

**Title, Lucy Orta – Exilles**

**Interview by Irina Zucca Alessandrelli**

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Irina Zucca Alessandrelli:

*1. Your work usually derives from a specific social reality and works as catalyst on it. Involving local communities in a direct participation your work is often activated by the spectator. While, in this "Ornaments of suffering" the natural element, the wind seems to be involved in order to play hundreds of gloves with mountain bells dropping from their fingers. The public does not have access to this installation and can only attend the evocative action of the wind. You mentioned laments of prisoners grasping the emptiness, trying to escape their own destiny in describing your installation. What exactly these spaces recall to you at the first glance?*

Lucy Orta:

The day I visited the Exilles was a stifling summers day and the gentle Savoy and Dauphiné mountains cradled us like infants against the heat. We were the only visitors to climb the steep slope leading to the fortress and penetrate its austere walls. Inside, the fortified mass obscures the green flanks of the Susa valley and immediately the memory inscribed into the stone, provokes a new set of emotions. How can you not be reminded of the severe glacial winters of nature versus man, the suffering of those imprisoned, the solitude of defence? There is no sense to create a participatory project, the sheer immensity of the surroundings overbear the individual. It is a place of contemplation.

In the courtyard dividing the barracks from the prison I found a space that puts into opposition the two aspects of the project. On the one hand the mountain grace, and on the other, the despair of man.

*2. You seem to be primarily inspired by the military past of Exilles fortress and by its suffering protagonists. Did you know that the mysterious man with the iron mask remembered by Voltaire in "The Age of Louis XIV" and by Alexandre Dumas in his romance "Le Vicomte de Bragelonne" (one of the d'Artagnan series) has been imprisoned here from 1681 to 1687? Or the suggestive aspects of your installation evoke several prisoners who died here during the centuries?*

This legend intrigued me immensely especially since our research centre, The Dairy, is just 40km from the Vaux Le Vicomte the splendid chateau and gardens built for Foucquet during his post as minister of Finance. It is suggested that Louis XIV imprisoned Foucquet and masked his face out of jealousy and it is he who was banished to Exilles.

However, this is not the reason. I am interested in expressing suffering or injustice in general, previous works such as 'Refuge Wear' which explores the precariousness of home; 'Commune Communicate', expressing the emotions of prison inmates; 'All in One Basket' poverty and waste; 'Orta Water', access to clean water for all; etc.

The arm stretching over the courtyard is a symbol of the suffering of all those who are imprisoned.

*3. You said that ornaments convey aspects of our personality. Why did you choose gloves as a main ornament this fortress would wear?*

As you may be aware my background in fashion often plays a hidden role in my reflection. I am constantly challenging the misperception of clothing or accessories as frivolous.

Ornaments are accessories that relate to the scale of buildings. The 200 gloves over 2m50 long become symbols dangling from steel cables, in the same manner that charms or a personal

object would be attached to the bracelets or chatelaines. The charms would have carried specific meanings to those who wore them, which could have been hope, love or even despair. The glove is a hand grasping from behind the bars, the inscriptions silkscreen printed on to the fabric, the tattoo, the message...

*4. Gloves are a second skin; they have the exact shape of a hand. This sort of orange begging hands remind us immediately to an emergency, to an imminent risk we can face up in the street. The bells are a sort of loud signs we immediately perceive as a possible danger. You seem to handle emergency in every work. How do you detect an emergency? Can we say that all your works are based on different emergencies?*

Emergency, or urgency is ever omnipresent but too often it is hidden 'out of sight, out of mind'. In our work, Jorge and I bring the sometimes harsh or difficult reality to the fore, but hope that we also leave as much as possible the poetics to the viewer.

I hope the bells will remind us less of the danger, than that of the pastures more green.

This is the wish.

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