

## ENTERING ORBIT

IT WAS PROBABLY INEVITABLE THAT MELBOURNE ART FAIR GAIN A SATELLITE EVENT, REPORTS **CARRIE MILLER**. WHAT COULD NOT HAVE BEEN EXPECTED IS THE UNUSUAL FORM OF THE NEW EVENT NOW ENTERING ORBIT.

The Melbourne Art Fair has established itself as Australia's only internationally recognised one, so it's not surprising that a satellite event has sprung up as they tend to do around other major fairs. But NotFair isn't just your average add-on to the main event, maintain the trio of Melbourne arts professionals who are organising the exhibition.

Conceived by artists **Sam Leach** and **Tony Lloyd**, who then brought in leading arts writer **Ashley Crawford**, the organisers claim to be producing an art event "unlike any other worldwide". Crawford says they make this claim because "to our knowledge even the sexiest satellite fairs still have direct income from commercial galleries". Adds Leach: "What we are doing is much more tightly curated than most art fairs". Or as Lloyd puts it: "We want people to come out of our fair talking about the artists and the work, as you would when you visit the biennale".

"We have deliberately kept our parameters broad so there is no pedagogic or didactic agenda", Leach says. The criteria for inclusion is simply that the artists "are undervalued, either commercially or critically and that their work will not be seen at The Melbourne Art Fair 2010," explains Lloyd. "They can be represented by galleries and they can be at any stage in their career." The artists were chosen by a selection committee of other arts professionals and then Leach, Lloyd and Crawford – who share "similar tastes in books and art", according to Lloyd – let their personal judgments guide them in the final selection of 32 artists from around Australia.

In terms of what they were looking for, Leach says their focus was on "artists who were taking risks with their work but who seemed to have a solid conceptual basis as well". Or as Crawford puts it: "We do want the works to intrigue, to make people stop and think. There's a lot of art out there that is simply for decoration and there's nothing wrong with that, but it's not for us." The ultimate aim of NotFair then is "to bring to the attention of new viewers relatively unknown artists who are producing world class critical work," says Leach.

Lloyd has claimed that the selection process was based on assessing the "innovation," "skills," and "concepts" of an artist's practice. Crawford explains these rather vague notions further: "Innovation really means someone taking a bit of a risk either stylistically, in terms of content, or in the use of materials. A case in point would be the very strange mode of photographic self-portraiture used by **Mimi Kelly** or the incredible paintwork of **Shannon Smiley** or the delicate linework of **Vito Manfredi**. All of the artists here, in one way or another, utilise incredible draughtsmanship, sculptural prowess or painterly technique. So, while the content may often be challenging or downright weird, the way the works are technically formed helps assure their potency."



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From left, Ashley Crawford, Sam Leach and Tony Lloyd. Shot on location at dedece, Melbourne. PHOTO: KIRSTIN GOLLINGS

For Leach, the work of **Murray McKeich** and **Daniel Price** exemplify the NotFair agenda. McKeich "is an experienced practitioner who has been pushing the possibilities of digital image production for several years". And Price is another artist whose work "intrigues" Leach. "His ultra-detailed pencil drawings are evidence of painstaking manual labour which goes so far as to obscure their very traditional and handmade production, instead looking superficially like mechanically produced images."

Leach believes another thing that separates out NotFair from the standard satellite event is the venue itself (also one of their major sponsors). Wardlow Art Residence, curated by **Brodie Higgs**, has been



sponsoring "significant international artists to undertake residencies in Melbourne. As a result, the space is becoming a zone for international cultural exchange and has the potential to play an important role in linking Australian contemporary art to the rest of the world".

But what about the fact that the Melbourne Art Fair already provides substantial opportunities for artist-run galleries and project spaces to show unrepresented or underappreciated artists? The organisers acknowledge this, but claim their event was conceived as a way of giving a larger number of people access to such work in a single venue, as well as the opportunity to purchase it (also often the case in the Melbourne Art Fair project rooms).

And significantly, the main objective of NotFair is the artists themselves. Accordingly, besides a 10 per cent administration fee, all money generated from sales goes back to the artist.

Despite NotFair beginning, as Crawford describes it, "as a very humble project, which originally didn't really require much capital," it's now established itself as a not-for-profit corporation with the ambition of "living on, perhaps interstate and further". As a result, they are currently looking for commercial partners, albeit ones who do not have a vested interest in maintaining the hegemony of the current art world. They are currently in discussions with potential partners and are actively seeking support to cover the costs associated with staging the event. •