

Fabulae Romanae is a body of work by the artist duo Lucy + Jorge Orta that takes the viewer on a symbolic excursus across the city of Rome, drawn from archaeological and historical research conducted by the artists and their observations on the cultural and social map of the city and its seven hills. Starting from the most cherished form of the artists duo's language: the tent, Dome Dwelling and accompanied by the protagonists of their research the Spirits, who take on the form of ethereal and mysterious figures that inhabit the city. This publication brings together the installation of Lucy + Jorge Orta's work in MAXXI, the National Museum of XXI Century Arts in Rome and the video performance in which the contemporary sentinel Spirits silently explore the Roman city accompanied by the poetic verses of Mario Petrucci: we encounter the Traveler under the Castel Sant'Angelo bridge and in the Trastevere back streets; the Observer overlooking the Sacro Cuore dei Monti and the Isola Tiberina; the Tunneler and the Myth Maker in the Villa Gregoriana Park; the Flying Man, Chariot Rider, Memory Man, Bale Maker... Fabulae Romanae assumes the meaning of "homage" to Rome and was commissioned by ZegnArt with the curatorial advisor by Maria-Luisia Frisa.



LUCY + JORGE ORTA FABULAE ROMANAE



FABULAE ROMANAE

LUCY + JORGE ORTA

Marsilio

ZegnArt | Marsilio

ZegnArt

FABULAE ROMANAE
LUCY + JORGE ORTA

MAXXI
National Museum of XXI
Century Arts, Rome
March 22 – September 23,
2012
part of MAXXI Arte Collezione
TRIDIMENSIONALE

Curated by
Maria Luisa Frisa

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WANDERLUST

by MARIA LUISA FRISA



Fabulae Romanae is a project with a good story to tell, for it was born out of the meeting of people, ideas, places, desires and dreams that have found in the romantic, terrible and sublime magnificence of a city like Rome and in a new and majestic work of architecture, the MAXXI, National Museum of XXI Century Arts—contemporary hub of a stratified and omnivorous capital—the ideal setting to lay down experiences and discover new directions of emotional and physical intensity, and a place in which to act out feelings and obsessions.

It is not so common for distant affinities to meet in this way, called one toward the other in order to try to give form and substance to their intentions, to the desire to produce objects that are representation and synthesis of an art which is able to serve as measure and comprehension of the reality that surrounds us.

And this is how the encounter between the Orta, family of artists, and the Zegna, family of industrialists, came about. Old and very contemporary industrialists, the latter, first in the textile sector and then as pioneers of a men's fashion based on the perfection of materials and forms. With deep roots in their hometown of Trivero, a place that echoes with the sound of water and wind, they are at the same time reaching out to the new frontiers of the planet. Lucy and Jorge Orta, artists coming from nations that are distant from one another, Great Britain the former and Argentina the latter, who have found a refuge, a common home in Paris, have combined their individual excellences in a poetics in which art is always put to the test of the exigencies of contemporary life and the problems connected with the world's emergencies, both political and social. In a process of appropriation and understanding that leads them to traverse the most diverse geographical and mental territories. This is how many of their works are born; works that we often see silhouetted, in the images that document them, against perilous and remote landscapes. Explorers once again, at a time when everything seems to have been discovered

and to already be known, but in which instead it is becoming necessary to turn back and go down well-trodden paths, to recover the sense of cultural differences, the dignity of individuals and their land and a timorous attention to cruel mother nature. A process fed by faith in the creativity of utopia.

Our artistic practice is motivated by the wish to understand the complexity of the world we are living in and to imagine new scenarios for the future. We believe that the return to utopian thinking may be the key with which we can open the doors to the third millennium, to look farther ahead and to build a more equitable world for the next generation. We also believe that society cannot renew itself, nor even exist, without Utopia. Utopia is a movement. It encompasses the will to go further and to invent another world so that the present one is revitalized. However our Utopia is one we believe to be very attainable – a “concrete Utopia.” One of our Utopian endeavors is Studio Orta— Les Moulins, an ambitious cultural complex that incorporates four historical industrial buildings along the Grand Morin River in Seine-et-Marne and allows us to fulfill our dream of creating a place for collaboration

and for sharing our passion for contemporary art. Today, Les Moulins includes The Dairy, the Moulin de Boissy, the Moulin Sainte-Marie and the Moulin La Vacherie, tens of thousands of square meters of buildings that we have saved from demolition since the year 2000, all situated along a picturesque valley comprised of twenty hectares of landscaped grounds. We began by welcoming students and scholars to workshops at The Dairy and have since expanded to hosting internationally renowned artists in residence. We opened to the general public for European Heritage Day in 2004. In 2007 we invited Galleria Continua and artist friends to assist in developing this Utopia. Finally, in 2011, we founded a nonprofit association to develop the artists in residency program, collaborative projects, on-site commissioned works, production workshops and partnerships with craftsmen, galleries and public events, with a view to building a cafeteria and restaurant, a library and bookshops. We have planted hundreds of trees to show our commitment to creating a legacy beyond our time. This may be our most significant collective work, an open workshop and a living sculpture, true symbols of the fusion of art and life.

Body Architecture - Foyer D, 2002





Connector Mobile Village I, 2001

OrtaWater - M.I.U., 2005



Fabulae Romanae arose out of Zegna's desire to continue an exchange with art, something that is part of the company's history and the daily nature of its life and work. I am thinking of the frescoes of Ettore Olivero Pistoletto that recount the history of the wool craft in the mill at Trivero, but also of the great apple (*Woolen--The Reinstated Apple, 2007*) created by his son Michelangelo that greets you at the well-lit and efficient headquarters in Milan. But perhaps what represents better than many other actions the striving for a beauty that always has to be shared is the Panoramica Zegna: the road constructed, in a titanic undertaking, by the company's founder Ermenegildo that, starting out from the mill over which the colored flags of Daniel Buren now flutter, allows people to walk through and enjoy the beauties of the surrounding nature, as if it were a painting by Caspar David Friedrich. The installation for Rome was initially defined as a homage to the city, but it has also and above all become a traversal of it, starting out from the seven hills on which it stands and finding material expression in seven tents destined to make up the exhibition at the MAXXI. The seven *Domes* are constructed out of a variety of materials, including many Zegna fabrics and garments that, with their qualities, their extraordinary properties in all kinds of weather and their versatility in use, turn out to be perfectly suited to the idea of protection, shelter and movement, the ethics of the new emergencies that characterize contemporary existence and are the focus of the Ortas' research. For many years Lucy and Jorge Orta have been constructing shelters and clothing, wrappings that transform the individual's relationship with the surrounding environment (we are thinking of works like *Refuge Wear* or *Body Architecture*).

The installation uses the MAXXI and its central role in the contemporary city as a junction on an imaginary map that traces completely new routes through the city. Different physical and mental routes between the ways of life of a present in a continual state of flux and the ancient urban fabric. The city becomes destination and point of departure, traversed and interpreted as a multiethnic and inclusive place of welcome, where the trajectories of the aesthetic and ethical values overlap. However, the significance of the project is given a fundamental twist by the performance that sees seven spirits/sentinels make their way across the city to arrive at the museum and guard the Domes.

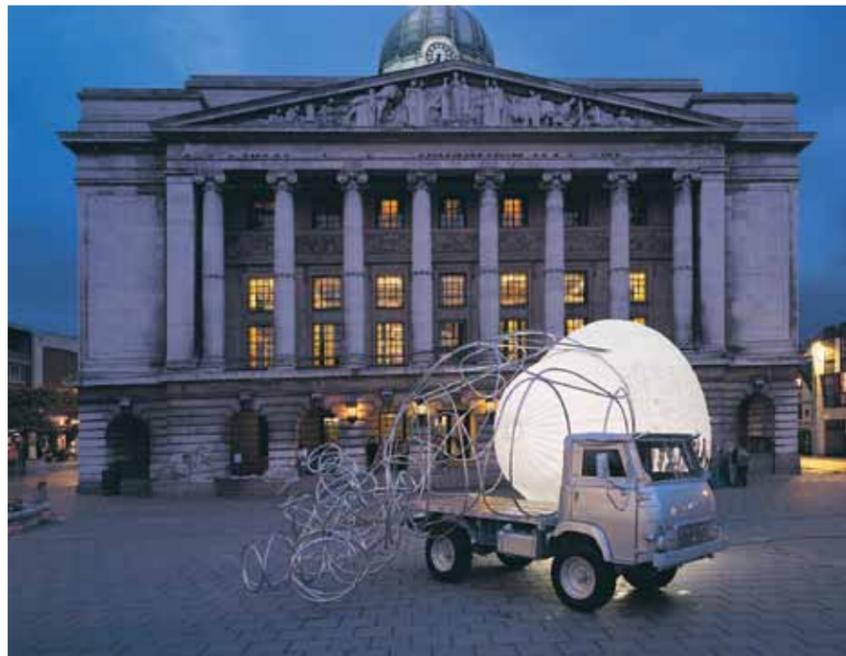
The representations of human figures and their personal traits have been an ongoing preoccupation since we began working on the *Life Guard* series in 2000. *Life Guards* are imagined characters clothed in poetic outfits as a response to some of the extreme conditions the earth is currently witnessing: the water and the oxygen supplier, the comforter, the Amazonia lifeline, etc. In 2010 we were commissioned to create a series of permanent public sculptures for the city of Marseille to coincide with its selection as European Cultural Capital for 2013. We conducted historical research into the feminine characters that have played a critical role in the foundation of the city and the Huveanne, a hidden river that flows from a source in the Provence mountains to the ancient port of Massilia. The findings developed into the *Spirits of the Huveanne River*, a series of five life-sculptures that will be installed along the riverbanks, creating a journey of discovery spanning thirty kilometers and inciting visitors along the way to enjoy the stories and majesty of the river. *Fabulae Romanae* is an extension of this reflection, a new body of work that we have named Spirits. The Spirits derive from research conducted into the history, mythology and storytelling of specific localities, to create sculpture in the form of 'clothed figures' that are a contemporary interpretation of their site-specific context. These figures draw from archaeological and historical research conducted in the city of Rome and further observations on the cultural and social map of the city indebted to the commission by Ermenegildo Zegna.





M.I.U. VII - Nomad Hotel, 2003

Dwelling X, 2004



OrtaWater - Bottle Rack, 2011

OrtaWater - Antarctica F.I.U., 2005-2008



The *Domes* remain but are a distant presence. In the room of the museum only two, Esquilino and Celio are left as shelter, memory, simulacrum. The *Spirits* have become protagonists. Sorrowful observers of the Eternal City and cast of a series of characters. The Observer, for example, who is on the cover of this book, is *oraculum*, reporter, speaker, listener, gazer, retrospective, foresighted. Or the *Traveler*, who is wanderer, migrant, farewell border, hoarder, gatherer, vagrant.

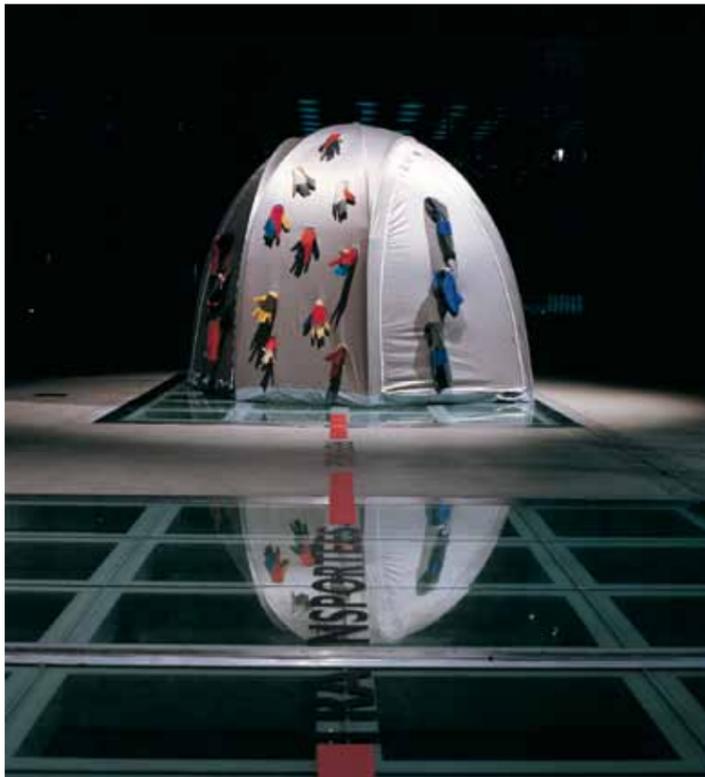
First they were figures drawn by the artists in pigment ink, and then were turned into precious watercolors that tell of a swarming of personalities in their imagination. Next shape and substance were given to their clothes in a variety of materials, to create a sense of being on stage for these characters who we see making their way through the city, observing it. Transformed and disfigured by the signs that define them in their role. A role that is specified, but at the same time amplified and made evocative in the beautiful verses of Mario Petrucci, tale of a humanity in transit obliged to move along with everything that it possesses and to declare itself.

As members of a community, we have been effected by various problems that our society is facing: loneliness, homelessness, forced migration, famine, water scarcity and climate change. And as artists, we develop poetic patterns in an attempt to address these issues. Like Joseph Beuys, we support the idea that art can act as a catalyst for social change. Together, we believe that the creative potential of every individual no longer needs to be proven; rather it needs to be fully recognized and converted into initiatives that will engage a wider range of community members, whether they are street sellers, passersby, scientists, museum curators or visitors. We set up collaborative initiatives in the form of events, performances, workshops, exhibitions and installations. These multiple formats are needed to strengthen the process of catalysis, and the poetic responses resulting from these initiatives are attempts to overcome adversity. We create strategies for long-term projects we call Acts that evolve over a minimum of ten years research. Thanks to this approach, we can better understand the challenges and can offer potential solutions to resolve the complex issues raised by the ecological, political, humanitarian and economic problems of food production, water consumption or organ donation.



Refuge Wear - Habitent, 1992-1993

Modular Architecture - Igloo, 1996



Nexus Architecture x 50 Intervention Köln, 2001



70 x 7 The Meal act XXI
Neude Square Utrecht, 2005



70 x 7 The Meal act XXIX
La Venaria Reale Torino, 2008



70 x 7 The Meal act XVI
Bolzano, 2002



70 x 7 The Meal act XXIV
Fundació Joan Miró, 2006-2011



70 x 7 The Meal act X
Napa Valley, 2001



70 x 7 The Meal act XXVIII,
Villa Ephrussi de Rothschild, 2008



70 x 7 The Meal act XIII
Colchester, 2001



70 x 7 The Meal act V-VII
Mexico City, 2001

70 x 7 The Meal act L, Tate Modern, City London, 2006-ongoing



OrtaWater - Purification station, 2005

Amazonia Collection: Aepyornis, Gallimimus, Allosaurus, Pelaeomastodon, 2009-2010



Thus the geography of the places of people of feelings and utopias becomes a vast emotional map that contrasts with the objective one. Thinking it over, in this project everyone has decided to set out on a journey. Toward other people, toward other places to give rise to new representations. Rome is the place of a convergence aimed at artistic production. The entrepreneur, or the luxury-brand patron, has for once broken its habit of establishing a relationship with art in a place of its own (a relationship that can take the form of the acquisition, the exhibition, the project or the installation) and transferred it somewhere else. Not a fortuitous place and not an inactive place, a mere venue, but one oriented toward artistic production, i.e. to creation, and for this reason extraordinarily stimulating. On the map of the great journeys, those over long distances, that paved the way for *Fabulae Romanae*, one of the hubs, in this case too not a passive material anchorage but a catalyzing entity, has been, the MAXXI in Rome, the national museum of the arts of the current century. As I have already pointed out, the MAXXI was also the hub of the other map, the one on a much larger scale that, within the bounds of the place-city identified by the convergence of the routes of the first one, has guided and recorded the movements of the *Spirits*. Along the routes of this second map, walking has a much more literal value, rather than the metaphorical one it had in the first. Walking has meant, for the figures conceived by Lucy and Jorge

Orta, crossing the city and walking has assumed a cognitive function. From this point of view, the performance of the two artists has renewed a very rich history stretching back at least to the *flânerie* of the 19th century and passing through, among the many experiences of a practice of getting to know the places of the city and of the self in the city, the excursions of the dadaists, the walks of the surrealists and the *derive* of the situationists, with their drawing up of psychogeographic guides and maps. One of the most interesting recent developments in this history has in fact taken place in Rome, around the Stalker/Osservatorio Nomade group and its experiments with “transurbance” (carried out in numerous other cities too) and its theoretic and historiographic focus on walking as an ethical and aesthetic practice. In their relationship with the city and its parts, in their ways of identifying and traversing it, in their conquest of the shelter, in their definition of the nature and roles of the walking figures, in short precisely in the ethics and aesthetics of traversal, Stalker and the Ortas are probably not for the most part comparable. Recalling the experience of Stalker does however allow us to stress the way in which Lucy and Jorge Orta’s project, generated in part by Rome, enriches the imagination of the city, or a sort of implicit poetics of it. And makes it possible to observe how the change of location decided by Zegna has produced even more varied and abundant fruit than was expected or imagined.



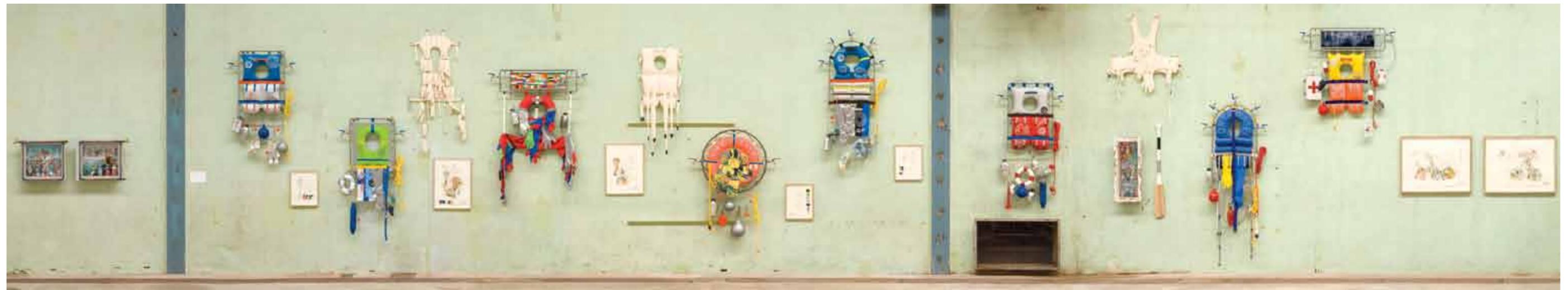
Antarctic Village - No Borders, Ephemeral installation of Antarctic Village, North, South East and West villages across the Antarctic Peninsula, 2007

MARIA LUISA FRISA is a critic and independent curator. She holds the Gaetano Marzotto chair and is director of the degree course in Fashion Design at the IUAV University in Venice. She was the first in Italy to work on contemporary visual culture, conveying its full complexity in many exhibitions at the Stazione

Leopolda, Palazzo Pitti and Palazzo Strozzi in Florence; at the PS1 in New York, at the Rotonda della besana, Triennale and Permanente in Milan. For her, books are fundamental in bringing the project of an exhibition into focus. Among others, she has published *Total Living* (with Mario Lupano and Stefano Tonchi, Charta,

2002), *Raf Simons Redux* (Charta, 2005), *Walter Albini and his Time. All power to the imagination* (with Stefano Tonchi, Marsilio, 2010), *Italian Fashion Now* (Marsilio, 2010), *Lei e le altre. Moda e stili nelle riviste RCS dal 1930 a oggi* (Marsilio, 2011), *Diana Vreeland After Diana Vreeland* (Marsilio, 2012).

Survival Kit, Life Line, 2007-2008





Antarctic Village, Métisse Flag, 2007



Clouds / Nuages, Versailles, 2011