



Emily's brilliant career

The period immediately after leaving art school can be a crucial time for promising young graduates. Award-winning artist Emily Wolfe proves she has what it takes to make it.

Three years after leaving Auckland with a scholarship to study at the prestigious Slade School of Art in London, Emily Wolfe is up there with the best of British.

From 800 fine art graduates in Britain last year, she was named as one of six finalists in the renowned DLA Art Award, a selection that marks her out as a name to watch. Young artists who have won this award have gone on to successful careers. On top of this, Emily's first solo show since completing her masters at the Slade sold out within half an hour at the Anna Bibby Gallery in Auckland last December. "It's really bizarre," says Emily, 28, of her sell-out show. "I was just so focused on making the work and then getting it back to New Zealand that I forgot that people would see it. Especially considering the work is made in such isolation – but it's wonderful, it's lovely."

With her success assured here, Emily is well on the way to establishing herself in London. In the long-term she plans to divide her time between the two hemispheres. She has returned to Britain after spending a couple of months in New Zealand catching up with family and friends over summer.

Emily has been given free studio space for the next year as one of 12 young graduates to win a place in yet another scheme aimed at helping artists during that vulnerable time between leaving college and getting established.

"That's one of the advantages of being in London. There are more structures to help young artists," says the Elam art school graduate. "That can be quite a tricky time, finding a studio and being able to work and have enough money to pay the rent and all that kind of thing. There seems to be more recognition of the need to help art school graduates

establish themselves through that transition."

Emily's evocative paintings of embroidered cloth draped over wood caught the eye of the selection panel for the DLA Art Award because of her innovative treatment of traditional materials. "Minimal in form and spiritual in essence," says the exhibition curator.

The quick sale of Emily's recent exhibition bodes well for her future, although Anna Bibby says in the fickle art world it takes more than one sell-out show to ensure an artist's longevity. "When I'm looking for people who I think are good, it's people who are talented and committed," says Anna. "Art is fashionable and an artist can sell one minute then be as dead as a dodo the next, but Emily is there for the long haul."

The only child of creative parents (celebrated artist Pamela Wolfe and writer Richard Wolfe), Anna says Emily's upbringing has given her "the tools to survive as an artist. Children of artists know what it's like running up to a show, they know about the relationship with the dealer, they've been dragged along to openings, and they know how to work the room at shows. They know that being a professional artist is a lot of hard work."

In New Zealand, it's inevitable that associations are made between Emily's work and that of her mother, though their styles couldn't be more different: Emily's pared-back and monochrome; Pamela's wildly colourful and bold. "It's interesting being in London," says Emily, "Because no one knows (her background) and it's like starting from scratch. I know a lot of artists whose children are artists. I think if you're brought up in a creative environment it would be pretty hard not to turn out that way yourself."

Leanne Moore