

**F**ood and the Public Sphere is the culmination of twenty years dedication to the power of art and food that presents the socially engaging public works, sculpture and objects of internationally acclaimed artists Lucy + Jorge Orta, examining their practice within the context of major concerns of the twenty-first century: environmental change, species loss, food scarcity, food waste and sustainable development.

Communities all over the world—working from the scale of global food networks down to local methods for farming and cooking—are seeking ways to make the food system better serve the needs of people and the planet. After decades of successful food production in massive quantities, producing cheap goods, policymakers and citizens are recognizing the environmental and social cost of this process. The over-industrialisation of food has forced small farms to surrender to agribusiness, reduced biodiversity in favour of monoculture crops, and assaulted communities with debilitating chronic diseases. Lucy + Jorge Orta's work in this volume brings these pressing issues home, drawing people into a reflective experience of art that combines the aesthetics of eating, drinking, cooking, and dining.



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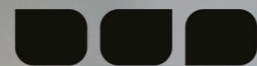
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# FOOD

## EXTRACT OF A CONVERSATION BETWEEN HOU HANRU AND LUCY + JORGE ORTA

HHR

Your food projects have evolved over the years in what you have termed “Acts”, beginning with *All in One Basket*, 1997, can you give a few examples of the following Acts and how these have led to the most recent series *70x7 The Meal*, 2000?

L+JO

Each Act is part of an evolving process that becomes participative, more complex and embedded with the possibilities and collaborations that each locale allows. For the first Act of our food projects *All in One Basket*, we hosted an open-

air buffet in one of the busiest central shopping districts of Paris, Les Halles, made with discarded fruit salvaged from Parisian fruit and vegetable markets. A former farmers’ market, Les Halles was delocalised in the 1970s, and its site was handed over to real-estate developers, who built a horrific underground shopping mall. *All in One Basket* points a finger at local consumer waste and the inequalities of global food distribution. Using the fruit and vegetable market as an example of a growing urban phenomenon, we were able to generate debate around the broader subject. With more than 300 kilograms of ripe produce that we had gleaned from the local markets, our professional partner, the famous Parisian pâtissier Stohrer, arduously cooked a variety of sweet dishes.

Samples of jams, jellies, and puddings were available to taste for free, and visitors could buy souvenir editions of our bottled and labelled preserves. During the course of the day, thousands of people stopped by, including members of the art community, shoppers, children, homeless people, students, and immigrants. In the adjacent gallery of Saint-Eustache, we set up an installation of artefacts constructed from wooden fruit crates, and displayed our homemade preserves with photographs of mounds of discarded market produce. The installation also included *Storage Units*, a series of trolleys with baskets symbolising the collecting of the produce, which were outfitted with a sound system playing the audio recordings of interviews with the community of gleaners at the weekly markets.

Two years later, we were able to stage the second Act, *HortiRecycling Enterprise*, 1999, in Vienna thanks to the historical context of the construction of the Wiener Secession, founded in 1897 by artists Gustav Klimt, Koloman Moser, Josef Hoffmann, Joseph Maria Olbrich, Max Kurzweil, Otto Wagner and others. These artists objected to the conservatism of the Vienna Künstlerhaus, with its orientation toward historicism, and were concerned with exploring the possibilities of art outside the confines of academic tradition. The Secession Building could be considered the icon of the movement, and above its entrance is the phrase, “To every age its art and to art its freedom”. We took advantage of this history, the proximity of the fruit and vegetable Naschmarkt opposite the gallery, and the energetic Secession curators who carry on the legacy of the Viennese manifesto.

Instead of discarding their overripe fruit and vegetables, the market vendors were given ‘Collect Units’—brightly coloured, silkscreen-printed bags—to fill with rejected produce throughout the day. We collected the bags of fruit and vegetables using the ‘Processing Units’—mobile kitchens with integrated shopping carts, sinks, hotplates and freezers. The ripe produce was cleaned, chopped and cooked by the Viennese chef Han Staud on location in the market. We distributed the fresh delicacies to encourage the public to take up these kinds of sustainable initiatives.

In the Wiener Secession’s first-floor gallery, we set up a second working kitchen complete with a ‘Collect Unit Pulley’, a wooden winch reminiscent of the Medieval pulley systems used to haul groceries in baskets to the upper floors of tall buildings. Using this device, market produce was delivered to the gallery, cleaned, cooked and then bottled or frozen in dainty portions ready for distribution.

This pilot action took place in both the market and the gallery, illustrating the multiple possibilities of a recycling enterprise and at the same time bringing together an art institution, the street and the different communities involved.

**HHR** In many of your works, in particular the food projects, your role is both artist and project manager: you mobilise the institution (taking it beyond its established limit and out of the art context), involve the community, communicate the project and encourage wide participation. To what extent do you consider your work to be an artistic project versus a sociological one? How do you define your work?

**L+JO** For us they are one of the same, both creative and sociological, linked and inseparable. For the last decade we have been looking for formats for our work that enable interaction and foster responses to the real challenges and needs of local communities. After *All in One Basket* and *HortiRecycling Enterprise*, *70x7 The Meal* was the natural next step in our research—from food collecting and recycling, to the fabrication of culinary objects and artefacts, to the actual ritual of dining.

For the *70x7 The Meal* series, we invite a small number of guests to become part of an endless banquet, and in turn ask them to invite other people, so the act of creating the event happens through the chain of human interaction. We are merely triggers in that process, or enablers. The artwork becomes almost invisible, taking the form of our most cherished rituals; it mimics the essential human needs to eat and to unite. For each meal we try and create a set of bespoke artefacts, such as a hand-printed tablecloth or Royal Limoges porcelain plates, designed in our studio. These become the binding elements of each meal, leaving a trace that something unusual has brought these guests together. However, we ensure that these clues remain discreet, so as not to incite a ‘fear of art’; instead, they act as catalysts, stimulating encounters to blossom naturally. By setting the meals in an urban space, we return to the need for spontaneous general assemblies around specific subjects, bringing people together to converse, reconcile and reflect, with the potentiality of an artwork that is active in the heart of a community. 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 and empowering communities with a sense of civic responsibility. Each meal changes the world, if only in a small way.

**HHR** This type of project reminds us of past experimental art, in particular Joseph Beuys’ concept of ‘social sculpture’. His work is based on a personal belief that creativity is essential and part of human nature. Beuys argued that everyone was an artist. However, his way of communicating this message resembled a priest preaching the truth to people. Your practice is perhaps more open and participatory. How do you initiate this process artistically, and to what extent can you still call this artistic or creative?

**L+JO** We pursue the idea of art as a catalyst for social change, building on Beuys’ legacy. We believe that the individual creative potential of people no longer needs to be proved—it needs to be fully recognised and channelled into initiatives that will mobilise an even wider range of members of the community, be they street vendors, passers-by, museum curators or visitors. These individual initiatives—in the form of art actions, performances or whatever—are the ingredients to catalyse social change. Throughout our practice we have been moved by various problems our society is facing—solitude, hunger, homelessness, water shortages, climate change, migration—and we create poetic schemas to attempt to tackle these problems. By developing long-term research strategies over a minimum ten-year life span that unfold in a series of Acts, we can actually begin to understand and find solutions for ecological, political, and humanitarian issues. By activating debate and discussion, we aim to change people’s attitudes or habits, and thus get closer to the seeds of real change, which can even lead to the modification of legislation. It’s not the work of art, but a process—through a chain reaction of events with the participation of people—that can actually make this happen.

Once again, we’re exploring the extreme limits of art, the periphery, even if it means leaving the artistic sphere altogether, without worrying about whether our activities fit into actual artistic categories or criteria or not. Our aim is to explore and open up new ways of moving forward.

**HHR** How do you shift your *70x7 The Meal* practice to specific contexts and venues?

**HOU HANRU  
LUCY + JORGE ORTA**

**L+JO** Sometimes the meal settings are small, so we can focus on specific issues in intimate settings. The larger events for thousands of people allow for greater public participation. The venues range from galleries to restaurants, historic buildings, streets and open-air parks. For example, *Act XXIII* took place in the Barbican in London, on the occasion of my survey exhibition in The Curve gallery in 2005. The Curve was the ideal setting for piloting *Lunch with Lucy*, a live panel discussion and gastronomic encounter for seven food specialists, developed with the education team at the Barbican and broadcast via media channels such as YouTube. The panellists were Harriet Lamb, Director of the Fairtrade Foundation, which develops products, licenses brands and raises awareness of issues surrounding fair trade; Tim Lang, professor of food policy at City University London who advises food and public health sectors both nationally and internationally; Lucy Stockton-Smith, an artist who designs and builds geodesic ecology domes in schools to promote an educational approach to biodiversity; Wendy Fogarty, the International Councillor for Slow Food UK, an association that promotes food and wine culture and also defends food and agricultural biodiversity worldwide; Dr Peter Barham, reader in physics at Bristol University, the author of *The Science of Cooking*, and a collaborator with chef Heston Blumenthal in the development of molecular gastronomy; and Allegra McEvedy, the chef and founder of Leon, the United Kingdom’s first fast-food chain to feature fresh, organic and seasonal produce. The seventh guest and chair of the session was John Slyce, a London-based art critic and historian. *Lunch with Lucy* was designed to function as a platform to raise awareness, provoke insight, question practices in the food industry, and bridge the gap between the arts and society.

The twenty-ninth dining experience was held in the historical Savoy palace of Venaria Reale, outside the city of Turin in Italy. It was our first collaboration with the Fondazione Slow Food per la Biodiversità Onlus, with the aim to support the project Cooperativa Cauqueva in Argentina and to protect the production of the Andean potato, a fundamental foodstuff and financial resource for the rural Argentinean population. We invited 147 guests to dine on the most basic of dishes: soup. Together with chef Alfredo Russo from the restaurant Dolce Stil Novo, we chose soup as a symbol and common denominator, and it was served throughout the meal, from the main course to the dessert. This sustainable dish brings together populations and cultures of every continent, and can have spectacular colours: green vegetables, black beans, red tomatoes, orange pumpkins, white garlic and onions. In contrast with the ornate setting of the palace, we created a huge vegetable kitchen for a live performance at the head of the dining table, where we cleaned and chopped mountains of organic vegetables for each of the guests to take home in a hand-printed calico bag. A Royal Limoges porcelain plate edition designed especially for the occasion celebrated the theme by depicting delicately drawn vegetables and a recipe for potato soup, to be cooked using the vegetables we prepared.

Our fiftieth act—which covers several miles of streets starting from Tate Modern and running across the Millennium Bridge to Guildhall, the historical centre of London—hasn’t yet been realised, but from past experience, and with our 70x7 multiplication strategy, we know that it is possible to unite several thousand people. All we need now is a good pretext to gather the crowds, but the right occasion hasn’t quite arisen yet!

**HHR** It seems that the key to the success of these events is their partnerships and collaborations, so how do you go about determining the occasion for an event?

**L+JO** There are events that need quick, urgent attention, and then there are issues that may need to be repeated and drawn out over several meals, to sustain the subject in depth. As a reaction to the invasion of Iraq in 2003, we decided to stage *Act XX* at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris. We invited 490 people—diplomats, representatives from the cultural sector, artists, and media representatives—to dine on bowls of rice (*Un Bol de Riz pour la Paix*) at an immense table. Our choice of the UNESCO headquarters as a setting for the meal was not anodyne. Human rights and fundamental freedoms were being violated, and we needed a venue to carry the weight of our discussions, as well as a place we knew would be frequented by decision-makers in the process of promoting peace and security.

In 2007, the Albion gallery in London hosted our first charity dinner—*70x7 The Meal Act XXVII*, also on the subject of the Iraq conflict—to close the exhibition *The Politics of Fear*. Here we addressed the themes of forced migration and torture, and the proceeds of the event were donated to the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture. We also highlighted the work of charities, including Forward Thinking, Asylum Aid, Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees, and Bail for Immigration Detainees. In keeping with the concept of *70x7 The Meal*, the guest list was composed of seven groups of seven people: artists, media representatives, charities, collectors, curators, philanthropists, and political and legal figures. We invited an additional fifty people, for a total of ninety-nine—the Chinese symbol for infinity. This Act was also the first time the limited-edition Royal Limoges porcelain plates were designed by collaborating artists: Reza Aramesh, Xu Bing, Shilpa Gupta, Kendell Geers, Rashid Rana, and Avishek Sen.

*70x7 The Meal Act XXVIII* at the Ephrussi de Rothschild Villa in Monaco was a small private dinner in the presence of His Serene Highness, The Sovereign Prince of Monaco. For this occasion, forty-nine guests—avid supporters of the arts, the environment and education, with a specific interest in climate change—were invited to inaugurate the Art for the Environment initiative, a partnership formed between the Natural World Museum and the United Nations Environment Programme in 2008. Our common goals were to use the universal language of art as a catalyst to unite people in action and thought and to empower individuals, communities and leaders to focus on environmental values across social, economic and political realms.

**HHR** You mentioned something very interesting earlier: legislation. How can art influence legislative change and be a more effective channel for inciting social responsibility?

**LO** It's the research process, followed by hundreds of collective actions and manifestations in the public sphere—through what has been called the 'butterfly effect'—that will raise awareness and eventually lead to changes in legislation. *70x7 The Meal* is just one of the methods we use. Perhaps this is how Beuys' idea of social sculpture can take form and become an integrated part of daily life.

**HHR** So, do you expect one day to get more directly involved in the political system?

**L+JO** No, definitely not, and we have both been asked! But, we are developing a new cultural project, *Les Moulins*, which will regenerate a former industrial complex that has ceased activity in a rural region of exceptional beauty, the Brie, in the Seine-et-Marne area of France. We have already begun renovating four important historical industrial buildings along an 8-kilometre stretch of the Grand Morin river—La Laiterie (The Dairy); and three paper mills, Moulin La Vacherie, Moulin de Boissy and Moulin Sainte-Marie—to transform them into creative laboratories dedicated to artistic research and production. Inspired by the historical and environmental context of the surrounding Grand Morin river valley, and more specifically by the industrial heritage of the paper mills, the birthplace of paper in France. *Les Moulins* will play host to studios and residencies for international artists and researchers from the domains of contemporary visual arts and ecological science to discuss, develop, create and present artistic projects through a programme of collaborative activities.

Our artistic practice is our life's work. There is still too much ground to be covered and too many silent voices that need to be heard. The strength of art is its independence.

## HOU HANRU BIOGRAPHY

Hou Hanru is a Chinese art curator and critic. He is Artistic Director of the MAXXI in Rome, Italy.

Hou graduated from the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing and moved to Paris in 1990. He lived in France for sixteen years before moving to the United States in 2006. He worked at San Francisco Art Institute as Director of Exhibitions and Public Programs and Chair of Exhibition and Museum Studies from 2006 to 2012.

He has curated numerous exhibitions, including *Cities On The Move* (1997–2000), *Shanghai Biennale* (2000), *Gwangju Biennale* (2002), *Venice Biennale* (French Pavilion, 1999; Z.O.U.—Zone Of Urgency, 2003; Chinese Pavilion, 2007), *Nuit Blanche* (Paris, 2004), the 2nd *Guangzhou Triennial* (2005), the 2nd *Tirana Biennial* (2005), the 10th *Istanbul Biennial* (2007), *Global Multitude* (Luxembourg, 2007), *Trans(cient) City* (Luxembourg, 2007), *EV+A* (Limerick, 2008), *The Spectacle of the Everyday*, the 10th *Lyon Biennale* (Lyon, 2009), the 5th *Auckland Triennial* (Auckland, New Zealand, 2013).

He has been consultant and adviser in many international institutions including Walker Art Center (Minneapolis), Solomon R Guggenheim Museum (New York), Kumamoto Museum of Contemporary Art (Kumamoto, Japan), De Appel Foundation (Amsterdam), Rockbund Art Museum (Shanghai), Times Museum (Guangzhou), Today Art Museum (Beijing), Power Station of Art (Shanghai), Deutsche Bank Collection (Frankfurt), Kadist Art Foundation (San Francisco/Paris) and Asia Art Archive (Hong Kong). He has served in juries of many international awards including the Hugo Boss Prize (Guggenheim Museum), Chinese Contemporary Art Award (Beijing), Ars Fennica (Helsinki), Credit Suisse/Today Art Award (Today Art Museum, Beijing) and Hugo Boss Prize China (Rockbund Art Museum, Shanghai).

He has also taught and lectured in various artistic and educational institutions including Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten (Amsterdam), HISK (Antwerp /Ghent), and numerous universities and museums across the world.