

New contemporaries: dance along the fringes

EMERGENT 2021

Artsite Galleries 06 – 28 February 2021

Emergence can be defined as the process of coming into being; beginning to exist; becoming prominent or known. Professor John H. Holland, author of *EMERGENCE: From Chaos to Order*, describes emergence as 'much coming from little', where the combination of individual actions interact dynamically to create something more complex, greater than the sum of its parts. Within this thinking, the artistic process could be considered a process of emergence, one that we observe each time an artist makes new work or a curator presents a new exhibition.

Emergence motivates or causes change to unfold from the inside out. Similar to the artistic process, we often observe emergence in the actions and structures that arise without or in opposition to demands from the outside. This is often where early-career artists reside, not fledgling, but in a bold position to push dialogues, ideas, materials and art-making processes in different, ever-changing directions. These new contemporaries resist the urge for stasis or comfort and can usually be found dancing on the fringes, moving laterally along the precipice between the old and new, to forge new understandings of artmaking by means of usurping conventions and disrupting pre-existing conditions or histories.

'*Emerging artist*' is not a dirty word or one that should induce associations with infancy or immaturity, quite the contrary. While some artists may be in the embryonic stages of their careers, most emerging artists are bravely undertaking the long voyage across precarious terrain towards the blinding light of the elusive artworld. Spanning multiple temporalities, over many decades and ages, these artists echo both the present and the future. Although the term is infinitive, emerging artists are intrinsically linked to the processes and artifacts of our cultural futures, protruding the idea that a community in which arts practice is not endemic ultimately risks its future. Reflecting this, *Emergent 2021* reshapes the current art infrastructure, offering support to a new generation of Australian visual artists, by providing emerging and unrepresented artists an opportunity to exhibit their work to the wider and local community. The exhibition endeavours to uproot common barriers in the artworld that can regress emergence or progression.

Emergent 2021 is a celebration of the vast and diverse talents of forty Sydney-based artists in the early stages of their careers. Underpinned by the parallels and contrasts in artistic approaches, *Emergent 2021*, explores the dynamic and versatile manner of contemporary arts practice and the interdisciplinary nature of emerging artists. Through a wide range of conceptual and material engagements, the exhibition oscillates between abstract to figurative depictions, serious to playful tones, experimental to traditional methodologies, and lo-fidelity to refined aesthetics.

The commonality between the exhibited artists is their geographic connection to Sydney, specifically those living and working in the Inner West, which is home to a higher-than-average percentage of creatives. However, beyond this underlying connection, certain themes have become evident across the many artistic practices displayed. These can include explorations of urban and natural landscapes; form, materiality and mark-making; imagined, real and observed worlds; time, memories and transformation; and political, cultural and social navigations.

Reflecting the fluidity and hybridity of emergence in a contemporary context, the exhibition is fundamentally void of any dominant art movement, style or subject. Working across different media, *Emergent 2021* embraces each artist's intention as a valuable approach to art-making,

consolidating painting, drawing, printmaking, analogue photography, mixed media and fibre- based works. The edge of 'emerging-ness' is evoked throughout with many of the artists intensely interrogating their material practice and the possibilities and potential of their mediums. This is also demonstrated with some of the artists having produced digital illustrations, reflecting the shift towards new technologies as a valid and accepted artistic medium.

Although each artwork is disparate to one another with seemingly no palpable link, the exhibition as a whole navigates the breadth and depth of Sydney-based artists, surveying the diversity of contemporary art practice and the differing ways that emerging artists are currently working with today.

Sarah Rose, Curator. February 2021

Holland, John H. *Emergence: From Chaos to Order*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.