

WHAT IF WE COULD BE AN EMERGING ARTIST AT ANY AGE?



**For the next 8 minutes I am going to ponder the question with you:
WHAT IF WE COULD BE AN EMERGING ARTIST AT ANY AGE?**

I'm going to start by asking

What do we mean by this term 'an emerging artist' and then consider different contexts, different situations within which an artist might be emerging.

I'll be offering some illustrations, examples of artists who have emerged or re-emerged in later life

And I want us to be thinking throughout – does the age of the artist matter, in this process of emerging?



So what do we mean by 'emerging'?

I'm going to talk about four definitions of emerging

- newly formed, just beginning to exist
- becoming visible, apparent and prominent
- recovering from or surviving a difficult situation
- growing and developing, changing

I'd like to explore with you these definitions in relation to artists of different ages and consider:

- What makes the difference in helping us to emerge, to keep growing, changing, becoming who we can be as artists and people?
- What encourages us, or discourages us, to keep emerging as we continue through life?



So our first definition:

NEWLY FORMED, JUST BEGINNING TO EXIST

So what if arts education and opportunities were open equally to people of all ages?
To encourage, support and nurture the talents of artists across the life course?

An example.

Arts Award, backed by Arts Council England, is like the Duke of Edinburgh Award for the arts. Its open to people aged 5 to 25. Participants work their way through different levels and gain credits for their creative and practical learning and achievements.

Diana Walton wrote on the 10th Birthday of Arts Award that key factors in Arts Awards popularity are:

- young people are naturally creative and make great leaders
they have an appetite for experimentation, leadership and responsibility
- Arts Award enables young people who are not academic or in education to realise a talent – personal passions can lead to great artists

She says that

- Qualifications matter – they can help us get onto a course or add value to a grant application for support for our next arts project - and
 - they are of particular personal value to those of us who haven't got academic certificates - a public recognition of achievements

- Arts Award has a lasting impact : it can spark talent, support success, build learning and confidence

She quotes a young person who said:

- *Arts Award helped me to find myself as an artist and a person.'*



WHAT IF emerging artists aged 26+ could get the support and encouragement of Arts Award?

What if those who didn't get a chance when they were younger because of family circumstances, poverty, geography, lack of confidence, discrimination against women, against people of colour, could get a chance now – aged 29 or 79 and **be encouraged to emerge at the beginning of their creative careers?**

And what if, opportunities to get started in the arts were easily available for those who wouldn't think of getting involved in an Arts Award.

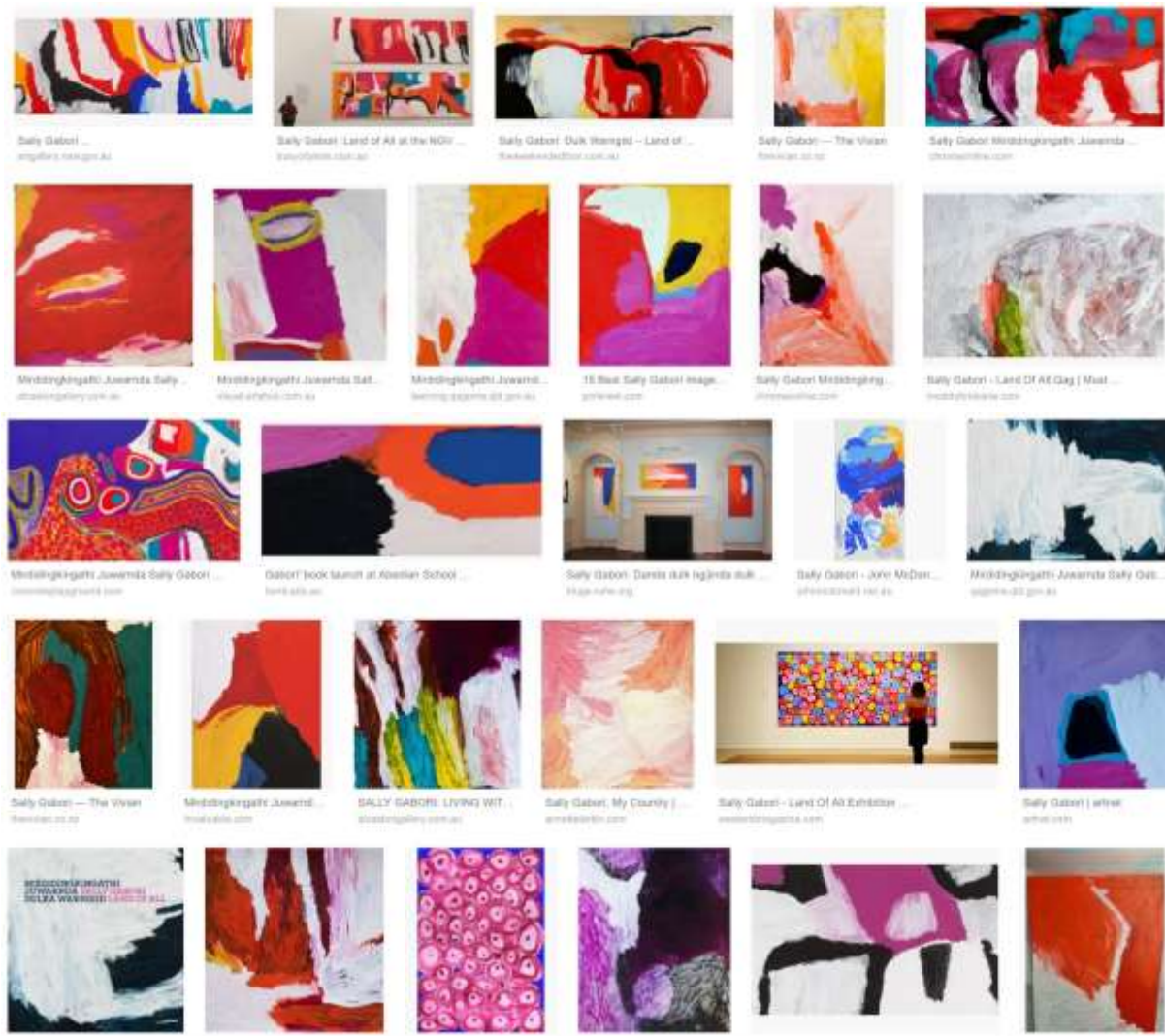
I know that many of you in this room work day by day to create those opportunities or are yourselves artists.



I'd like to share the story of one artist as an example

Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori, was born around 1924 on Bentinck Island, one of the indigenous Kaia-dilt people in northern Queensland, Australia, whose amazing work I saw in an exhibition in Brisbane a few years ago:

Gabori came to painting in 2005 aged around 80 years old, through a group at the Mornington Island Arts and Crafts centre. Her talent was spotted and taken up by a Brisbane gallery owner and agent and according to critics she 'was immediately recognised as an artist of breathtaking instinct, unabashed passion and drive. Her love of paint and the full spectrum of colour offered to her, triggered an outpouring of ideas including depicting her country and her ancestral stories.'



She painted to the end of her life in 2015, making in just ten years an exceptional collection of 2000 paintings, shown and collected nationally and internationally.

SO WHAT IF THE OLDER EMERGING ARTIST OFFERS THE WORLD A FRESH EYE ON THE LANDSCAPE AND HISTORY OF HER PEOPLE that draws from 90 years of life lived, and passes on both a legacy of that history in visual images and financial support for her descendants,

AND THEN AGAIN WHAT IF THOSE WHO DID GET A CHANCE WHEN YOUNG chose to **re-emerge**, took a second chance to refresh, renew, and bring a life of experience to their artform:



I'm thinking here of **Glenda Jackson**, born 1936, who enjoyed a theatre training and a highly successful career on stage and screen, the Royal Shakespeare Company, two Oscars, primetime tv then left acting to become a Labour MP in north London for 23 years.

And returned to the stage, in 2016, aged 80, as King Lear at the Old Vic, and now on Broadway – described by a critic as “one of the most powerful Lear’s I have ever seen”



So back to our definitions

**What if our Emerging Artist is someone
BECOMING VISIBLE, APPARENT AND PROMINENT**

Who is it, who has the power to judge who is 'emerging'? and who has the resources to encourage or support that emerging?

WHAT IF the 'emerging artist' is not a Glenda Jackson but someone who was previously overlooked and unrecognized, noticed now for the first time

WHAT IF we didn't need a festival for older people because our work was shown every week of the year in galleries and theatres and streets across the UK? as part of the mainstream? on the main stage?

WHAT IF THE RANGE OF PEOPLE WHOSE STORIES GET TOLD, whose voices are heard within our arts venues and companies, really reflected our population?



WHAT IF we could write a 'coming of Age' novel at any age, to explore and discover what it is to change as we age,

Not just the traditional 'coming of age' novel or play of the teenager or young adult discovering their identity and often their sexuality but the coming of age novel of the person becoming 70 or 80 or 90 or more. exploring our older identities and sexualities, and how these aspects of being human change, as we change, as our bodies age and alter, as how we are seen by society impacts our personal view of ourselves.

How would those artists and artworks change our understanding of others experiences and perhaps how we design and organise our world?



And using our third definition

WHAT IF OUR EMERGING ARTIST IS someone **recovering from or surviving a difficult situation**

WHAT IF a person living with a dementia, who no longer communicates verbally reveals who they are through gesture and expression and sounds.

I'm thinking of a lady living with dementia, described to me recently by musician Julian West One of a group of Residents, staff and professional musicians and dancers who create together through Spitalfields Music. This lady who is non-verbal loves to dance.

She is the finest dancer in the room, moving everyone else to a state of awe, inspiring others to dance



And What if seeing that woman dance means that staff focus less on what residents can't do, what is lost, and notice instead who they are now and what they have to offer?



WHAT IS THE EFFECT OF THE EMERGING ARTIST ON THE LIVES OF OTHERS?

At Magic Me we see that the courage and enthusiasm of older people, seizing opportunities that they didn't have earlier in life, can bolster the courage and inspire the engagement of younger people.



AND WHAT ABOUT THE AUDIENCES FOR THESE EVER-EMERGING ARTISTS who are an essential ingredient in their story?

AS AUDIENCES are we prepared to open our minds, take the risk of seeing or hearing new work? Not sticking to what we already know, but choosing to try something different? Not to follow only the bands like the Rolling Stones who keep touring and delighting their fans world wide, but whose repertoire is still the hits from 50+ years ago



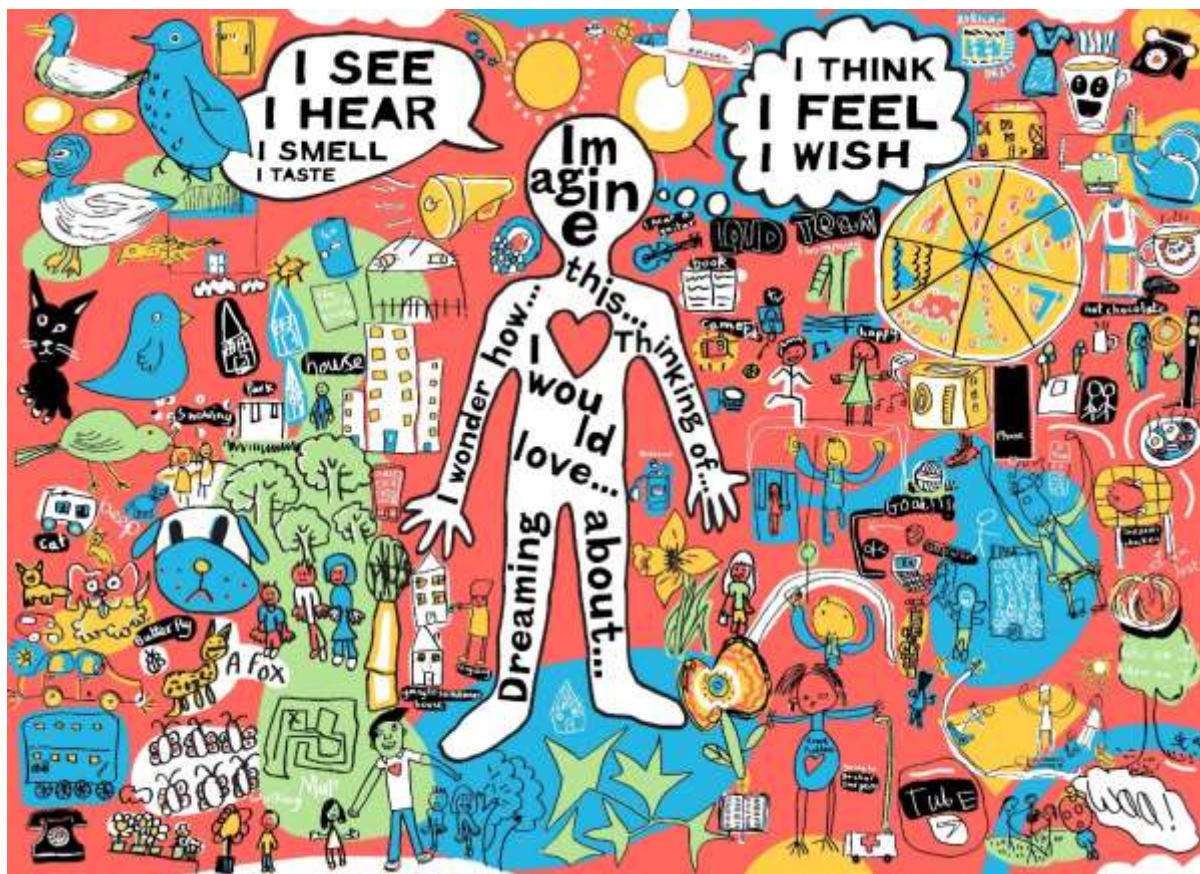
WHAT IF WE TOOK AS OUR FINAL EXAMPLE the ever emerging artist David Bowie, who had his first hit Space Oddity, aged 22 in 1969, then re-emerged as his alter ego Ziggy Stardust in 1972. Every decade after that Bowie reinvented himself and his music, and moved into electronic, dance, jungle then film, theatre, acting

And FINALLY

WHAT IF the Emerging Artist then managed and choreographed the soundtrack to his own death:

David Bowie released his final album *Blackstar*, to huge critical and popular acclaim in 2016. He died two days later aged 69. A re-emerging artist and in charge, to the end of his life.

We can't all be David Bowie,
but my invitation to you is to think WHAT IF?



THANK YOU



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