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## JAMES BRAITHWAITE and GLEN MACKINNON: "ALBERTA: All You Can Eat," Opens September 29, 2012, Trianon Gallery, Lethbridge

by [Christina Cuthbertson](#)  
September 6, 2012

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Glen MacKinnon, "Potato (Taber Suite)," pencil on paper, 22" x 30", 2012.

*Feature Previews Fall 2012*

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James Braithwaite and Glen MacKinnon

### [Trianon Gallery](#)

104 5 Street S (Upstairs),  
Lethbridge, Alberta T1J  
2B2

#### PHONE

403-380-2787 or 866-  
380-2787

#### FAX

403-329-1654

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### **Trianon Gallery, Lethbridge**

#### **By Christina Cuthbertson**

Didn't your mother ever tell you not to play with your food? For artists Glen MacKinnon and James Braithwaite, notions of play and food seem to go hand-in-hand. With equal measures of fascination, humour, inquiry and humility, this uncle-nephew duo tease out complex ideas surrounding food production and consumption, while remaining playfully aloof on the subject.

"What started as a collaboration has ended up as a kind of surreal culinary pit-fight" says Braithwaite about his ongoing postcard project with collaborator MacKinnon. The practice of drawing, the theme of food and the art of comedic delivery are the battlefield on which the two wage their war. See the results in their upcoming exhibition, All You Can Eat. For months they've sent dozens of meticulously drawn artworks back and forth in the mail depicting scenes of ever-escalating levels of absurdity and cheekiness.

"Working on this project is like hallucinogenic free-jazz pushups for my illustration career," says Braithwaite. "It's a place to experiment, try bizarre new things, and at the same time try to keep up with the glowering monolith that is Glen MacKinnon."

Their project has evolved out of a decades-old history the two share: Glen is James' uncle, and for many years sent personalized and highly elaborate Christmas crackers to his sister and each member her growing family. James is Glen's nephew, and years later as a successful illustrator, credits these Christmas crackers as a major influence in his formative years: "Ever since I was a little kid, he has been polluting my impressionable mind with hilarious and lewd drawings, and that little germ of hilarity has taken root and ruined my chances of ever becoming an investment banker"

And it's a good thing too, that Braithwaite's ambitions to hold a straight-laced, suit-wearing job were squandered before they started. As an artist and illustrator his work was featured in the animated short film I Met the Walrus, which was nominated for an Oscar in 2008, won an Emmy in 2009, and awarded the Guggenheim/YouTube prize in 2010.

Ironically, for the Lethbridge-based MacKinnon, the practice of drawing — while fundamental to his everyday life — has typically remained a private activity not entering the realm of his artistic pursuits. Known primarily as a sculptor and wood-block printmaker, MacKinnon brings a level of sobriety into the mix with his Taber Suite, a series of new works featuring large-scale food producers in and around Taber, Alberta. "My work will address a concern I've dealt with throughout my career, that is: the natural world mediated by human involvement." While MacKinnon will explore these ideas in the media he's honed for years, the representational and political nature of this series are somewhat of a departure for him.

The shift follows MacKinnon's participation in Ecotone, a symposium and residency project that brings ranchers, scientists and artists together over shared social, political and environmental concerns. Southern Alberta is rich in food production and MacKinnon's interest lies in the evolutionary line between people who raise food and factories that produce it.

In addition to the postcard project, Braithwaite will also create new solo work for All You Can Eat. A series of ten portraits based on a fictional battle at Harris Teeter grocery store. "I have envisioned a day in the not too distant future where food is scarce, and roving, hungry gangs search the desolate landscape for the last remaining Pop Tart...To save the store from these gangs, the few surviving employees, or Teetlings, make a brave stand to protect the store...The drawings I am making ... are celebratory portraits of the proud Teetling Martyrs and the ceremonial meat hats they so bravely died in."

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