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## ARTS/ENTERTAINMENT

### From Young Storytellers, a Playful Tone

Contemporary Art Powerhouse's Emerging Artists Show Promise

By **BENJAMIN GENOCCHIO**

What joy there is in this year's "Aljira Emerge" show in Newark, the eighth installment of the gallery's annual professional development program for young and emerging artists, mainly from the metropolitan region. It is

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not the strongest exhibition in recent years, but it is the most delightful visually.

For the first time we have none of the usual moralizing, even in the emphatic treatment of social and political issues that occurs here and there throughout the show. The works by 20 artists, selected by Rocio Aranda-Alvarado, the curator at the Jersey City Museum, is remarkable for its lightness and humor.

Many striking works of sculpture are also on display. An artist known as Natsu has built a giant, glistening egg out of plastic beads, which makes a powerful first impression. Hanging in the middle of the exhibition, it inspires awe at its beauty and admiration for the hours of labor that went into its construction.

I have remarked before that a streak of craft is running through contemporary art these days, with many artists making objects by hand using techniques like model-making, knitting and ceramics. It is plainly apparent in this show. In addition to Natsu and Ms. Pepito, there is also Mike Womack, who has constructed a cinder block out of bright orange Cheetos. It is a tongue-in-cheek gesture, but the block is so perfectly made that you can't help but admire the artist's oddball brilliance.

*"Aljira Emerge 8," through Sept. 29, at Aljira, a Center for Contemporary Art, 591 Broad Street, Newark. Information: (973) 622-1600 or [www.aljira.org](http://www.aljira.org).*