



Lucy + Jorge Orta's artistic practice has focussed on social and ecological issues for nearly thirty years. Their diverse art projects, ranging from drawing, sculpture and video to complex installations, social sculptures and fashion design, have been shown in numerous museum exhibitions.

Since 2007 the artists have worked on the long-term project Antarctica that negotiates the question of nationality and peaceful coexistence. The Antarctic continent has remained free of any nation's rule: under the Antarctic Treaty, which includes signatures from fifty-three nations, Antarctic territory is a demilitarised, nuclear-free, neutral zone. This treaty will be newly negotiated in 2048, which might endanger the region. The Orta's write in a statement: 'Antarctica's immaculate ice landscape has become a powerful symbol of global warming. Geographic transformations and displacement of communities induced by climate change, especially along coastal zones or in desert regions are redefining our local and global borders. Climate change crosses all borders and is affecting every region in the world, without distinction. Faced with this global phenomenon our reaction should also be united, without borders. Antarctica World Passport proposes a discursive platform around the concept of No Borders.'

For their Frieze Project, Lucy + Jorge Orta will present a new iteration of their Antarctica World Passport Delivery Bureau which will invite the visitors to join the community and become passport holders.

Raphael Gygax: Your artistic practice follows in the tradition of art that has a strong social function, which tries to change predominant value systems. How did that the 'social arts movement' change over the course of the decades? Can you observe any significant change from the beginning of your career, almost thirty years ago, until today?

Lucy + Jorge Orta: The early years of our careers were far from easy and for different reasons. Jorge Orta: I lived in Rosario, Argentina, between 1972–84 under the pressures of public silence that was imposed by the oppressive dictatorial regime. The economic instability made it impossible to earn a living from art and there was no institutional or gallery support. Furthermore, there was a general social contempt and devaluation of the profession of an artist, and my activities were too far removed from traditional aesthetic preoccupations of that period. To counteract this, I worked collectively and engaged in unofficial modes of organisation. Artworks were given away for free – for example, using the phonebook as mediator for structuring chance encounters and creating communication pedagogies. We selected entries by chance and played a 'concierto por teléfono' (phone concert), or sent mini-exhibitions to peoples' homes. The relationships artists formed and wove together in this kind of process prefigured the work that is done on the Internet today.

Coming to Paris in the 1980s was a complete shock, which took me several years to overcome. In Argentina, there was no economic goal to our work. We wanted to provoke and stimulate a collective voice and act for the transformation of society through artistic channels. We all had other jobs to support our art and often deprived ourselves of family lives. When I arrived in Paris, I encountered a commercial art world with no social goal or interest. FIAC, the art fair, was the parameter of professional achievement. I was enrolled as a doctoral student at the Sorbonne and attempted to reproduce some of those actions and performances from Argentina. No one wanted to collaborate with me. My colleagues were interested solely in their work as individual artists and were obsessed with sales. But then the Gulf War broke out

in 1990, the stock market crashed, and the wave of impact on the world economy led to a terrible recession. The art system disintegrated, imploded, and finally there was a reason to platform the issues I had left in Argentina. The Kurdish refugee exodus, street protests, the visibility of homelessness brought the possibility of engaging directly with new audiences. Lucy Orta: The economic situation Jorge described also provoked a general sense of fatalism, that there was nothing worth fighting for. When I met him in 1991, he was working collectively and many of his collaborators were 'non-artists'. Their attitude was different, optimistic and constructive and there was a sense of community and shared ideology that was more fraternal than the mainstream egocentric contemporary art world or the world of fashion, where I was operating. I began shifting my practice from commercial fashion to an experimental approach to clothing, exploring its social and communicative factors (like in *Refuge Wear*), organizing workshops with young homeless people and staging public interventions to draw attention to their distressing situations.

My first exhibitions were criticised in Paris, I heard colleagues say, 'Art should not make a social critique.' Maybe those that criticised wanted to avoid discussing the problem all together, and suddenly a tent on a plinth deranged because it was too confrontational. Much of our work throughout the early 1990s was conducted outside of the gallery and museum system, it was process-based and co-created. There were very few curators or museums who were willing to test new modes of representation, but we continued to push the boundaries and challenge the role of the institution by conducting workshops with marginalised communities within the gallery space, and taking curators with us into the communities involved in our projects (in venues like the Secession in Vienna, MCA Sydney, the 2nd Johannesburg Biennale, and so on). With the rise of new curatorial programmes and the development of public engagement and educational departments in museums, there has been a huge shift in social practice and a better understanding of what it is and how it can be presented (mediated). Now there is a plethora of artists working socially within both the institutional and community



sectors, and thankfully a more critical support structure to mediate these kinds of practices.

RG: In the summer months you work outside of Paris in Les Moulins. You use an old factory where you work with your team Studio Orta. Could you tell me about this special place?

L+JO: Les Moulins is a vision Jorge had as a boy and fate has given us a wonderful opportunity to finally create a powerful space dedicated to contemporary creation. In 1999, we began looking for a larger studio outside of Paris and we discovered the Grand Morin valley in the Brie region, just thirty miles east of Paris. As well as its natural ecological beauty and its famous cheese, it has a fascinating industrial heritage as the birthplace of the French

paper industry, where as many as fifty paper mills once populated the valley. We came across La Laiterie, one of the first mechanical dairy factories in the region, dating from the eighteenth century. As well as relocating our production studios from Paris, we initiated a residency programme, inviting artists and students to create work in resonance with the ecological and social context. By chance, our project took on a new dimension in 2007 when, a few miles downriver, we acquired an abandoned pulp mill, Moulin de Boissy, which we restored into a complex of art studios and exhibition spaces covering 8,000 square metres. We invited the Continua Gallery to stage exhibitions and develop an international programme of contemporary art. In 2009, we added a third location along the valley, the Moulin Sainte-Marie, a paper mill occupying 20,000 square metres composed

Lucy + Jorge Orta, *Antarctic Village - No Borders*, 2007, Ephemeral installation of Antarctic Village, North, South East and West villages across the Antarctic Peninsula from March to April 2007, Various dimensions
Courtesy of Lucy + Jorge Orta. Photograph Thierry Bal

of historical and modern buildings, in a forty-acre landscaped park on the banks of the river. In 2011, the Moulin de la Vacherie completed the portfolio of heritage buildings that now form the complex we named Les Moulins, which meanders five miles along the picturesque Grand Morin river.

With Les Moulins, our objective is to create a living project, a community based on complicity, exchange of ideas and shared creation. We are keen to offer young artists the opportunity to live and work in inspiring surroundings, to share the adventure of art and confront, on a daily basis, all the challenges that allow them to devote their life to contemporary creation. Artists in residence, collaborative projects, on-site commissioned works, production workshops and partnerships with craftsmen, galleries and public events, a cafeteria and restaurant, a library and bookshops are slowly emerging from the vestiges of the former factories. We have planted hundreds of trees to landscape the grounds for the project to take root and mature beyond our lifetimes. Les Moulins may be our most ambitious collective work, an open workshop and a living sculpture, true symbols of the fusion of art and life.

RG: Since 2008, you have been working on the Antarctica project, which has had many different elements and iterations since then. For Frieze Projects, you are working on a mobile passport office which will give the audience the chance to become citizens of Antarctica. How did this project start? Could you tell me more about the beginning of it?

L+JO: In 1995, Jorge was invited to represent Argentina at the 46th Venice Biennale. As Argentina no longer had a pavilion, he created two projects: *Light Messenger*: networks of dust, a series of ephemeral light projections along the Grand Canal, and *Antarctic 2000*: *territorio sin fronteras*, a written project statement published in his post-Biennale exhibition catalogue (*Transparence: La face cachée de la lumière*, Éditions Jean-Michel Place, 1996). The project included an amendment to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 13.3), a flag and a passport for a new community, taking its inspiration from the

Antarctic Treaty which was signed as a founding utopian endeavour to promote peace, international cooperation and the exchange of scientific research between nations.

Our work together had been exploring how we could awaken a deeper consciousness to situations that are humanly tragic, the mass migrations resulting from the first Gulf War, the rise of young homeless people in our capitals, the Balkan wars, the Rwandan genocide, the material and spiritual poverty that were more and more prevalent. With *Antarctica 2000* we imagined the twenty-first century as a century of change, of hope, and Antarctica's immaculate ice landscape was our metaphor, a filter for the kaleidoscope that makes up our nations and identities, concentrating all the colours into the sum of light and the purity of a hope. We imagined that peoples could come together on a united front to combat acts of barbarity and persecution, that those seeking asylum, leaving their homes for reasons beyond their control, could move freely to safer havens – Antarctica was the symbol of a welcoming land. Today, in 2017, what seemed possible is slipping between our fingers with the rise of terrorism, nationalist tendencies and the devastating effects of climate change that are yet to even manifest themselves. The *Antarctica World Passport* project has given us a glimmer of that original hope.

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Lucy Orta (*1966, United Kingdom) +
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Antarctica World Passport Delivery Bureau, FIAC Hors les murs Paris, 2012, Lucy + Jorge Orta, Bureau construction in various materials, chairs, red cross crates, various objects, ed. 30,000
Antarctica World Passports, passport stamps, ink pads, 200 x 200 x 200cm variable
 Courtesy of Lucy + Jorge Orta. Photograph Bertrand Huet