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## With cues from 'Our Town,' Philly artists branch out to collaborate for the first time

By Peter Crimmins

The new fall season of exhibitions at the the Institute for Contemporary Art, in West Philadelphia, includes a two-hour, non-narrative video by two prominent Philadelphia artists who have never before worked together.

"Easternsports," by Jayson Musson and Alex Da Corte, is a four-channel video projected on four screens facing the center of the ICA gallery. In the middle are four orange chairs, a deep-plush orange carpet -- for comfort -- and a scattering of plastic oranges.

The video's five scenes show actors moving through constructed set pieces, enacting particular rituals of consuming, working, and celebrating. All of it is played back at half-speed, making the glacial pace of the action both banal and contemplative.

"We're trying not to wholly alienate the viewer, but it is testing people's patience," said Da Corte. "It's prompting you to look again, and look again, which isn't something we do often. Everyone is always on full speed, which is super-speed at this point."

"It's an indicator that you are not in a space of normal consumption of visuals," said Musson.

The assistant curator at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Kate Kraczon, noticed the artists were gaining national prominence, but sometimes not for their most interesting work.

Musson, a Tyler School of Art alumnus, has had exhibitions of his text prints ("Too Black for BET") and textiles, but the larger art world knows him for his Internet video alter ego, Hennessy Youngman, a caricature of hip-hop who delivers acidic contemporary art criticism with a dose of comedy.

The Institute asked Musson to collaborate with Da Corte, an installation artist whose dabblings in video were limited to Internet-only videos of a few minutes in length. "It's a drawing method for me," said Da Corte. "Understanding material in terms of moving image."

The two artists grew up and worked in and around Philadelphia (Musson recently moved to New York), and have known each other since 2001, but never collaborated due to missed opportunities and schedule conflicts.

"We agreed to do something, but what that was, we had no clue," said Musson. "A work based in video for Alex, and based in writing for me. But we had no idea what it could have been."

"Any good curator wants to push an artist," said Da Corte. "Kate (Kraczon) proposing a show with just video and text pushes us into uncharted territory, to make braver work."

Da Corte says the video is inspired, in part, by "Our Town," the classic Thornton Wilder play about the values of a simple town delivered on an aggressively minimalist set. Onstage objects were understood to represent things they were not. Likewise, the actors in "Easternsports" emote through their relationships with abstracted objects.



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Although the experience of watching "Easternsports" is a lot about stasis, there is a lot going on. The set designs are riddled with pop-art references, and Musson's text, sometimes delivered in French, recalls the film work of Chris Marker and the French New Wave. He sometimes writes pointedly about desire, other times in a more rambling, circuitous fashion about ephemeral relationships.

"There is this bringing forward reality through consumed illusion, which plays back into desire," said Musson. "Desire to be something perfect, which doesn't exist in the world. It exists, flatly, somewhere else."