

Title, Drink Water⁰¹ Lucy ORTA Jorge

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In urban architecture, just as in palaces and gardens, the movement of water created by fountains has always been a symbol of a profusion of wealth. At a time when there is a faucet in every room, at least in Western countries, we no longer see water as a sign of the convergence of civilization and opulence. We fail to remember that the first true democracy is precisely that of water, attained by those nations that are able to give all their citizens, without distinction, safe drinking water. This is what Lucy and Jorge Orta have created for the Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa. They designed operation *Drink Water!* along with a group of young people who attended several workshops. Anyone who understands Italian will immediately realize that the name of the project, which will have a second phase in Northern Europe, is a pun on the name of our century-old foundation, Bevilacqua.

The Ortas see Venice as a city of magnificence and extravagance, where civilization now seems to find expression in a flood of the superfluous and consumption. This is especially true during the celebration of art, the Biennale of contemporary visual arts, which gathers forms and information from all over the planet that are not alien to the world of luxury. With this exhibition, the city also assumes the role of a metaphorical place in which themes linked to survival and to the vital strategies that keep us from sliding into physical, moral and economic decline are voiced and underscored. A showcase *par excellence*, but also a place where the truth is touched on, Venice speaks to us like no other city in the world about the emergency lurking just around the corner: water.

Lucy and Jorge, linked by ties of love and artistic creation, have imagined that one day, in a surreal but not distant future, it may become necessary to desalinate, purify and distribute water from the canals that are customarily a setting for gondolas and accordions in the lagoon city. And that we may have to go back to distributing this water in much the same way as when it was carried in buckets. Today we would need enormous plastic jerry cans, transported by vehicles cobbled together for that purpose, or small bottles would need to be given away in the street. The brand, cult of our time, would no longer be applied to washing powders, clothes or automobiles, but above all to water. *Orta Water* is already flowing.

The exhibition is a symbolic, but not farfetched attempt, to purify the water of the lagoon. It also presents the visitor with strangely shaped vehicles that turn into giant toys that hint at a potential apocalypse. Playfulness and fear, frivolity and social commitment, sweet childishness and critical awareness of the present are the apparent dichotomies that characterize the exhibition and, more generally, the work of the Ortas. They are probably the characteristics that art should have each time it sets out to establish a relationship with the observer and with the events of its time: entertaining to make people think; planning for the future, civilization and survival as soon as these are threatened; and involving the largest possible number of people in the act of creation itself, so that the work does not remain the expression of one individual but becomes instead the voice of many.

Thus the exhibition embodies two ideas that as president of the foundation I consider fundamental: putting on shows made to measure for the institution, for Venice and for its region and making sure that these events make it part of a network linked to museums, schools, and national as well as international bodies. For this reason we would like to express our gratitude to

the artists and to all those who have let themselves get involved in what may appear to be amusement, but is in fact emblematic of the way we treat the world.