

Title, REFUGE WEAR - BODY ARCHITECTURE – URBAN LIFE GUARDS

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The context for Lucy Orta's first work in the early 1990s was the terrible economic recession, caused by the repercussions of the first Gulf War and the stock market crash. There was rampant unemployment and the effects of such instability were sweeping the streets.

Orta was working as a freelance fashion design consultant at the time and experiencing the financial difficulties herself. Although she could have remedied this by taking on more design contracts, her feeling was that she needed to become more socially active and find a new visual creative medium.

REFUGE WEAR

The first visual manifestation of Orta's was the Refuge Wear series, which was a direct response to both the refugee crisis and to the social instability at that time.

HABITENT is a portable habitat that catered for minimum personal comfort and mobility for nomadic populations. Habit, implies a garment for meditation and spiritual refuge: the "in-habitant" suggesting a human presence as an occupant for the dwelling.

The aluminium coated one-person tent with telescopic armatures transforms in a matter of seconds into a wind-waterproof poncho. The universal dome is reduced to the essential human volume allowing for complete mobility for migrant populations. The aluminium surface of a coated polyamide which serve as a common fabric membrane for the Habitent and other Body Architectures, can be placed exterior to reflect the sun's rays or and interior to reflects the body's heat. It is the idea that our body is in complete interaction with the surrounding environment, that we determine the harmony within our habitat.

Orta went onto to explore further individual shelters in response to increasing situations of human distress and unsuitable social environments. The forms allow for a minimum space around the body, the notion of space is essential to the development of the person inside. The materials are chosen for their "comfort seeking" properties further extending the metaphorical properties of the objects; a combination of microporous rip stop with a PU coated polyamide which takes into account both the abrasion during mobility and the necessity for body comfort. The **HABIT-BIVOUEACS** have carbon structural armatures that raise the fabric above the chest to eliminate the effects of claustrophobia. They often have arm or hood appendages that assist the inhabitant in developing relationships outside the environment, other pockets containing both functional and symbolic objects.

The design innovations and the new materials employed give the impression that they are operational or functional, 'oeuvre en fonctionnement'. **COCOON WITH DETACHABLE BABY CARRIER** a mother & child survival combination uses thermochromic coated fabrics that change colour with temperature fluctuations enabling the mother unit to react and control climatic variations. **OSMOSIS WITH NATURE** incorporates zipper systems or design innovations that create mobile forms.

All Refuge Wear habitats transform and adapt for the body (personal space), the environment (architectural space), and social condition (mutation and mobility). They separate to create two parts: jacket and transport bag. The supporting structures are lightweight and telescopic so that the architecture can effectively pop-up.

The transformation from shelter to clothing and vice a versa is fundamental to the concept of freedom of movement, free will, free choice: new relationships and new cultural exchanges.

HOMO MOBILIS.

BODY ARCHITECTURE

Meeting urbanist and philosopher Paul Virilio in '94 was a significant turning point in Orta's career. He was concerned by the breaking down of the family unit and the reconstruction of the social link. Quote : "The precarious nature of society is no-longer that of the unemployed or the abandoned, but of that of individuals socially alone.

Refuge Wear and Survival kits are concerned with an individual's immediate needs. It became apparent that it would be impossible to address issues of 'survival' without investigating the role of the individual in a collective body and the community at large. **1+1 = 2**

Paul Virilio's philosophy and social criticism encouraged Orta to explore interconnections and new ways of creating dialogue and in doing so she developed **BODY ARCHITECTURE**.

The first in this series was COLLECTIVE WEAR X 4. Its appearance is protective, hinting at physical and psychological refuge within a larger protective enclosure, somewhat high-tech or maybe even sci-fi.

These larger scale domes and collective tent-like structures seek to promote the opposite of individual isolation. Bivouac structures can zipper on and off at will, individual yet part of a community structure. The surface skin of the enclosure is many membered, appendages or demi-bodies representing individuals within a community structure. Second hand clothes collected in the Soweto markets in South Africa. A family of nine segments that can be worn in different manners or a central foyer providing a meeting point for a series of pods that can zipper in, created for the exhibition 'Visions of The Body' at the Museum of Modern Art in Kyoto.