



Title, Body Architecture

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Exploring the connections between architecture, clothing and shelter, Lucy Orta's work is a reminder that our sense of belonging is tenuous, and like architecture itself, disconcertingly transitory.

The work of artist Lucy Orta communicates in a multi-dimensional manner, beyond its mere visual hanging in the exhibition of *Personal Effects – The Collective Unconscious* currently showing at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney. Orta's work (she refers to her pieces as "Body Architecture") speaks of a precarious society, where what we take for granted can suddenly be taken from us. What is central to her study is the notion of shelter, and the inherent meaning of the word, particularly as an extension of its architectural construct.

Shelter provides protection, most notably from the elements. But within the societal realm of Orta's exploration, shelter is not just protection for the occupant, but the means to communicate, negotiate and bond as a community. For example, *Collective Wear 4 Persons* and *Collective Survival Sac* is clothing/shelter for one or more people. As shelter, it requires individuals to work together with common goals, sleeping in close proximity with shared body heat.

Her *Collective Survival Sac*, similar to her *Nexus Architecture – Collective Wear 8 Persons*; speak of the collective community. While individually, the works suggest the definition of emergency housing, for homeless or dislocated people, and is further supported by her written text with phrases like "immediate assistance for urgent situations"; the message is beyond the pragmatic.

At some time or another we are all "homeless", dislocated or cast adrift in a society that is so often too difficult to connect with. Orta's work reveals the ephemeral nature of our being with respect to society, and suggests we are simply an occupant within society and can easily be removed or alienated at will. The powerlessness of the individual within a greater omnipotent society is revealed here.

Yet paradoxically, the community is made up of individuals and the individual like the house, is not an autonomous element, but has connection and context with the environment. At its best, a community offers meaningful connections that enrich life and provide a sense of belonging. But Orta's message is clear; our sense of belonging is tenuous, and like architecture itself, disconcertingly transitory.

As Orta crosses boundaries of art, so she also asks us to look laterally at shelter and architecture. What is architecture, what is clothing? Are they not just another interchangeable form of shelter? Both define identity and our place in society. As the curator of the exhibition noted: "The evocative fabrications encapsulate a certain relationship between architecture and dress – here clothing is shelter, one of the many protective layers within which we wrap or cocoon ourselves". This is a moving and indeed poignant exhibition that has been carefully assembled by the curator. Ewen McDonald. As an exhibition, it successfully conveys the uncertainties of life on a personal level as well as the overwhelming sense of the individual's powerlessness in the turmoils affecting our current milieu.

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