



# Incy Wincy Spicy Bazaar

chaco kato

Walker Street Gallery, Dandenong art centre

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# SPICE OF LIFE

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Anyone who has visited Dandenong or heard anything about the place will know of 'the market'. Undeniably the pulsing heart of the city, it represents the area's sturdy prosperity and displays the proof: the raw ingredients of the fact that Dandenong is Melbourne's most culturally diverse suburb. Spices, grains, fresh and exotic fruits and vegetables are the signs of a gorgeously rich tapestry of different cultures having frequented the market since its beginnings in 1866. Indian, Afghani, African, Italian, Polish and Lebanese families well into their fifth generations visit this hive of trade and friendship on a weekly basis. The strength of Dandenong lies not in one individual culture, but the weaving together of many.

Not far from the market, in Walker Street Gallery, artist Chaco Kato has re-created her own kind of social hive and creative, social ecosystem. The 'Incy Wincy Spicy Bazaar' uses a rainbow of colourful spices and produce from the market as the basis and materials for an impressively ambitious collaborative installation.

Just like real life itself, Chaco Kato's work is multi-disciplinary and collaborative. Her process is a type of creative symbiosis, a complete system of many collaborators dropping in and out and interacting and working together to make a big picture that continues to evolve daily.

Initially building a framework for the project using her signature woven string and wool stretched taut across scaffolds and frames of different shapes and sizes within the gallery space, Kato provides the raw shell of a market place or meeting place, the stage if you like. This is a very important element of what Chaco Kato does, she whole-heartedly invests her own precious time, creativity and enthusiasm and as a result provides a welcome space where magic is more likely to happen.



From within this setting Chaco reaches out to the children and parents of the Dandenong community via the local Dandenong West Primary School and the local public library. She welcomes them into her space and works with these willing collaborators as a kind of guide, facilitating workshops that revolve around making artwork from different types of food collected from the market as their raw materials. Inviting other practicing artists such as Kate Hill and Joseph Griffiths to run small workshops such as making dough pinch pots and then decorating them with seeds and beans, or drawing cut fruits onto brown paper bags, blindfold sensory tasting games and secret invisible drawings with citrus juices. Along side the making Chaco prepares fruit and vegetable snacks, which the children happily munch on.



The day that I visit the space Chaco is sitting quietly with a mother and her two school age sons carefully gluing lentils and chickpeas in delicate abstract patterns onto triangular patches of material to create 'flags.' As a mother of two sons myself, I witness this calmness and immediately appreciate the skill of Chaco's craft; a special kind of artist-parent communication. Encouraging children to sit still and make something is one thing, but doing so in a meaningful fashion, treating them as equals and creating a dialogue where they believe they are actually contributing to something bigger than themselves is another thing entirely.



There are many layers of value at play here. Firstly, the value of time and making something slowly, investing yourself in a project. Here, each participant believes their singular contribution is important in making a larger, beautiful whole. There is no point scoring, no right or wrong. Secondly, communicating the value of art to the broader community. By coming in and making something with their hands and feeling free enough to use their imagination to do so, the collaborators intuitively learn the value of making art and creating meaningful symbols in their broader lives. Finally, highlighting the value of children themselves. By investing time and patience in children, Chaco is investing in the future of the city itself. By learning how to be intuitively creative, children learn associated skills of asserting independence, personal opinion, individual voice and pride in their culture and place



Re-occurring arteries or themes throughout Chaco Kato's work suggest an interest in the parallels or 'life cycles' of natural products and resources. As a consumer/producer living during this time it is more important than ever to make sure we understand where things come from and where they end up. Especially when working with children. Not only does this project encourage a beautifully humble 'make-do' resourceful inventiveness, but it also encourages a distinct playfulness and curiosity in regards to the everyday things around us, much like you find in the most positive aspects of Science.

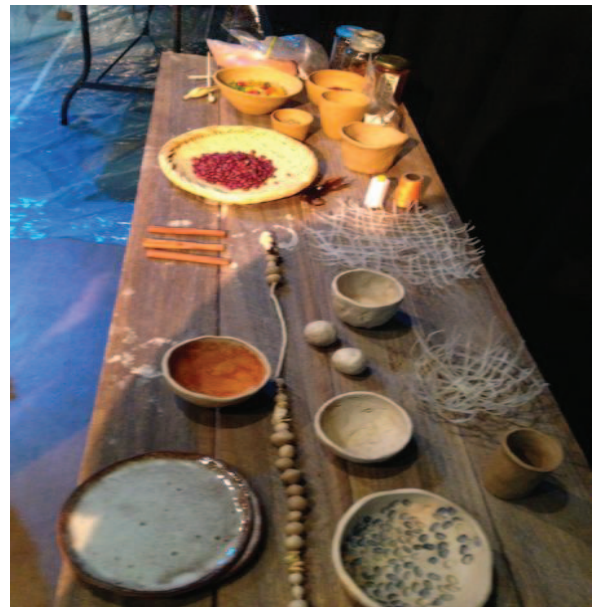


If you spend some time breaking down the results or categorizing the artworks made in Chaco's works you begin to see some distinct categories and re-occurring symbols which helps unravel the areas of interest in her broader practice. There are things from the ground; clay, soil, rocks, crystals. These are power sources, building materials, sculptural vessels. There are seeds and husks and stems and dried things she has collected. These can be ground into spices and flour and made into dough, or strung up as a frame or a mobile or a hanging device. Then there are the fruits and flowers- the symbols of growth and life. These then become the collected scraps, dried and threaded skins to be treasured and remembered as signs of impermanence. At first it seems like an eclectic jumble of bits and pieces ready for the compost, but on careful and thoughtful inspection it is as strong, confident and hopeful a palette as any abstract painter's.



Chaco Kato's work is about flow and possibilities. It is about intuition and improvisation. Curiosity and delicate personal ideas guided through craft and exchange. It is ultimately contemporary in that it cares not for the grandiosity of the notion of 'solo' artist or 'art star' or it's place in the art market. Kato's work prefers to create a sustainable and nourishing sense of meaning, place and learning through the pure act of making with others.







Incy Wincy Spicy Bazaar is a commissioned work for Children's week, City of Greater Dandenong. Thanks for Dandenong West Primary School and Dandenong Library.