

International Foodcourt/Global Classic

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*Today I woke up and we had a new Prime Minister.
And Duterte was cleansing criminals.
And Korean citizens were demonstrating in the streets.
And the Myanmar military were cleansing citizens.
And Thailand was in mourning.
And we had a new Prime Minister.
And drones were [still] bombing Pakistan.
And Aleppo was in rubble.*

Today I woke up and Trump was the President Elect.

*And Jesus I thought Jesus we live in a fucked up world.
A world that
despite the global handhugs and It's A Small World After All isms
is rapidly accelerating towards
exclusivity.
An exclusive economic
ecosystem
where we negotiate
free trade agreements
[open borders was it]
whilst re-designing flags to assert national pride
build walls
build higher walls
tighten migration legislation
and turn people away
turn people away desperately seeking assistance
turn refugees away
who never asked to be refugees
but not in the same way a privileged teenager screams
I never asked to be born.*

I woke up and Trump was President.

How?

How do we move towards changing this, when we do not operate in a system where we can assert positive action

assert any action

where those desperate to tell their stories struggle to find a place to be seen,

let alone heard

are screaming

screaming and no one is listening.

How do we clear space, make space?

Maybe art

maybe art is the only way to shift this, create a space for voices to arise, for alternate realities to coexist, and move forward (preferably, but not necessarily) together.

No

no, no one is being meaningful in the art world

it's all about the

Residue of Memory or

Light or

fucking Bodies in Space or something.

No one is doing anything meaningful

and why would I even bother engaging in that world.

That art world over there.

And here is where I arrive.

In a crisis of thought

a critical, fatigued mind

desperately seeking clarity in a

desperately fucked world.

I wasn't anticipating that the gallery would ask me to

pause

stop

look

listen

no

really listen.

And so the unravelling begins.

The scene is
An international food court.
A robust yet lawless world
full of crooks
wraps
and spinach and berry smoothies.

The characters include
stall owners
semi notorious businessmen
restless children
a cook and
a poet.

You are
a ceramicist
a baboy
clearing plates
writing signs
drawing menus and discovering
culture and language.

You are
a weaver
a customer
sitting, waiting for shifts to end
seeing patterns
everywhere
bags on the street
tea-towels
tea-towels
and more tea-towels.

In New Zealand, food halls are synonymous with retail culture, trapped somewhere between chain-store mega malls (cut to ketchup smeared children screaming with handfuls of half-eaten fries while sleep deprived mothers nurse sale items in oversized strollers) and high-end boutique emporiums (cut to bored Remuera housewives curating their instagram between swiping plastic with the latest 'authentic' fusion experience, sans seeing or tasting). But aside from the banal consumerism of fast food joints and trendy supper spots exists a more functional food space with more flair, flavour, and picturesque dishes than you can shake a fork at: the international food court. *International Foodcourt/Global Classic* is a

re-articulation of the knowledge, experiences, and activities in such a food court. Together artists Annie Mackenzie and Dave Marshall present a series of found and made pieces, cohabiting in the gallery and acting as a portal to another world - to other worlds. A familiar world constructed into vignettes of classic domesticity: a line of tea towels; stacks of banana boxes; an (albeit, melting) milk carton atop a woven placemat; decorative ceramic vessels; a seemingly discarded drying cloth atop a PVC wrapped workbench; hand-painted signs providing humorous insight into daily *HOT WAFFLE* banter. And yet, this world is somewhere distinctly unknown: alien. The iconography is recognizable and yet misplaced, objects implying purpose without functionality: a vinyl sign hanging limply from a bungee cord; glossy photos of lifeless food; an empty, upturned mango crate; a laminated instructional (or was it poetic?) article. Through the thoughtful construction of this food court, we are both inside and outside its suggested reality. But to frame this experience simply as 'alien' is to do the very thing both artists are resisting: the act of 'othering'. At the heart of this exhibition are two practitioners coming to terms with the complexity of the world in which we live, and inviting the viewer to engage: through personal, artistic, and cultural practice. Welcome to the United Nations of dining experiences: the cheap and cheerful world of the international food court.

The collaboration is a dialogue between two practitioners working separately, together. It reflects a dialogue between two artists, two practices, bouncing back and forth, unveiling the almost imperceptible threads of connection between partners. A private life where daily art-making rubs up alongside shared readings, shared television, shared cups of tea. One encountering and influencing the other, alternating, fluidly and in motion. How might two artistic perspectives coexist? Avoid sacrificing personal integrity and bring forward the full self without enacting aggression, dominance or submission? Here, the delicate quality of a partnership is revealed through the objects who, like the artists, are in conversation. They are vessels for stories, whispering to each other. Placed together, considered. In response. In harmony and yet off-balance. Together, Mackenzie and Marshall investigate the process of making through their respective lenses: the loom; the kiln; the brush. Both are purposeful, each folding their immediate surroundings into the practice. They are arguably the same immediacies: people, places, things. And yet, they are not *the same*. They are not duplicates of the same concepts, viewpoints, or emotional frequencies. They are not interchangeable. Marshall is more present in his work, reflective of his active relationship and engagement with the subject. You can almost hear his guffaw bubble up at the drollness of the signs' fonts and the rooster's beak playfully protruding from the pottery. Mackenzie, on the other hand, works with a quietness that indirectly connects us to the conversation. Despite the complex social commentary her textiles provoke, their deceptively unassuming quality earns a double-take: for a moment they are ready-made placeholders before we realise they are hours of highly-skilled workmanship: embodiments of human labour. Each of the artists independently hold their own. However, the strength in this work is where the two collide, creating a rich space for contrast and

complementarity. We are able to reflect on sets of polarizing binaries, simultaneously: local and global; private and public; handmade and mass-produced. Through Mackenzie and Marshall's shared artistic practice we can value not only the outcome of the physical work produced but the invitation to visit their shared vision of the world, through a process with multiple planes.

The collaboration is a dialogue between two generations working separately, together. Artists carefully paying respect to Aotearoa's whakapapa of craft practice: institutes of learning including people, communities, and guilds where skills and knowledge are passed down over time, person to person. Although both Mackenzie and Marshall are graduates from Ilam School of Fine Arts, they have consciously sought new systems of making outside of art school, spending time studying with local potters and weavers - some of whom are in their seventies, and older - honouring the principles at the heart of craft (call it workmanship, artistry, or art). This pursuit opens up a genuine enquiry - not without a slight air of melancholy - into the future of orthodox craft practice in New Zealand: what will happen when the craft kaumātua are gone? Yet, despite the sincere engagement with this practice - not to mention that Mackenzie was the 2016 recipient of the Creative Fibre New Weavers Award - there still exists a tension between the traditional and the re-imagined as these two contemporary artists re-think the notion of craft practice. For Marshall, this lives through his unique style of throwing where the ideals of functionality (thinness; lightness; tidiness) are cast (no pun intended) aside to make way for something new. For Mackenzie, it is through the playful appropriation of designs traditionally found in assembly line consumables so unashamedly captured in the loose edges of the wall-mounted tea towels: an act of subversion that might cause a stir at the Wellington Handweavers and Spinners Guild. And yet to speak about this exhibition qualifying as art over craft (or vice versa) is reductive to the artists and the work: it is at once a rejection and celebration of both. By committing to investigating the forms, patterns, and structures through craft, Marshall and Mackenzie prompt us to consider our own relationship to the objects saturating our daily lives and the origins of their production: Where do these patterns belong? Who made them? Whose are they to make? When we consider how low-cost imports and short-lived disposables fuel our high turnover, throwaway lifestyles, Mackenzie and Marshall's handmade kitchen homewares shift from kitsch table ornament to objects of pointed (and political) permanence.

The collaboration is a dialogue between two cultures working separately, together. Both Marshall and Mackenzie have lived and travelled through Southeast Asia, and their encounters with the people and traditional arts (including textiles) have clearly fed into their practice, as both artists and craftspeople. Their compassion and curiosity set up an exciting contract in the gallery space, traditionally occupied by dominant voices, to see and hear something new. On the one hand, it documents the happy misunderstandings between the different languages and customs of the food court. An attempt to assimilate, to build a new life. Through Marshall's signs

we gain insight into an artist's position in service to this community, and his quest to find meaning in the function of food stall signage. But beyond the humor is an indication of Marshall's genuine attraction to this community: he reveals the stall owner's own quest to find meaning in being a stall owner, through Dong 'Pony' Zhang's contribution to translating Pu Songling's article on JianBing (Chinese breakfast crepes). This interchange, though buried in the work, pulses through the veins of the gallery. Refreshingly, Marshall is not pushing his own agenda - this is not a documentary piece. Nor is he placing the difference aside - to colonise and homogenise - but instead positioning it front and centre. We come to understand these views by moving *through* the difference, not *forward*, as our outcome obsessed Western lens would have us propagate. Yes, difference lives here. This is what it feels like to dance together into the unknown. Let's miscommunicate. Let's get it wrong. Marshall's effort to develop a shared language, a shared gesture, where he is communicating to both the subject and the viewer, removes the romantic notion of the universal and accepts that sometimes we might not quite understand each other. When you said that, did you mean this? This? How are those different? How are they the same? When you said this, did you really mean that? And could you do this for me? And this? And just this last thing? So begins a slow and beautiful process toward a meaningful, messy intercultural exchange. This is what it means to be international. This is what it means to *truly* collaborate.

Sometimes, the privilege of language and systems from the outside hold little to no currency in the codified encounter that is stepping into a gallery. We can become foreigners: hungry travellers in a hawker centre faced with a variety of unknown dishes, rapidly attracting the unwanted attention of the residents (cue the gallery security guards at the Guggenheim). *International Foodcourt/Global Classic* asks us to shift our relationship to the unfamiliar, and to reconsider the actions of our daily lives in relation to the wider world. Perhaps we won't be able to change things on a global scale, but it feels like we could move a little closer.