

Title, Antarctica Without Borders**Author, Corinne Sacca Abadi**

South of the South, on the farthest end of the Tierra del Fuego Province, Argentina, South America is the city of Ushuaia. Located on a peninsula that turns into a filigree of archipelagos, the mythical island is permeated by two oceans that plunge into tempests before flowing into the ice of the Antarctic continent. It is here, in a context of excess and of inconceivable beauty, that the founding events of a first international contemporary art biennial foment highly intense personal experiences.

The First End of the World Biennial (1° Bienal del Fin del Mundo) opened in Ushuaia in March 2007; it coincides and has affinities with the International Polar Year, which is celebrated every fifty years and runs through March 2009. During this time, numerous scientists and experts from all over the world focus their attention on the North and South Poles, share research and inform the international community of the results of their studies. The sciences and the arts share the same concerns with regard to the warnings being sounded of ecological emergencies that have special echo in these, extreme, latitudes. *Communication between the Poles*, the revision of *what the ends of the world represent in our imaginations* and *experiencing extremes* are some of the central themes used during the Biennial to nourish reflection. The dramatic consequences of what has been referred to as “global climate change” constitute the greatest ecological emergency that planet Earth has had to face since the advent of humankind. It serves as a striking example of the harm generated by atmospheric and oceanic warming and the partial disintegration of the Larsen Ice Shelf (sectors A and B) in Antarctica. This frozen desert holds 90% of the ice in the world and 70% of the world’s water reserves. The melting of glaciers leads to continental flooding, in addition to the loss of fresh water reserves.

Contemporary Art Takes Us to the Beginnings & Ends of the World

Current forms of creating works have led curators to establish an intensely close relationship with artistic production. For the first biennial, artists have been asked to travel to the southernmost parts of the planet and to revise, from the unusual perspective provided by these extreme horizons, their vision of the world. The project, *Antarctic Village – No Borders*, proposed by the artists Lucy + Jorge Orta, penetrates the crux of the question, “What other worlds are possible?” We hope to formulate new questions, to create new concepts and principles that will revitalize our turmoil-ridden society.

Ethics is the key to this summons, which attempts to link art and politics with poetics and ecology. Contemporary art records the aspects of our global activity that undergo the greatest change to evidence the world’s continual transformations and to express urgent situations and desires.

Antarctica: The Land of All and None

Initiated with Utopía Fundadora the *Antarctic Village – No Borders* project by the artists Lucy + Jorge Orta (respectively from Great Britain and Argentina, who reside in Paris), radiates with a transforming energy that is not lacking in audacity: the ephemeral installation consists of a four villages at the foot of the millennia-old ice covering the sixth continent.

During the Austral summer of 2007, Orta went on an expedition to Antarctica coordinated by the First End of the World Biennial; logistical support was provided by the National Antarctic Directorate in Argentina (Dirección Nacional del Antártico - DNA).

The artist and his team arrived at the Marambio Base aboard a Hercules KC 130. The base is located on Seymour-Marambio Island (64°14'S 56°37'W). They were accompanied by a group of experts who brought with them the knowledge and equipment required to travel and sojourn in the region. Harsh weather permitting, they flew over the different zones in a helicopter to observe the changing geography of the region and to scout for the best locations for the *Antarctic Village – No Borders* project. Within a few days time, the dream started to become reality: approximately fifty domes were unfolded and set up on the frozen surface of the island, a strange mix of mobile sculptures and architectonic habitats.

In *Antarctic Village – No Borders* these pieces are the supporting structure for the hundreds of flags of countries throughout the world, for the clothing of different communities, for the gloves transformed into hands and for the responsible arms connected together, helping each other. A series of graphics and inscriptions are used to reproduce the latest article in Universal Declaration of Human Rights (art. 13:3) and open new paths to be taken.

The sight of this new settlement in Antarctica conjures images of the refugee camps that crop up throughout the world day after day. The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) has registered more than 700 camps; there are an estimated 33 million persons in the world who have been displaced from their homes, these figures do not include migrations. According to estimates there are currently twenty-six countries in a state of conflict, most them are located in Africa and the Middle East.

The Antarctic Treaty signed in 1959 by Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Chile, the United States, France, the United Kingdom, Japan, Norway, New Zealand, South Africa, and the USSR, states that the sixth continent is a common territory, open to all peaceful peoples and to cultural and scientific cooperation. The project the Ortas have proposed is to transform Antarctica symbolically into the Nation of Humanity, "something resembling a promised land that shelters millions of displaced men and women seeking exile from war, climatic disasters, economic strife, religious persecution, political violence, racism, etc." The idea developed by Jorge + Lucy Orta encompasses the creation of a territory where freedom of movement reigns, a village whose inhabitants renew bonds of solidarity, enabling new forms of cohabitation. The village, presented as a refuge for the stateless peoples of the Earth, symbolizes a hope for change that is poignant because of its radical nature in our global society deeply divided by wars and border conflicts.

The product of a transdisciplinary creative process, *Antarctic Village – No Borders* is comprised of a series of actions that include: the installation of textile based architectural works in

Antarctica and Ushuaia that explore new possibilities in nomadic dwellings; the making of a film; photographic records; workshops; and the draft of a new article, art. 13.3, which would rectify the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and would “give all human beings freedom of movement and freedom to cross borders and enter the territories of their choosing.” These new citizens would sign up to protect human dignity and defend the unalienable rights of liberty, justice and peace. The project put forward by Jorge + Lucy Orta provides a new path for hope that leads to a shared land, to an Antarctic city whose inhabitants have freedom of movement using an Antarctic passport that makes them citizens of the world, without distinction, and to a flag that represents all of the flags of the world.

Football and Cohabitation “Heads or Tails vs. Tails or Heads”

On April 2, 1982, Argentina and Great Britain, in the wake of a failed attempt at reclaiming land made by the former, became involved in an absurd war. A member of the military, speaking in the name of few and designated de facto president, embarked on this adventure as part of a strategy to remain in power. The wages of the painful episode was the irreparable loss of human lives and damaged relations between both nations.

Twenty-five years later, for the opening of the First End of the World Biennial Orta organized an performance event entitled *Heads or Tails vs. Tails or Heads*, a football match in which representatives from both countries play a match wearing jerseys bearing the flag of one country on the front and the flag of the other country on the back. This very special football match should bring to the fore the fact that no one is able to distinguish between friend and foe. In fact, the use of the combined Argentina-Britain jerseys aside, the only way of knowing what the real intentions of the players are is through the attitudes of the individual players during the match. This clever idea stages and reveals the complexity of human relations and the mistake of classifying and evaluating people based on random information such as place of birth, cultural differences or similarities. Contingencies and appearances aside, what becomes evident is that there are human values that we can only discover if we rid ourselves of conventions and distrust.

The works undertaken by Jorge + Lucy Orta demonstrate the possibilities for action that contemporary art has to offer, and how synergy can be created from a participation ethic that multiplies the meanings and influence of contemporary art in community life, in culture and in education.

Corinne Sacca Abadi

1° Bienal del Fin del Mundo

Curator representing Argentina and Special Projects