/MFA survey. Unlike Conner's *Academy 2010*, which surveys local art schools, *Introductions6* is meant to be national in scope, although this year's selections skew heavily toward the Washington/Baltimore region. The show features work by students from some of the area's usual suspects -- MICA and American University (Steven M. Cummings; [Hedieh Javanshir Ilchi](#) and [Brendan Loper](#)) -- as well as from New York and California ([Firelei Baez](#) and Wafaa Yasin). Even Georgetown University, usually absent from the local art scene, gets thrown into the mix ([Claire Callagy](#)). Perhaps not so surprisingly, the academic pecking order is noticeable, though the successful pieces are exciting enough to make you forget about the ones that are less inspired.

The highlights of the show are Baez and Ilchi, both of whom were born abroad (the Dominican Republic and Iran, respectively) and raised in the United States. In their separate works, they present cultural narratives of their homelands that are natively fluent, even though their observations are made through the prism of a western perspective, removed from the constraints of the cultural processes that they depict. In this regard, their work is neither ethnographic nor political; rather, globally informed reinterpretations of regional mythologies and traditions.



Image of "Not Even Unalterable Limitations," by Firelei Baez, courtesy of Irvine Contemporary

Baez, an MFA candidate at Hunter College in New York City, explores the role of femininity in Afro-Caribbean conceptions through her decontextualized ink, gouache, and graphite drawings. Baez is particularly interested in the myth of the *Ciguapa*, a folkloric female creature that inhabits the Dominican highland forests and preys on wayward men (like so many [mythical female creatures](#)).

Baez's drawings divert from literal descriptions of the Ciguapa, and instead, present figures that are barely human in form, save for the long legs and stiletto heels. Their skin transitions softly between flesh, fur, and tropical lush, and in doing so, they present not only the re-conceptualized form of the mythical creature, but also the personification of romanticized western notions about "the tropics." This is most noticeable in *Not Even Unalterable Limitations*, which presents a smoky portrait of a sensual female form wearing a lavish headdress of foliage. The drawing pulls you in, perhaps like the Ciguapa, or like a mysterious and exotic land that is seen through the proverbial male gaze.



Image of "Too Bad You Let Me Go," by Hedieh Javanshir Ilchi, courtesy of Irvine Contemporary

Hedieh Javanshir Ilchi, a first-year MFA student at American University, integrates aspects of traditional Islamic art into colorfully violent landscapes that allude to the militarization of civilian life. In *Too bad, you let me go!* she adorns an urban battlefield with arabesque patterns, and in *Thrusting Trust* she depicts a phoenix from Persian mythology carrying a large bomb, presumably before igniting to rise again.

At the center of each piece is a faceless young woman in markedly Western clothes, sometimes carrying intricately decorated weaponry (hand grenades, a rocket launcher). Her hair is always disproportionately long and in movement as if electric, a statement on the perceived physical and emotional constraints of traditional Islamic headdress.

Brendan Loper's black and white gouache drawings exploring codes of narrative in film are also worth a second look, as is Wafaa Yasin's video and installation documenting site-specific performances that consider the malleability of notions of place and space.

Introductions6 is on display at Irvine Contemporary (1412 14th Street NW) through September 4.

By [Matthew Smith](#) in [Arts and Events](#) on August 5, 2010 4:00 PM [0 Comments](#) [5 Likes](#) 1539 Views

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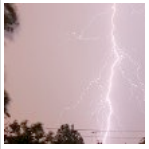
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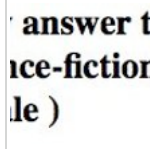
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