

Unofficial art rivals the real-deal show

Emerging artists are to get their own "Notfair", writes **Raymond Gill**.

ART fairs around the world offer a snapshot of concerns, pursuits and directions artists are exploring at any given moment.

Back at the last Melbourne Art Fair in 2008, when the good economic times were still rolling, a definite "aesthetic" emerged from the 3000 works by 900 artists on show at the Royal Exhibition Building. The works were overwhelmingly positive — sleek, shiny and playful — and 30,000 visitors spent a total of \$12.1 million on them.

But what themes might emerge from artists' studios this August, when the biennial Art Fair trucks in darker economic times and when even the fair itself abandoned plans to become an annual event?

Art Fair director Bronwyn Johnson can't say. She's yet to view the works, which will be selected by the 80 local and international galleries who have already booked out the 2010 event. Each gallery will pay between \$14,000 and \$20,000 for a stand at the four-day event, which this year is expected to attract more visitors than in 2008.

But someone who does know is artist Sam Leach, who along with fellow artist Tony Lloyd and arts writer Ashley Crawford is curating an unofficial and concurrent "satellite" fair called "Notfair". It's to be held at the Wardlow Art Residence in Fitzroy, only a few hundred metres from the Exhibition Building.

Using their knowledge of the arts scene and the input of a dozen curators (including Melbourne University's Chris McAuliffe), they have selected 32 Australian artists — some young, some mid-career — who will not be seen at the Art Fair but who they feel deserve a bigger audience. From the work he's seen lately, Leach thinks



Sam Leach: "Some people will definitely get lucky." PICTURE: RODGER CUMMINS

there's an emerging aesthetic. What it is, however, is "hard to put a finger on".

"I've seen some interesting references to mid-20th century modernism and some hard-edged abstraction creeping in. I've also seen a lot of strong figurative work," says Leach, a Melbourne artist whose own brand of realism borrows from Dutch still-life painting but who is probably best known for his infamous self-portrait of the artist as Adolf Hitler.

The artists selected for Notfair — who will price their own work and pay 10 per cent commission to the organisers — work in all forms of the visual arts, from painting to video. They include Bernhard Sachs, Murray McKeich, Akira Akira, Jordie Marani, Tonk and Heidi Yardley.

Leach says it will be interesting to see if there is any cross-over of themes by the artists shown at Notfair and the Art Fair. "I think there will be," he says, stressing that he doesn't buy into debates about whether art fairs are crassly commercial.

"I love art fairs, it's great to see that many galleries in one

place," he says, adding that his work has been represented at the Melbourne Art Fair in a sold-out show by his Sydney dealer, Sullivan and Strumpf Fine Art.

"We don't want to step on anyone's toes and the Melbourne Art Fair has been very successful but they are mostly showing artists at the top of their game. We want to show artists who we think are undervalued, or need to be seen more, or who are at the very beginning of their careers."

Johnson welcomes Notfair as one of a number of events that have sprung up around the Melbourne Art Fair and which all bring attention to contemporary art by living artists.

"But we do have 12 project rooms where emerging and unrepresented artists are shown," she says.

Leach says that as many of the artists at Notfair are relatively unknown but ones he believes will go on to "great careers", there will be bargains. "Some people will definitely get lucky," he says.

Notfair and the Melbourne Art Fair will run from August 4 to 8.