

MARY MACDOUGALL
Ceramic Papers

28 May – 25 June, 2022

READINGROOM
186 High St.,
Northcote,
Naarm / Melbourne
3000, VIC, Australia

ReadingRoom is pleased to announce *Ceramic Papers*, a solo exhibition of new work by Mary MacDougall. This is the artist's second solo exhibition at the gallery.

Inoperative words

An exchange between Tom Melick and Elisa Taber

It wasn't so long ago that entomologists discovered that some insects use plants like telephones, sending chemical signals to each other above and below the ground, and often in different dialects. The same might be said of artworks: they are transmission devices where a certain kind of signalling and intermingling happen, or doesn't happen.

These exchanges take place between two people in two cities, Sydney and Montreal, and through the works of an exhibition, *Ceramic Papers*, by Mary MacDougall. They take place at a certain time, between the difference in times, when one of us is awake and the other asleep, or can't sleep. Eloquence and mastery don't interest us. Much like Mary's art, our gamble is that there's more to be found in what remains illegible and fragmented, a language vibrating between text and image.

Language communicates something other than itself, than its content: its form. We stand outside its door (on opposite sides), I knock, it cannot open, I hear you knock back. Three times during this exhibition we'll exchange scripts that speak to each other, to the images that in turn speak for themselves, and to you, our imagined reader.

Inoperative words #1

Tom Melick, 23 May, Sydney, 2:41 pm

maps

calligraphy

cuneiform inscription

graffiti

lacework and netting

botanical shapes

musical composition

weather systems

cartoons

signatures

children's drawings

anatomical illustrations

architectural plans

electrograms

I made the list on the train, after talking with my friend Nina about Mary's art. It comes from wanting *to read* her pictures, piece them together from clues and associations.

The images ask for guesswork because what is absent is just as present as what appears. Her visual language is never one thing, refuses a single technique even. Some hair-like marks suggest script (ideograms?) but then breakdown, become excitable. Nothing remains still.

I was trained to locate artworks in time, secure them to a particular style. Art history is a discipline of explanation and emplacement. Mary's pictures bother chronology and style. They come with a restless historicity. Full of citations to visual languages that lead you across the surface, but also into the primary act of mark-marking.

You once wrote that when there is too much to say you synthesise it into something cryptic. You were referring to your own writing, but I wonder, can this also be a way of making images?

Abstract not in terms of its art historical meanings, but something closer to the word's etymological root? "To draw, drag, move" away.

Elisa Taber, 25 May, Montréal, 9:21 am

Mary's marks graze their surfaces like absolute decoration, emancipated from every purpose. They feel "al ras de suelo" (grazing earth). The Uruguayan storyteller Horacio Quiroga describes his characters that way, hovering between life and death.

Intent is a raft moored to the island that is comprehension, always trying to float away. She cuts the cord and speaks to herself. Brave isolation.

I stare and stare at the clusters of shapes until they emit smoke. *This is fiction*, I think and imagine a mask beside a featureless face. Reality's doppelganger, unlike dreams, is not dispelled by but points to its artifactuality. I fall deeper into sleep.

A snake slithers up a stairwell to a room in the sky, swallows a star, and falls so hard it becomes a rooted tree.

Air dense with swarms of no-see-ums blown clean by a wind that feels like diving into a tepid pool.

An arrow points to the sea, "No one lives there, they drowned."

Those are the myths, stories of origin, I see in “Ceramic Papers.” Dwelling on her encrypted script, I peer into her home. We can only hear each other. You mention a “restless historicity,” maybe this is the time of myth: the primordial is immanent, now gods descend in human form.

Elisa Taber writes and translates herself into an absent presence. *An Archipelago in a Landlocked Country* is her first book.

Tom Melick makes books and pamphlets at Stolon Press, and edits Slug with Elisa.

Mary MacDougall (b. 1983, Australia) lives and works on Gadigal land in Sydney. The foundation of her practice is experimental mark-making which she employs across a variety of materials including glass, board, paper and ceramics. She is interested in colour theory, collage, asemic writing, image archives and forms in transition.

Recent exhibitions include *DRAWING*, Sydenham International, Sydney (2022); Joan Jonas and Mary MacDougall, *Dialogues: Wind*, 1968 and *R.B Archipelago*, 2017, ReadingRoom, Melbourne (2021); *Roman Glass Episode*, Knulp, Sydney (2019) and *R.B. Waves*, ReadingRoom, Melbourne (2018).

Mary has released two records, one as part of Warm Currency via the London label Horn of Plenty (2022) and another as The Bowles on Graham Lambkin’s Kye label in New York (2012). She has produced three artists’ books with Nicolas Welytk of Cooperative Editions and has contributed to numerous publications. She has exhibited widely in artist-run spaces in Sydney, Melbourne and San Francisco.

ReadingRoom gallery opening hours are: Tuesday to Friday 10 am –6 pm, Saturday 10 am–3 pm & by appointment

For further information, contact olivia@areadingroom.com

ReadingRoom acknowledges that we are living and working on unceded sovereign land of the Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation. We pay respect to elders past, present, and future, and recognise the rich history of creative practices of Indigenous peoples across the country.