

THE ARTISTS' FAIR

THE BOOTH WALLS WILL BE PULLED DOWN AT A NEW MELBOURNE ART FAIR SATELLITE EVENT, WHICH WILL SEE ARTISTS NOT GALLERIES TAKE CENTRE STAGE REPORTS **JANE O'SULLIVAN**.



Melbourne Art Fair will have a competitor for collectors' interest this August, with the launch of a new satellite event dedicated to undervalued and under-appreciated artists.

Founded by Melbourne-based artists **Sam Leach** and **Tony Lloyd** with writer **Ashley Crawford**, NotFair will present the work of over 30 currently practising artists who for whatever reason have yet to gain the attention they deserve.

"We're looking for artists who in some sense have been undervalued," explains Leach, "whether that's because they haven't had the economic support that they deserve, or the critical support they deserve, or maybe it's just that their work hasn't been seen by as many people as should see it ... It's going to be artists who are not necessarily widely known on the mainstream art scene, but are artists who are nevertheless producing really top rate work."

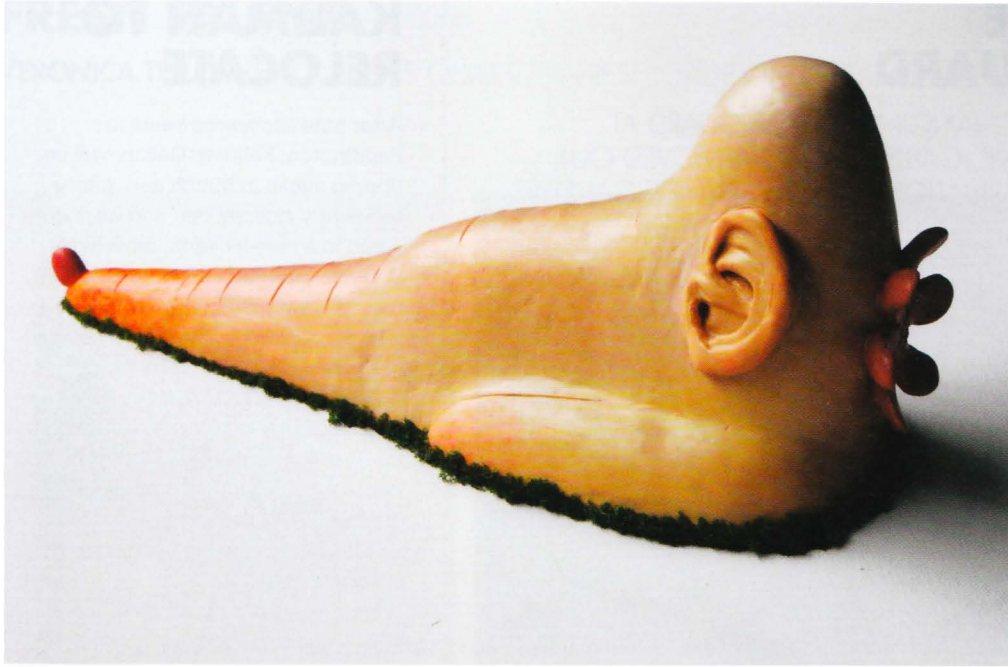
Artists not galleries will take centre stage at the fair. "NotFair is not so much anti-fair as it is an inversion of standard practice," adds Leach. At traditional contemporary art fairs, organisers will usually vet gallery selection but then allow galleries free hand to present the artists of their choice. At NotFair, however, artists will be directly invited based on selection criteria including innovation, strength of concept and technical skill.

While final selection rests with the triumvirate of Leach, Lloyd and Crawford, nominations have been sought from a diverse advisory panel including National Gallery of Victoria curator **Alex Baker**, Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces director **Alexie Glass-Kantor**, art writer **Carrie Miller**, 24HR Art director **Steve Eland** and Utopian Slumps founding director **Melissa Loughnan**.

This curatorial advisory process has yielded mostly young and emerging artists, including **Mark Rodda**, **Brie Trenerry**, **Stephan Balleux**, **Mimi Kelly**, **Sanné Mestrom**, **Simon Pericich**, **Jake Walker** and **Vito Manfredi**. Many are Melbourne-based, a skew which Leach says was not intentional but evolved because it was "where we have the most knowledge".

The model, a blend of commercial art fair and curated biennale, will see 90 per cent of sales go directly to the artists, with the remaining set aside to cover operating costs.

"We didn't really want to go down the gallery path," explains Leach, adding



Above: Vito Manfredi, *Finder*, 2010. Polymer clay, rubber, acrylic paint, 16 x 38 x 11. COURTESY: THE ARTIST

Opposite: Mimi Kelly, *Untitled #2*, 2009. Dimensions variable. PHOTO: DAN FREENE. RETOUCHING: WASSIM BAZZI. COURTESY: THE ARTIST

diplomatically “Melbourne Art Fair does a great job of that as it is”. And despite the provocative name of the new fair, he says its not the case that fairs like Melbourne Art Fair are unfair to artists, but rather that they’re simply not designed to promote emerging talent. “There is a gap there,” he says, pointing to the fact that while fairs like Melbourne Art Fair – which Leach has himself shown at – concentrate on “A-list galleries and A-list artists,” other exhibiting artists are facing a lack of opportunities to communicate their work to a wider audience.

Leach and Lloyd were originally toying with the idea of curating a large-scale public institution exhibition, but were then inspired by a trip to London. Lloyd enthuses: “We’d both been to London together and seen the Frieze Art Fair and all the satellite events that occur around it, and it creates such an artistic buzz around the whole city – it’s more than just complementary to the main event – and we thought this sort of thing could work in Melbourne.”

Leach adds that at the last Melbourne Art Fair he was enthusiastically showing off a batch of newly acquired **Graham Day Guerras** to collectors, gallerists, artists and anyone who would give him the time of day, and says there was “a surprising response, just people fascinated with new work”. (Incidentally, Day Guerra has also been selected for the inaugural NotFair.)

This curiosity and interest is something Leach hopes to tap into with NotFair. With its focus on artists and on bringing new work to public attention, NotFair is already carving a niche for itself as an artists’ fair, but one that organisers clearly hope will have crossover commercial appeal. To draw in as many collectors as possible, NotFair will be staged an easy 10-minute walk from the main Melbourne Art Fair at Wardlow Studios in Fitzroy.

There will be no booth walls, and with projects of varying scope and scale and an admittedly loose curatorial agenda, Leach admits that presenting the work will be a challenge. There’s a nervous laugh when he talks of the three days set aside for installation and he adds that when visitors first walk in, they’re likely to be “a bit overwhelmed by the sheer amount of work occupying the space”. The plan, he says, is simple: to pack the 300m² space “as full we can get it”. ■

NotFair will be staged at Wardlow Studios in Fitzroy from 4 to 8 August 2010.