

In the studio: Lucy and Jorge Orta, sculptors



Stools of the trade: Lucy and Jorge Orta in their studio complex outside Paris

'Utopias are disappearing behind money and success'

Karen Wright: Friday, 9 August 2013

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Lucy Orta shows me around the group of buildings in the Moulin de Boissy outside of Paris which, when renovated, will form an artistic collective project on an inspirational scale. Composed of old industrial structures, the vision is to create a new utopia. At the moment, it appears like a playground for artists, with scope to carry out performances and build mammoth installations. The project has been established by husband and wife and creative partnership Lucy (born in 1966), a professor at the University of the Arts, London, and Jorge (born in 1953), who see themselves as "catalyzers", operating within an aesthetic but also in the business of transformation.

The Ortas moved here in 2008 from their previous studio in, Bercy, Paris, when their installation work became too large for the studio. Lucy recounts how they discovered two factories along the Grand Morin river: "You find an industrial building in an idyllic city, what is not to believe in." Jorge has established relationships with the architecture and landscape design departments at the University of Villette to recruit assistance in designing the park that will link the buildings.

In a shed a deux chevaux car is being prepared for a performance in which the car will be flattened by a steam roller. Jorge says, "The car represented my epoch, with seven or eight students squashed into it, so many of whom were among 'the disappeared'." It is one of the proposals that he has wanted to make since leaving Argentina, where he was born, in 1988: "There were about 70 in my head and written down, some made but many still to be done."

Jorge had come to Paris with a love of industrial buildings. He had seen too many destroyed in his native land and has a passion to "bring them back to life". The couple currently work in a large industrial shed, formerly a paper mill. There is room to store the ex-military objects that they find on ebay to add to their collection. Nearby are some of their sculptures composed of plastic water bottles transformed into clouds, the bottles still visible encased by plastic, some of which have been shipped off to Yorkshire as part of their current retrospective show at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park.

"Water is the basic need for life," says Lucy, and is central to the ecological/sociological exploration of the Orta's practice. In Drink Water! for the 2005 Venice Biennale, they set up portable water staging posts purifying lagoon water, convincing people to partake of its goodness.

Each of the Orta's 10 assistants are encouraged or, Lucy says, "forced" to continue to make their own work. Jorge believes that "small actions can change the world". Their project is to "create a community of living". He is passionate in his belief. In the end, "utopias are disappearing behind money and success. It is up to us to show youth the possibility of these ideas."

Lucy + Jorge Orta, Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Wakefield (01924 832631) to 3 November