

The emersion

Approximations to the Barcelona Contemporary Art terrain

The Emersion is a new online forum by me & the curiosity that is dedicated to the analysis of the emerging and burgeoning art scene in the city of Barcelona.

On a biweekly basis and hand-in-hand with the curator David Armengol, me & the curiosity will offer texts and interviews with some of the leaders of the city's art scene.

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The emersion #2

Interview with Joana Hurtado

by David Armengol

At the end of 2014, Carmen Cruañas and I met with Joana Hurtado in the Can Felipa Civic Center to chat about the Can Felipa Arts Visuals' contemporary art programs, as well as the Center's role in Barcelona's emerging art scene.

[Can Felipa Arts Visuals](#) is one of the notable calls within the Catalan artistic panorama. It is a model inserted within the structure of the [Can Felipa Civic Center](#) that has generated two specific lines of work dedicated to contemporary artistic creation, which are the performing and the visual arts.

Joana Hurtado, who is a curator, art critic and cultural administrator, coordinates everything relating to the visual arts in Can Felipa. In fact, her relationship with the Center is an emotional one. While living in Paris studying her doctorate she first came into contact with Can Felipa's art programs and in 2008, alongside Eloy Grasset, she won the call to curators with *L'efecte cinema*, a collective show that reviewed the ties between cinematic production and current art practice. At that time Joana did not know it, but only one year later she would join part of the core team of the center, working closely with artist and cultural administrator Jordi Boldú, who had close ties to the center for several years. Over time, Joana Hurtado has become a person of reference about contemporary art within the institution.

Alongside her administrative position, Hurtado has written art criticism for *Cultura/s de La Vanguardia* (her great passion writing, rather than management), has curated the series *Catedrals* at [La Capella de Sant Roc de Valls](#) (2011) and the videographic programming *Pop Up, Ver es añadir* in [Caixaforum Barcelona](#) (2011), developing a curatorial style that deviates from the three main focuses that seem to represent her position on art: criticism, emerging art and film.

Our conversation begins by speaking generally about the emerging art calls for entries, remarking upon the virtues and defects of these "contests" given that, whether we like it or not, it is a question of

providing platforms that offer good opportunities for visibility of artistic work and the possibility for the professionalization.

JH: Initially, I see more “pros” than “cons” in these calls for entries. I believe that they provided a possible path among all those that we can encounter. In this sense, it is dependent upon each person to decide which doors are the ones that they want to open. The calls are fields of professionalization that are open to everyone but that at the same time depend on a level of selection, which of course entails a level of competition. For example, the Can Felipa visual arts program falls within the parameters of a Civic Center, and this is very important to note. There are those in the neighborhood that ask to show in the center, but this professionalization framework requires that the exhibition space be reserved exclusively for the call for entries’ show. I think that, especially since the period in which Jordi Boldú was in charge of the programming, there are certain differences between this and the other two calls that take place in the city (Sant Andreu Contemporari y Sala d’Art Jove). On one hand we don’t have an age limit, so consequently it isn’t only a question of youth. On the other hand, and despite being habitual that the same names come up in all three calls, I have the sensation that we get different, specific content that could mean that they are singular entries that deviate from the career path.

We now continue discussing these distinctive elements of the Can Felipa Visual Arts. If the objective is clear – to offer a good professionalization framework to emerging art agents or those who are still honing their skills – which are the tools, work processes, and experiences that the Center can offer?

JH: For me, the principal element that characterizes the whole program, and that translates itself into the call to artists is the gallery space, which is a luxury to have. This exhibition space is a great one, with many possibilities for anyone who starts with a spacious place to show what they would like. This directly influences the call to artists, given that it involves a dedicated to the curator, which is also a determinate aspect of Can Felipa that other calls don’t have. The only one in the city that proposes a curatorial plan is BCN Producció, which now finds itself in a more consolidated artistic grouping. Two projects are selected from the curatorial call and the call to artists results in a collective show, which account for the three shows that each occupy a period of time at Can Felipa. On the other hand, since my entry to the Center I have wanted to include a third category, which is Graphic Communication. Before this, a line of investigation existed, but I thought that this third via did not necessarily need to be an independent one, provided that it is inserted within the same line of artistic creation that was already established. Another motive was that in Can Felipa Arts Visuals, everything is decided upon by group consensus among the members of the jury, so including the graphic arts in the call freed me from having to decide who would be the designer, and also gave work opportunities to interested emerging designers in the contemporary art terrain. I think that this is yet another fundamental and distinctive element of Can Felipa, which offers many very good experiences while also opening up alternatives for work apart from the large design studios. This allows for a new team of jurors, artists, curators and designers to form every season, and at the heart of this network is Can Felipa.

Once we’ve analyzed the call and defining elements thereof, we ask Joana about the ties and relationships between the two main users of Can Felipa: the artistic community that applies, shows and/or follows the programming, and the general public who does not directly participate in the visual or performing arts.

JH: The relationship between these dual users is currently very defined due to the specificity of the call. In addition to creation, curation and design, this year we are adding yet another specification: mediation, which we call Lab Felipa. Up until now, this dual usership was external, that’s to say, we had not been looking for it, but rather the case became that we found ourselves in an art space within a civic center, and due to this duality of recipients it’s something that comes by default. But since an incident in 2013, which called into question the continuity of the program, we had a defense for Can Felipa Arts Visuals as much from the artistic sector as from the entire neighborhood. This caused us to be auto-critical and to think seriously about the work dynamics that are capable of uniting and linking these two users more efficiently. Before, they simply coexisted and shared the same space, and this wasn’t specifically addressed through the program. As of this year, Lab Felipa has been introduced and is a mediation

program coordinated by Cristan Añó that tries to understand and unite the entirety of the civic center, not only the visual arts program but also the performing art program, the workshops and the rental of spaces. The idea behind the formation of Lab Felipa is to generate networks of collaboration between all those who participate in the Center's activities. For this reason it seemed necessary to include this aforementioned mediation profile to the call.

So, we see that the new program Lab Felipa strengthens the direct relationship between emerging artistic creation and the community of the Center's users. We continue to speak with Joana about the abilities or the difficulties of the program as far as influencing other artistic contexts, such as the institutional framework, independent initiatives or the art market and gallery circuit.

JH: As for the institutions, there exists a fundamental relationship that stems from the call. Each new edition generates a link with another specific institution that directly participates in the jury. This generates some compelling results on a practical level (that's to say, an actual product), providing that innovative things have been done for the institutions that also yield satisfactory results for the artists and participating curators. As far as independent spaces, these connections are generated by the selected artists, curators or designers; such as when they want to work for someone or someplace in particular, when they want to carry out an activity outside of Can Felipa... or even in the case of those who have participated in the call and have since opened their own independent spaces in the city (such as is the case of [The Green Parrot](#) or [Nyam Nyam](#), for example). In any event, Can Felipa is an institutional space that runs on few resources but with an incredibly high level of energy and enthusiasm, so relationships with more independent initiatives is the order of the day. Lastly, and in reference to the galleries, I know that some certainly have one eye on the emerging art calls, but not because they come and visit. Really, this relationship is not exceedingly evident.

And now, we propose a rather complex question to Joana that is difficult, maybe even impossible, to answer: What is the next step for Can Felipa – or for emerging art calls in general – as an art agent?

I have ideas, but no truly defined answer. I think that we are in a moment of renaissance, and if before we only waited for the institution to make concrete proposals, now it seems that there are many more people that establish them on their own, which strengthens the sector. The institution should be more receptive and willing to collaborate more actively. In respect to those who pass through Can Felipa, I personally see a continued growth, dedication and consolidation of their career, which is lovely. And if Can Felipa has a hand in these processes of consolidation, I am very happy for it. Apart from this, and in relation to this second step, many people are leaving, or were interested in doing so, and this is certainly very alarming. If I had the power of decision I would try to make it so this didn't happen as much.

And lastly, we end the conversation with Joana by speaking about the possibility of establishing more stable relationships between other areas dedicated to emerging art or between other cities and art scenes.

Well I think that this has to be done through the people that take responsibility for or who give us the responsibility for these programs, as long as in the end it is them that generate the networks. Sometimes the relationships are so fragile that when the person changes the collaboration ends, and they should be much more solidly built. With Can Felipa, we are now working intensely to amplify the connections between our work dedicated to artistic creation and the Poble Nou neighborhood. Establishing more direct ties with other contexts, such as Madrid, is still a challenge we have pending.