



ATTENBOROUGH  
ARTS CENTRE

GUIDE

# Lucy + Jorge Orta

30 January – 24 April 2016



# Lucy + Jorge Orta

Lucy Orta was born in Sutton Coldfield, UK in 1966 and Jorge Orta was born in Rosario, Argentina in 1953. They founded Studio Orta in Paris in 1991.

Lucy + Jorge Orta's collaborative practice draws upon ecological and social sustainability issues, and their social aspects, to create artworks employing diverse media, including drawing, sculpture, installation, couture, painting, printmaking, photography, video and light, as well as staged ephemeral interventions and performances.

Much of their work shares the defining feature of addressing global issues affecting the lives of people around the world. This exhibition features objects that touch on issues around migration, access to clean water, and ecological change. Other topics that recur throughout their portfolio include hunger, homelessness and alienation.

## How they work

A distinctive feature of Lucy + Jorge Orta's artistic practice is the broader framework in which their art is produced. They develop long-term projects unfolding over a minimum of ten years, which involve extensive research and emerge as a series of 'acts'. These are often collaborative and involve professionals and academics as well as members of the public.



"By blurring the boundaries between an art project and a real-life situation, our goal is to incorporate people as active participants giving them a sense of belonging."

- Lucy + Jorge Orta

## Projects

The Ortas' practice takes the shape of research projects tied to the issues they are involved in. This exhibition features objects from **Antarctica** (international human rights and freer international migration), **Amazonia** (the value of the natural environment to our daily lives and to our survival) and **OrtaWater** (water scarcity and the problems arising from pollution and corporate control).

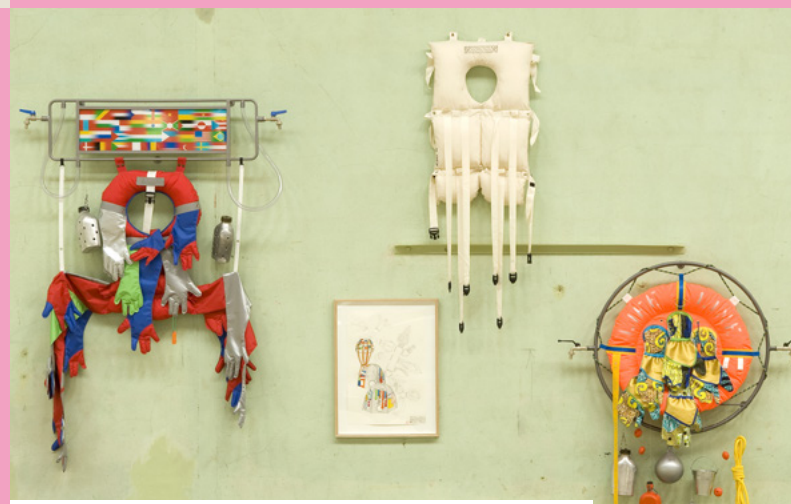


IMAGE: Lucy + Jorge Orta. Life Line installation at Galleria Continua, 2008. Photograph by Bertrand Huet.  
TOP OF PAGE: Lucy + Jorge Orta, Perpetual Amazonia, 2010.



IMAGE: Lucy Orta, Refuge Wear Intervention London East End, 1998. Photograph by John Akehurst.

## Lucy Orta

Lucy Orta's career started with an honours degree in fashion-knitwear design from Nottingham Trent University in 1989 after which she worked as a fashion designer for various brands in Paris for a number of years. In 1991, Lucy began developing her practice as a visual artist. While her artistic work does not include fashion as such, it often makes reference to clothing, and her understanding of design has informed her work exploring more conceptual approaches to design and the socio-communicative role of clothing.

Lucy's practice spans across sculpture, public intervention, video and photography, exploring issues such as the boundaries between the body and architecture and the factors they have in common such as their roles in identity and communication.

"We're concerned with how far the artwork can function, activate and be activist, and move important issues forward."

- Lucy Orta

## Jorge Orta

Jorge Orta studied fine arts and architecture in his home town of Rosario, Argentina. This was during a turbulent time in Argentinian society, culminating in the government being overthrown in 1976. With social injustice and unrest growing, the social role of art became increasingly important to Jorge's practice.

Under the junta regime 1976 - 1983 public and private meetings were illegal, and Jorge worked as part of an underground network who developed alternative ways of disseminating their art. Jorge tells of how the group would randomly select 500 names from the phone book and contact them one by one, through messengers or coded letters. One piece was disseminated through phoning people up and performing 'phone concerts'.

Jorge has been a pioneer in video art, mail art and large-scale public performances. In 1984 he left Argentina, with a scholarship which brought him to Paris where he has been based ever since.

"Today it is obvious that the political system is failing and requires these types of initiatives to incite action and positive change."

- Jorge Orta



# Migration

The movement of individuals between different territories with the intention to settle permanently is a consistent feature of life, although the number of people moving at any one time varies, with rapid changes in environments typically resulting in increased relocation. There are numerous reasons someone might migrate – from relocating for a new job to urgent issues like famine, war and persecution.

Much of the current ‘migration crisis’ is caused by events like the civil war in Syria, and the political situations in places like Afghanistan and Eritrea. These may be social conflicts at their hearts, but another factor whose effects are often more subtle and long term is that of our climate. Events such as droughts and floods are



not an uncommon cause of mass migration. For instance, it was estimated that 42 million people in Asia and the Pacific in 2010 and 2011 left their homes due to floods, storms, heat waves and cold waves. With climate change the situation is expected to get worse, with a common estimation that 150 - 200 million people will be climate refugees by 2050.

The causes of migration are, however, complex. For instance, how we adapt to climate changes and deal with crises may change the situation for affected people. There are also indications that the social tension that arises from increased competition over the remaining scarce resources, as well as from the migration itself, could be one contributing factor in conflicts such as the one in Syria.

## Antarctica

A central idea of the Ortas’ Antarctica project is its setting in Antarctica as a place not belonging to any nation and without permanent inhabitants. The ‘Antarctic Treaty’ of 1959 states that it is to be a place free from weapons, nuclear activity, and military presence, and that research conducted there should be collaborative. Containing 80% of earth’s fresh water, it moreover becomes a symbol of natural resources. The project has included the sub-projects **Antarctic Village - No Borders**, **Antarctica World Passport** and **Heads or Tails, Tails or Heads**.

## Antarctic Village - No Borders

For Antarctic Village, the Ortas made 50 ‘Dome Dwellings’ from flags of the 53 nations who have now signed the Antarctic Treaty. The dwellings also have garments and gloves waving in the wind, and silkscreen prints.



IMAGE: Lucy + Jorge Orta. Antarctica Flag, 2007 - 2009.  
Photograph by Thierry Bal.

“No individual should have inferior status to that of capital, trade, telecommunication and pollution, all of which have no boundaries.”

– The Ortas’ suggested addition to the Declaration of Human Rights

What would make  
you leave your  
country?

## Heads or Tails, Tails or Heads

The Ortas’ Antarctica project included ‘Heads or Tails, Tails or Heads’: a series of football matches organised by the Ortas where researchers from the Marimbo Antarctic Base. The players wore ‘team shirts’ where the front was made from one country’s jersey, and the back from another.



IMAGE: Lucy + Jorge Orta. Antarctic Village - No Borders, 2007.  
Photograph by Thierry Bal.  
TOP LEFT: Lucy + Jorge Orta, Life Line - Survival Kit, 2008. Photograph by Thierry Bal.

“Everyone has the right to move freely and circulate beyond the state borders to a territory of their choice.”

– Silkscreen print from  
Antarctic Village - No Borders

## Antarctica World Passport

In this ongoing participatory artwork the Ortas issue passports for the new ‘nation of humanity’. The passport can be issued to anyone wishing to become a citizen, and grants them free passage to go anywhere in the world.



Have your say:  
#orta





IMAGE: Lucy + Jorge Orta, Symphony for Absent Wildlife, 2014. Photograph by Paul Bevan. Courtesy of the artists and Fondazione Zegna.



# Biodiversity

‘Biodiversity’ is the term used to refer to the number and variety of species that exist. Different species depend on one another in complex ways, and are linked together in ecosystems that may either be small (like a single tree trunk or pond) or large (an ocean or a forest). Biodiversity is crucial to the survival of human species as it is the source of our food, fuel, shelter and other resources.

The value of biodiversity in current society is predominantly measured in economic terms. This means placing a monetary or tradable value on the ‘services’ the environment provides, such as clean air, fresh water, fertile soil, provision of nursery grounds, drought and flood prevention, resistance to erosion and so on.

Much of the Ortas’ work addresses issues around biodiversity, species loss and the access to natural resources such as food and pure water. Their **Amazonia** project brings this discussion to the ‘biodiversity hotspot’ of the Amazon rainforest and **Symphony for Absent Wildlife** draws on the loss of biodiversity on the Albertan plains in Canada, but the Ortas emphasise that the place is not important: the concept applies to species loss world-wide.

## The Holocene Extinction

Since the emergence of humans as a global species there has been an ongoing reduction in the biodiversity of the earth, caused primarily by our effect on the environment, such as the destruction of habitats.

The extinction of species is part of evolution and it has been estimated that over 99% of all species that ever existed are now extinct. In the 3.5 billion years there has been life on earth, there has been five mass extinctions. With current rates of 100 to 1000 times higher than the average rate, this decline is becoming known as the sixth mass extinction, caused by humans – called the Holocene Extinction.

How can we use  
art to think about  
the environment?

Leave a  
comment

Write on a bookmark from the reading  
area and leave in one of the books!

## Amazonia

In 2009, the Ortas visited the Amazon rainforest of Peru. They recorded their visit through photography, video and sound. The resulting work draws attention to the diversity of life, the fragile balance between the many thousands of species that depend on the Amazon and the cycles of life and death.

As part of the project, the Ortas also assisted scientists at the Manú Biosphere Reserve in collecting plants and recording data. The data recorded which species were found, and how climate change and deforestation contribute to the decline of species diversity.

The project featured the ongoing work ‘Perpetual Amazonia’ where the Ortas photograph species of plants from all over the world. Based on these photos, the Ortas have produced numerous large format photographs, drawings, couture works, porcelain and glass sculptures. Each piece is accompanied by a certificate of ‘moral ownership’ to a specific hectare of land in the Manú region of the Amazon.

“The Amazon is a canary in a coal mine for the Earth.”

— Daniel Nepstad, tropical forest ecologist

## Manú Biosphere Reserve

The Manú Biosphere Reserve is a UNESCO World Heritage site. It is home to a huge variety of flora and fauna: more than 402 species of birds, 11 primates and several endangered or vulnerable species such as the blue headed macaw, giant armadillo and black spider monkey.



IMAGE: Lucy + Jorge Orta, Symphony for Absent Wildlife, 2014. Photograph by Paul Bevan. Courtesy of the artists and Fondazione Zegna.

“We are experiencing the greatest wave of extinctions since the disappearance of the dinosaurs. The cause: human activities.”

— Ahmed Djoghlaif, UN Convention  
on Biological Diversity

## Symphony for Absent Wildlife

The work was first created in 2014 as a performance. The audience entered a woodland clearing, composed of tree trunks from local forests. Here they encounter an orchestra of woodland ‘Spirits’, wearing costumes made out of reclaimed Red Cross felt blankets. They perform a concert on wooden bird whistles. The masked figures recall the spirits of the once abundant wildlife across the Albertan plains: bison, moose, wapiti, wolves, grizzly bears, and eagles. There is also species from other places, highlighting the global importance of this issue.



IMAGE: Lucy + Jorge Orta, Symphony for Absent Wildlife, 2014. Photograph by Paul Bevan. Courtesy of the artists and Fondazione Zegna.  
TOP OF PAGE: Lucy + Jorge Orta, Perpetual Amazonia, 2010.



# Water

Water is one of the earth's most valuable natural resources, but is a source of increasing concern. With only 3% of water being fresh-water, and most of this being either in the form of ice or trapped underground, only a fraction of a percent is available to sustain all life on land.

Figures from this year estimate that 663 million people - one in ten people - do not have access to safe water, and the figure is growing. The reasons for this are many, and they are complexly interlinked. While there is widespread agreement that climate change does affect the access to pure freshwater, as in some areas the amount will increase, while in others it will decrease, causing droughts.

But the way we use the water is also crucial. Factors like population growth, industrial

practices and cultural changes in hygiene practices and what we eat have an impact. This means that, as well as countering climate changes, there are many ways in which we can adapt as water availability changes. For instance, irrigation amounts to 90% of global water consumption. It has been estimated that producing one kilo of beef requires an average of 15,415 litres of water, while the same amount of chicken uses less than a third of that. Rice needs 2,497 litres to for a kilo, while potatoes need only 287. This becomes particularly pertinent in places where water is scarce.

Water has been the subject of several of the Orta's projects, most centrally **OrtaWater**, but it is also a concern in the **Antarctica** and **Amazonia** projects.

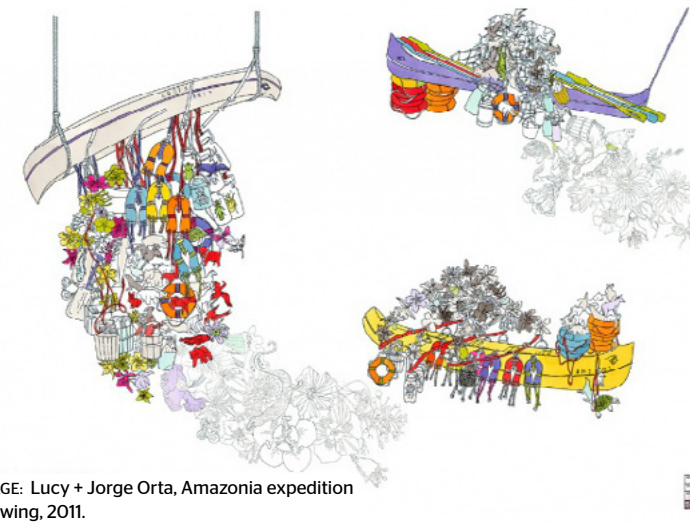


IMAGE: Lucy + Jorge Orta, Amazonia expedition drawing, 2011.

Can art have the power to change the world?

"The defining point in the Ortas' work is that here, metaphor and actuality merge, and subject becomes object. Sculptures about the purification of water in fact purify water... And this is unique."

— Judith Hoos Fox and Ginger Gregg Duggan in 'Subject = Object: Antarctic Village — No Borders'



IMAGE: Lucy + Jorge Orta, OrtaWater - Window on the World, 2005.

"Water is likely to be a growing source of tension and fierce competition between nations, if present trends continue, but it can also be a catalyst for cooperation."

— Kofi Annan

Share a sight



@AttenboroughAC



IMAGE: Lucy + Jorge Orta, OrtaWater - Antarctica Fluvial Intervention Unit, 2005 - 2008. Photograph by Bertrand Huet.  
TOP LEFT: Lucy + Jorge Orta, OrtaWater - Antarctica Fluvial Intervention Unit, 2005 - 2008. Photograph by Bertrand Huet.

## OrtaWater

The OrtaWater project started in a gallery set up almost like a factory during the 2005 Venice Biennale. Water was pumped in from the adjacent canal into a purification system devised in collaboration with engineers. An intricate system of tubes, containers and pumps made the process visible. At the end of the process, the water was bottled and given to visitors as a reference to the privatisation of many of the world's freshwater sources.

The project has continued to produce a series of objects such as the Life Guards featured in this exhibition. These relate to survival, safety, security and the necessity for transportable solutions which can reach the communities in which they are needed.





@AttenboroughAC



/attenborougharts



@AttenboroughAC



Visit us online at:

[www.attenborougharts.com](http://www.attenborougharts.com)



This guide is available as an audio guide from Front of House and in braille on request.



UNIVERSITY OF  
LEICESTER



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**