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## ART REVIEW:

At Aljira, reasons to be playful

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Anybody who's seen the shows at the Jersey City Museum knows curator Rocio Aranda-Alvarado likes to assemble art exhibits with a puckish sense of humor. But when Aranda-Alvarado was asked to guest curate the "Emerge 8" exhibit at Aljira in Newark, a show done each year for the alternative gallery's professional development seminar, we really had no reason to think it, too, would be a corker.

All 20 artists enrolled in the Emerge 8 program were taught useful skills, like how to present work to a gallery, how to work out a meaningful financial profile, and how to generate publicity about their work. They range in age from the early 20s to some in their 40s and 50s ("emerging artist" is a term usually applied to recent art school grads, but the art world often seems more and more to be filled with older artists who are finding an audience in their middle years or later, and Aljira's Emerge is intended to serve all ages). This exhibition is the ultimate reward for taking part.

But it has been striking to see the remarkable range and extraordinary talent of so many artists in this particular program over the past few years, whether it's because Emerge has become better known or just because the talent pool of visual artists is so much deeper than we ever imagine. And this show is no exception.

The quality of the craftsmanship is amazing, like Natsu's "Mushiki Whale-Cosmic Egg," a glittery construction made of brass wire and plastic beads as big as a motorbike that is suspended from the ceiling in the center of the gallery.