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Democracy Dies in Darkness

In the galleries: Simulated stone and neon artworks reflect the transience of life

By **Mark Jenkins**

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Stone is fundamental to Nara Park's art, but as an idea, not a material. The Seoul-born D.C. artist constructs rocklike memorials and monoliths from plastics and paints. There's a practical reason for this, since plastic foam is cheaper and more forgiving — and much, much lighter — than granite. But there's a conceptual rationale as well. Stone lasts a very long time, and Park's inspiration is the ephemerality of life.

This preoccupation stems from the death of her father when the artist, born in 1985, was in her 20s. "Touching his hand after he died transformed my perception of the world permanently," [she says on her website](#).

Park's response has been to make ersatz monuments like the ones on display at Plain Sight, a pop-up storefront gallery whose small shows are viewable only from the street. The five physical artworks (there's also an audio one) include a floor piece whose mineral-like cragginess is actually the result of paint and plastic foam beads, and three wall-mounted panels that look like inscribed rock but are in fact Polystyrene foam, plaster and stone-textured paint.

The show's title, "I Live," links it to two other current Park pieces, both outdoors and sponsored by Georgetown Glow and the Korean Cultural Center. The lawn at the cultural center is showcasing five phrases written in neon, all the last words of notable people. ("I Live" is the ironic deathbed assertion of Finnish poet Aleksis Kivi.) Park's contribution to Georgetown Glow, which includes four other light-oriented installations, is "The Beginning of Everything," a significantly scaled-up model of a nickel-iron meteorite that clobbered Arizona about 50,000 years ago.

The massive extraterrestrial boulder is made of foam covered with reflective glass beads, yet appears to be far more substantial. Although this is not the first time the artist has simulated a naturally occurring stone object, previous efforts were not so imposing. Park's motivation may still be to highlight the fragility of human existence, but "The Beginning of Everything" feigns a crushing permanence.

Nara Park: I Live Through May 13 at [Plain Sight D.C.](#), 3218 Georgia Ave. NW.

The Beginning of Everything Through June 27 at [Washington Harbour](#), 3000 K St. NW.

Neon phrases Through June 27 at the [Korean Cultural Center](#), 2370 Massachusetts Ave. NW.

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