

LITTLE DOG LAUGHED
in which we are introduced to
Yllwbro and some Vintage Tableware,
and the stories continue

If you saw them together you'd never guess they were related let alone brother and sister.

'Half-brother and sister,' says Yolo, the older sibling of the two, 'I'm the big and brainy half.'

'The bolshie and bossy half you mean,' adds the younger sibling, pouring hot water into a pot to make tea.

'She's Yolo and I'm her bro but you can call me B. B. for Blu.'

The first floor window is open. Outside, industrial traffic rumbles away in the distance. We are in the compact but surprisingly spacious studio/office of the collaboration known as Yllwbro.

Why is that?

'History,' explains Yolo, clearing a space on the

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long utilitarian trestle table desk to put down some mugs. 'We want our work to be out there not us. What should be interesting is what we have to say and why we want to say it. Who cares about who we are, where we come from or what we had for breakfast?' She sweeps a scatter of eggshell and slightly charred toast crumbs neatly into the palm of her hand. 'For us it is our idea that matters most.'

B. is rummaging through a stack of books on the floor and eventually finds a copy of the freebie magazine *Paperboy* upon which to stand the scalding teapot. From somewhere under the table he says, 'Even though mine's the prettiest, celebrity art success does not have to be all about the face.'

'It does when the face belongs to a body like you,' asserts his sister. B. re-emerges, makeshift coaster in hand and calmly ignores her. Yolo produces a carton of milk from the fridge by the door. She inspects the use-by date, pops the top and sniffs the contents. Good to go. Yolo smiles serenely, 'Milk anyone?'

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So when did the collaboration begin?

B. pours hot tea into each of the mugs. The brew is fragrant but strong and very dark.

'After surviving university we worked entirely independently of each other. It wasn't until my sister came home to Auckland in 2015 that the two of us were able to play together again. This was when we started to fiddle with a few ideas and experiment much as we had done when we were kids.' B. swirls full fat milk into his tea.

'Our occasional and fairly random collaboration suddenly got serious, when, in October last year, a proposal we made in response to an Artspace open call for submissions was selected for inclusion in the *New Perspectives* show.'

'Then it was all on,' says Yolo over at the sink. 'Gallery management sooo could not handle our 'wish to remain anonymous' gig. Went way beyond their comfort zone.' She disappears behind the bench. 'Seen the fruit cake Blu?'

An old, well-used square biscuit tin sits on the table. It's red and a bit munted but the lid still fits. Inside, wrapped in thick brown paper is the last quarter of moist, *Ginger Ale Fruit Cake* straight out of page 33 of the 1976 edition of the *Edmonds'* cookbook.

'Made it myself,' beams Yolo, slicing off a wedge with a stainless steel table knife designed by Danish architect Arne Jacobsen, c.1968. She hands her brother a hefty piece of cake and cuts another slice.

B. puts down the loaded plate and examines the Jacobsen artefact. Curious, he turns the object over and considers the blade. 'Kubrick used this cutlery in *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Wonder if creepy HAL, the all-knowing computer, had an algorithm for fruit cake?'

'Whatever,' says Yolo, helping herself to a fat raisin left lying in the tin, 'not all artists are upfront when their work is collaborative. Few want to acknowledge the way in which individual creative achievement is often the product of partnerships and associations they have with others.' She grins and leans forward, 'However, when creative collaborations occur within family groups, ordinarily it is the female partner who gets eaten by the male.' Yolo licks the end of her finger and pointedly hooovers up the last crumbs of cake. 'But not here, in this whare. Ours is a different story, isn't it Bro?'

'Totally,' replies B. curtly reminding his sugar-addicted sister that actually, it's her turn to be mother and she is the one who should offer more tea. 'Working as a brother

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and sister collaboration frees us a bit from the Euro-centric bind of sexuality and gender.'

'Blame Freud,' says Yolo, stirring the pot, 'I do.'

'For us,' continues B. 'power relations are different. Of course there is tension between siblings but we negotiate.'

'Argue mostly,' says Yolo wondering if at this juncture a cheese sandwich might be in order.

'Yes but that's our spark' insists B. 'Interrogation of the 'familiar.' Te hubbub of te constant whānau squabble, Girl.'

'Really?' says Yolo rattling around in a drawer hunting for the bread knife. 'We got anything bigger than your Scandi boy toys?'

B. laughs. 'Our ideas are our ideas. They might not be appreciated or hot right now but whatever you want to say about them, the work they inspire is direct and heaps more fun.'

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Lunch appears from nowhere. A loaf, block of budget Edam cheese, couple of ripe avocado, two beefsteak tomatoes and some pre-sliced spicy sausage flecked with chilli. 'Meatloaf,' says Yolo, 'leftover from last night. Get into it before he does.'

Mugs are washed and dried, kettle refilled and boiled. Tea is made again. Yllwbro discuss their installation, *Little Dog Laughed*, the inaugural show at Mokopōpaki, the sharp new gallery opened on the first of March, 2017 at 454 Karangahape Road by up-and-coming Auckland dealer Jacob Terre.

Yolo scoops out a spoon of creamy flesh from the leathery brown skin of the avocado and spreads this on her bread, seasoning it with pepper. 'If we have to talk about *Little Dog Laughed*,' she says, cutting into a tomato, 'possibly, formative childhood experience is a useful place to start.'

'But this is only a beginning not the end,' says B. peeling a slice of meatloaf off the ample stack. 'Although we want you to respond to some primal awareness of the infinite and unexplained, sensitive to the uncertainties such knowledge implies, *Little Dog Laughed* is about confidence built on the ability to feel secure.' B. pats down the top of his

sandwich and takes a bite. 'As artists, this is the state that allows us to look up and out. Here, we imagine and see for ourselves the beauty of space.'

'And,' reflects Yolo, 'the mysteries of creation.'

Anymore notes?

Mouth full, B. says, 'My sister has a passion for Omar Sharif.'

Come again?

'My sister has a passion for Omar Sharif.'

Some context please.

Yolo obliges. 'When I was fourteen I got taken to the classic 1965 David Lean film *Dr Zhivago* with the brown-eyed drop-dead-gorgeous Egyptian born actor Omar Sharif in the title role, supposedly running around Bolshevik Russia making heroic but revolutionary gestures.' Yolo considers the possibility of another sandwich, hesitates and pours the tea instead. 'What a chocolate smoothie he was,' she says. 'I was thrilled. Even thought the delicious Omar could have been Māori – one of those handsome Arawa boys from Maketū maybe.'

'If you believe that,' says B. splashing milk into his mug, 'she'll try and convince you *Oma Te Rīhi* is Omar Sharif's Māori mate.'

Yolo closes her eyes. 'Yes I can see it now. In a deleted scene the two Omar reign in their snorting Cossack horses, the war-weary, mahogany comrades-in-arms embrace and then charge off across the frozen steppes with a red moon at their backs.'

‘Yeah right,’ says B. unimpressed. ‘I tagged *Oma Te Rīhi* as a homage to Rem Koolhaas and his firm of radical architects, myself.’

‘Can be both,’ says Yolo, sweetly. ‘Oma Te Rīhi’s grandmother is Dutch you know.’

There is a pause.

‘Probably worth mentioning,’ says Yolo sipping her tea, ‘as an idea, *Little Dog Laughed* kinda made itself one afternoon just before the Trump Presidential Inauguration.’ There is no more cake but B. hands round a bowl of plums to stop a gap. ‘We happened to be watching Al Jazeera television and saw a re-run of Kim Webby’s documentary *Price of Peace* (2015) on Tūhoe artist and activist Tame Iti investigating allegations that he was the leader of an organised criminal group running military-style, terrorist training camps somewhere in the Urewera.’

Yolo inspects the fruit in the bowl. ‘The clip that grabbed our attention was footage recorded on Tuesday, the twentieth of March, 2012 when Tame stepped into glare of the camera right outside the High Court in Auckland the evening a jury failed to reach a decision regarding the conspiracy charges police had laid against him.’ Yolo selects a good-looking plum and polishes it with a paper towel.

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'Tame made a short speech in Te Reo and then, as an ironic thank-you to the Crown, concluded what he had to say by singing the nursery rhyme, *Hey Diddle Diddle*. 'Resonated with us,' says Yolo, 'but for different reasons, eh?'

B. hasn't quite finished with the cheese and trims off a nibble. 'For me,' he says, '*Little Dog Laughed* absolutely references my first year at Art School.' He wraps a soft yellow square of Edam around a juicy purple plum and squeezes them together. 'Almost put me off making art for life.'

'Lucky for us,' says Yolo, 'it didn't. Every dog will have its day, Brother. *Little Dog Laughed* is our day. *Woof Woof*.'

Mokopōpaki

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