

TROY EMERY

Sonder



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ART

IMAGE > [Front cover] Troy Emery, *The last thing you see* [installation view], 2021, polyester, polyurethane, adhesive, pins, 77 x 150 x 63cm. Photograph: Theresa Harrison Photography.
> [Left page] Troy Emery, *All I think about* [installation view], 2021, polyester, polyurethane, adhesive, pins, 56 x 70 x 35cm. Photograph: Theresa Harrison Photography.



sonder: n. The realisation that each random passer-by is living a life as vivid and complex as your own—populated with their own ambitions, friends, routines, worries and inherited craziness—an epic story that continues invisibly around you like an anthill sprawling deep underground, with elaborate passageways to thousands of other lives that you'll never know existed, in which you might appear only once, as an extra sipping coffee in the background, as a blur of traffic passing on the highway, as a lighted window at dusk.¹

¹ This term was coined in 2012 by John Koenig, whose project, *The Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows*, aims to come up with new words for emotions that currently lack words. This word was inspired by the German word *sonder*, meaning special, and French word *sonder* meaning to probe.
<https://www.dictionaryofobscuresorrows.com/post/23536922667/sonder>, January 2021

TROY EMERY

Sonder

Disarmingly vibrant and highly tactile, the subjects of Troy Emery's sculptures are also poignantly elusive. Though they may be reminiscent of stuffed animals that once provided us with comfort and companionship, there is also something perplexingly unsettling about Emery's silkily draped sculptures. These faceless forms, camouflaged in long lurid tassels, offer no indication of what really lies beneath.

Emery deliberately positions his work at the intersection of visual art and craft, whilst being driven by materials and the idea of decoration. The brightly coloured polyester tassels, for example, have been chosen because they connote a range of other uses, such as the embellishment of ballroom dresses or over the top curtains or even the lining of coffins. In contrast with more traditional art materials, like oil or bronze, which carry a historical resonance of dignity and seriousness, Emery relishes the status of the tassel as a kitsch adornment that

has a purely decorative function. The works carry an undeniably humorous charm and the materials used are often found in the haberdashery isles of large fabric stores.

The idea of decoration has been very important throughout Emery's career. He recalls being told at art school that if his work did not have a strong conceptual basis, that it would be "just decorative"². This statement led the artist to question why the idea of something being decorative was to be looked down on or derided. Having studied fashion early in his career, Emery is highly attuned to the lustre and behaviour of textiles and soft materials. The sensuous beauty of Emery's works is undeniable, but they bring so much more than a pleasurable viewing experience. They evoke a broad range of emotional and visceral responses because they draw on some of our most profound needs and anxieties. These new works display a vulnerability to which most of us can relate, namely our desire to be liked



IMAGE > Troy Emery, *The last thing you see* [installation view], 2021, polyester, polyurethane, adhesive, pins, 77 x 150 x 63cm. Photograph: Theresa Harrison Photography.

² Troy Emery in conversation with Juliette Hanson, 22 January 2021.



IMAGE > Troy Emery, *Coming up the stairs* [installation view], 2021, polyester, polyurethane, adhesive, pins, 80 x 95 x 60cm. Photograph: Theresa Harrison Photography.

and understood by others and to hide our negative qualities.

Emery's works serve as a tender reminder of the opacity and all too often misleading nature of the outward appearance of other beings. They raise the perennial questions that we manage in our everyday encounters with other people; why are they behaving that way and what are they feeling? The desire to communicate these types of things to other people is often fraught with misunderstanding, as our own layers of deception and protection get in the way.

Similarly, Emery's long tassels disguise the true form of the models underneath. This reduction of formal definition, also allows the work to have a distinctly anthropomorphic quality. Emery's creatures often transition from animal forms into shapes that could easily be humans crouching on all fours, for example in the work titled *Coming up the stairs*. The fact that we might see human forms, points to the common tendency to project ourselves and our all too human feelings onto animals. But as the comedian and author David Sedaris has noted,

*Wild animals do not give a damn about our little feelings. They're incapable of it. "I love you, I love you, I love you," we say. What they hear is senseless noise. It's like us trying to discern emotion in the hum of a hair dryer, or the chortle of an engine as it fails to turn over. That's the drawback but also the glory of creatures that were never domesticated. Nothing feels better than being singled out by something that at best should fear you, and at worst would like to eat you.*³

Emery's works also inhabit an ambiguous territory of appeal and mistrust. Wild animals often rely on camouflage both for self-preservation and also stalking prey. Emery's creatures do not blend in, their bright coats stand out distinctly in any environment. They are resplendent in their brilliance. Yet they still hide the most important thing you need to know about a wild animal, or indeed other humans, do I run or approach? Are they a threat or a friend?

By recognising that we can't fully discern the emotions on the faces that, presumably, lay beneath the tassels, we are driven to connect to these creatures in other ways.

³ David Sedaris, *Untamed On Making Friends with Animals*, The New Yorker, 17 December, 2016 <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/untamed-animal-friends>

Perhaps we might be encouraged by these works to try harder in other moments of human connection. This brings us back to the title of the exhibition; *Sonder*. A word referring to the realisation that every other person also has a rich inner life, that we all have our own histories, hopes and worries; we are all constantly thinking and feeling. Yet, for better or worse, we have very limited access to the inner worlds of others, as we all operate from within our own layers of artifice, disguise or coded behaviour.

This exhibition explores the complexity of forming a connection with other living beings, human and animal. The impact of these works can be disturbing, funny or comforting. In a display of chimeral wonder, they manage to be all of these things simultaneously. They are beautiful, wild and mysterious, though their charm is tempered with a sense of apprehension. It is the tension between what is hidden and what is revealed that makes the work so compelling.

Juliette Hanson
Curator
February, 2021



IMAGE > Troy Emery, *Things could be worse* [installation view], 2021, polyester, polyurethane, adhesive, pins, 21 x 82 x 42cm. Photograph: Theresa Harrison Photography.



IMAGE > Portrait of Troy Emery. Photograph: Theresa Harrison Photography.

TROY EMERY

Alongside silkily draped sculptures, Emery will present a series of his recent oil paintings, which expand his enquiry into the representation of animals, as well as showcasing his highly attuned use of colour and texture.

Troy Emery's practice encompasses sculpture, painting, and drawing. Emery's artwork explores the way that representations of animals can be used as decorative motifs, superficial icons for ecological issues or fetishised objects of adornment and entertainment. Disarmingly vibrant and highly tactile, his sculptures are also elusive and there is a poignance in their faceless disguises.

Emery has presented his work across Australia and internationally since 2003. He has recently held solo exhibitions at the Art Gallery of Ballarat (2019), CRAFT and as part of Dark Mofo (2018). Emery's work is held in various private and public collections, including NGV, Artbank, City of Townsville, Goulburn Regional Art Gallery and Deakin Art Museum.

Troy Emery is represented by Martin Browne Contemporary.

trovemery.net

LIST OF WORKS

Troy Emery
The last thing you see, 2021
polyester, polyurethane,
adhesive, pins,
77 x 150 x 63cm
\$9800

Troy Emery
Coming up the Stairs, 2021
polyester, polyurethane,
adhesive, pins,
80 x 95 x 60cm
\$8500

Troy Emery
In the window, 2021
polyester, polyurethane,
adhesive, pins,
72 x 93 x 39cm
\$8200

Troy Emery
All I think about, 2021
polyester, polyurethane,
adhesive, pins,
56 x 70 x 35cm
\$5200

Troy Emery
Can't make me happy, 2021
polyester, polyurethane,
adhesive, pins,
56 x 70 x 35cm
\$5200

Troy Emery
Things could be worse, 2021
polyester, polyurethane,
adhesive, pins,
21 x 82 x 42cm
NFS

Prices are inclusive of GST

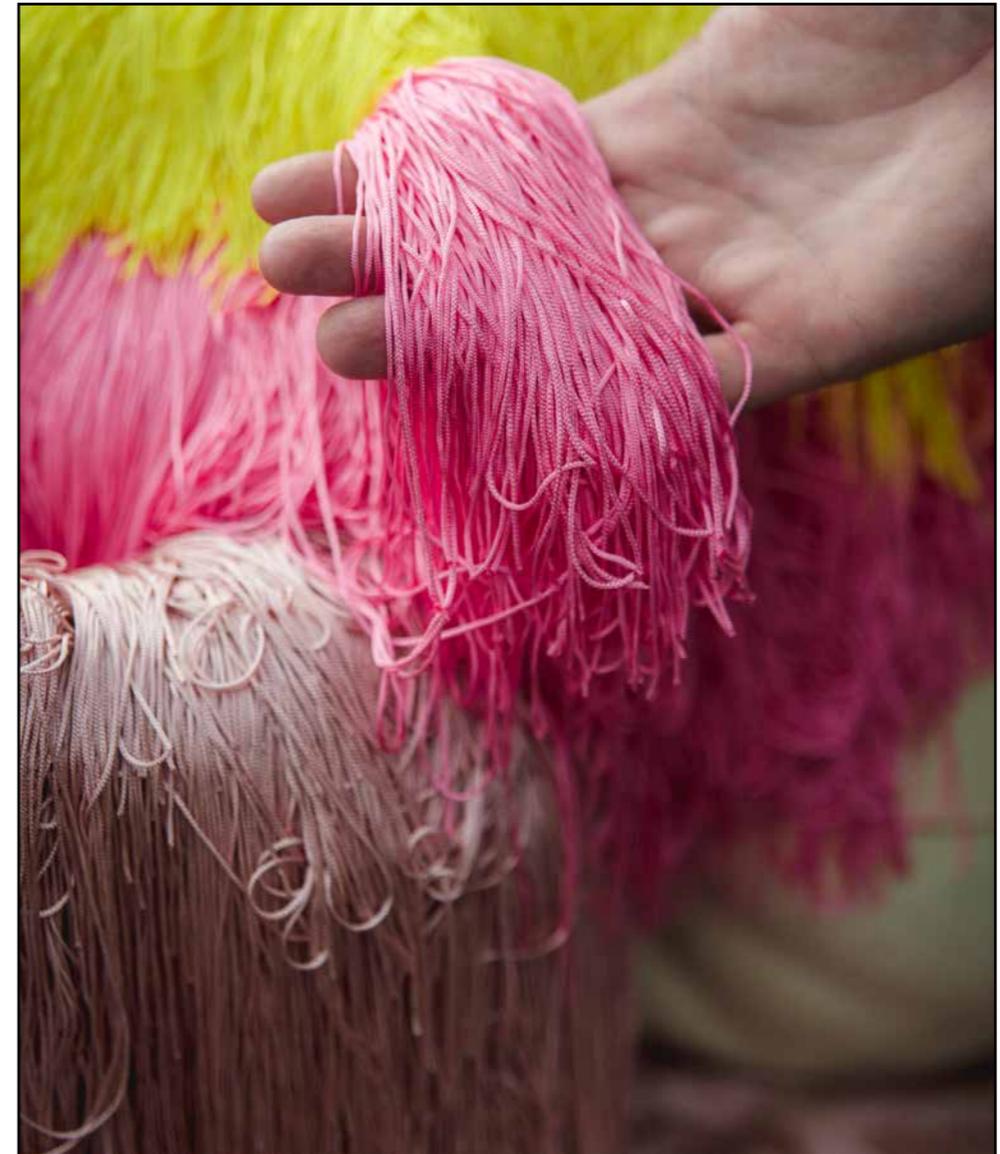


IMAGE > Troy Emery in the studio. Photograph: Theresa Harrison Photography.

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