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THE FUTURE IS ON THE TABLE #3

HOW DID IT START?

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“THE FUTURE IS ON THE TABLE” #3

Is about **WATER** and **SHELTER**.

. A stock of STOOLS is ready to be sent in bundles of 5,6, or 7, wherever there are artists and communities willing to use the arts to HIGHLIGHT WATER and SHELTER. The seat of each stool is a piece of a large puzzle representing the world.

. The process of the project is as follows: to DISPATCH THE STOOLS throughout the world, to invite participants to imagine, plan, map, build, perform, propose... that is PUT WATER and SHELTER ON, IN, ABOVE, WITHIN THE TABLE, and then to PIECE BACK together the PUZZLE of the stools along with NEW tables to be set -- cloth included -- and invite friends to think and act further.”

“LE FUTURE EST SUR LA TABLE” #3

parle d'**EAU** et d'**ABRI**.

. Des lots de 5, 6 ou 7 TABOURETS sont prêts à l'envoi, partout où il ya des artistes et des communautés souhaitant utiliser les arts pour PARLER d'EAU et d'ABRI. Le siège de chaque tabouret est un morceau d'un PUZZLE représentant le monde.

. Le projet se développe ainsi: envoi des tabourets à travers le monde; invitation faite aux participants d'imaginer, de planifier, représenter, construire, jouer, proposer... c'est-à-dire de BATIR, DEBATIR, REBATIR LA TABLE, EAU, et ABRI; réassemblage du PUZZLE; avec quelles NOUVELLES tables? Nappes? Couverts? Et leurs hôtes bien sûr.

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The text above was printed on a 6 x 9 postcard and mailed en masse. The front of the postcard was the picture you see on the cover of this catalogue. The seats were cut from a single sheet of marine plywood painted with a map of the world, oriented towards the North Pole so that all continents have equal visual representation. Participants received a bundle of seats but did not get to choose the pieces. Each of the 56 seats represented a piece of the global community and was to be used as a symbol for starting a circle, a workgroup, or a rhizome. The work groups were to be made up of anybody the participants wished, and the work was to be what the participant wanted it to be. Artists, artisans, and arts collaboratives who agreed to participate in *The Future is on the Table* were challenged to create an object, an installation, a performance, or other art project in response to the issues of water and shelter as basic human rights. The diverse array of projects, including artists-in-residencies, workshops, stone carving, gift exchanges, and other, took place across the globe in England, France, India, South Africa, and the United States:

Multiple residencies of musicians, dancers and visual artists on the frozen Doubs river (France); workshops, film/video and an embroidered book on festivals, public

speaking (India); spring stone carvings inspired by the five senses (Zimbabwe, South Africa); pictures of the burqa as a shelter (Nigeria, USA); a review of the multiple memories linked to oak trees (USA); a rebound of the gift exchange process (England); Hip hop philosophy (USA); and an attempt to 'capture the moving mind' on the Trans-Mongolian railroad.

Projects were lead by the Arpan Cooperative / MarketPlace India, Phinias Chirubvu, Omari Fox, Arianne King Comer, Marcia Kure, Rajni Shah and Delphine Ziegler. Therefore *The Future is on the Table* is like a stream, an art stream, a river of art projects. Under our leadership its tributaries are converging in Charleston SC, for its 5th year anniversary.

THE EXHIBITIONS

The Future is on the Table exhibition at the City Gallery at Waterfront Park is a visualization of the concept of this project, including a transformation of the space through the use and creation of museum-type elements, video installations, Internet access, photographs, creative crafts and large-scale tables/sculptures/seats, a tree, a bridge, shelters, water, youth expression, professional performances and their vestiges. Plus a lot of opportunities to sit down, question, come back, and catch a breath of the freedom brought about by some of today's art practices.

For *The Future is on the Table* exhibition in Gallery A of the Gibbes Museum of Art we built carts on wheels as new welcome gifts to each participant. They are semi-functional and inspired by the specific exchange that took place between us and the participant. They do not represent a style. Rather they propose a framework to highlight the practice and the role of the arts in various communities. They are to be launched, put in action and, in some cases, given away or sold by the artists.

The Future is on the Table is an art project built on the belief in the importance of local communities. Its goal is to create an open dialogue around the metaphorical "table of the future" referenced by the title of the project. This is a table around which local communities, as part of the global community, can gather to share ideas, discuss problems, and contemplate the future of our world. The purpose of *The Future is on the Table* is to invite people to use art as a means to create community dialogue, encourage activism and carry the energy of the project to the future.

The project was never a plan, more like a venture. It started in a slow motion mood and followed its own course. It is not ending in Charleston. The shows are at the same time creative art installations and stills/frozen views of a journey started by art products: 56 stools and a map. The shows are not the end product to a process. Actually Charleston is only a temporary hub where passengers can rethink their own destinations and goals. Even the catalogue with its ring binder is a work in progress and can be personalized. Each chapter has its own meaning and there will always be room for a new chapter. We have to make this show a path to the desire for movement.

THE FUTURE IS ON THE TABLE #3 exhibitions attempt to create a space where love for / dedication to and frustration about art and culture collide and are open for discussion. It tries to offer a sort of entrance door to consider social change as a force behind a movement in the Arts. Awareness of the global world shakes up eyes and ears. And our training in Euro-American criteria of excellence and systems of selection is shaken as well in the process. We are listening. We do not propose answers. Instead this project attempts to engage our minds in an unscripted trip. It seems to us that the older we grow and the more we learn and experiment, the deeper our awareness of what we don't know. Although, every minute of our life, we need to take a stand or make a decision, the arts – not painting or sculpting alone - have helped us keep alive the youthful talent of asking questions.

MARKERS

This “*Future is on the Table*” is #3. There were a #1 and a #2 and – before and in between – lots of travels, passages, detours, shelters and retreats, studio practice and various collaborations: a constant journey, although not pre-planned since based on experimentation. All along our itinerary from France to Canada, to the States and finally - by chance - Charleston, we grew from so many encounters with artists and non-artists. This did not always make our life easier, but for sure made our life richer, more interesting. It also provided us unexpected anchors, roots. More precisely, it gave us links - and awareness. We thank you so much, so so much for that.

Late French philosophers Bourdieu and Foucault are to be named here for their investigation of the role of the author. *Can we apply it to the role of the artist? And how come some institutions still consider a duo of visual artists with suspicion, weaker than the sum of its components? Un-eligible for fellowships?*

Our participation in Alternate ROOTS, a membership association of mostly performers provided us a ground for case studies. *Do visual artists seek their role in social change differently than performers? Where can our openness to multi-disciplinarity connect? How come the Fine Arts lost their connections to architecture and are now largely perceived only as goods for decorating walls, advertising, and various (finance-driven) art markets?* As Alternate ROOTS members we have also looked creatively into race relations and have understood the necessity of taking a stand and creating a presence, which will generate rippling effects after our role is over. We generate traces in the form of artefacts, prototypes or artworks, and especially new projects, lead by others. This may be where we are not only attempting to share ownership of *The Future is on the Table*, but also loose control of it altogether.

It would be negligence on our part not to mention that *The Future is on the Table* grew out of our primary job / secondary mind: *Gaulart & Maliclet French Café / Fast & French*. With basic money made somewhere else than in a field linked to the art world, we bought ourselves a certain freedom as artists. Not always and not only a practical one

– cash flow / management skills / contacts - but a freedom nonetheless that has liberated our artistic ventures from direct market connections. We say ‘we bought’, because obviously it has a price. We are conscious of that price, which gave us a ground from where we could rethink the frameworks of art making in this class-driven society. Nevertheless art remains an opener and an engine for imagining.

Here, instead of describing some of our previous works we are attempting to outline what was going on in our minds at the start of *The Future is on the Table* projects. What kind of soup?

- #1 grew out of anger with Bush stolen election.
- #2 proposed a table whose choice of use was left to the participants of FOCAS, the Festival Of Community Arts South – from outdoor sculpture to dining table to prop for an improvised choreography.
- #3 will be based on a gift exchange practice as opposed to a profit-oriented capitalist practice. Each object of the trade will be manufactured individually. Nothing to do with standardized production.
- #3 will highlight water and shelter as basic human rights, threatened here and elsewhere in the world.

- #1 opened in Orangeburg, SC with a discussion on race at the time of the anniversary of the Orangeburg Massacre.
- #2 developed a library of artists’ works at the intersection of art and activism, in front of the Carnegie Foundation Library of Lexington, KY.
- #3 will involve Charleston residents and organizations in its process and will count on same for the aftermath of the show.

- For #1, we reviewed our analysis of the main avant-gardes after World War Two, specifically conceptual, minimal, feminist and story-based.
- For #2, we rethought the participatory process and the transmission of information.
- #3 will utilize the tools of Community-based art, through the “Global-Local” lens. It will attempt to negate the opposition between the Artist (almost a hero) and the community-based artists (almost anonymous).
- #3 will touch upon questions of authorship, power and social justice in the arts and culture.
- #3 will talk about water and shelter, two basic human rights.

AUDIENCE

We are striving to find ways to pass on knowledge and leadership. It starts with the artists, dedicated to sharing knowledge with their assistants and observers. The shows at the City Gallery at Waterfront park and at the Gibbes Museum of Art are organized to act as libraries or comfortable public places for conversations as much as exhibition spaces. Please come and enjoy. We can assist you if you wish a special tour. Do you want a coffee? Can we talk about water and shelter?

What is the role of the Assistants in this project? Assistants or teams of assistants are responsible for communicating with artists or groups of artists, helping with participation on the website, facilitating artists' stay and work in Charleston. By the opening day they know the projects and by the closing weekend they can be their presenters. And others yet are more like interns, assisting with the administrative or technical aspects of the project. And others are real Partners. At this time our Partners are teachers and musicians. Within this framework, creativity is strongly encouraged. Ideas are followed through even if they cannot be implemented within the time and budget of this project; they may become the rippling effect of *The Future is on the Table*.

As was done for 'Changing the Beat', a 2004 Charleston Rhizome Collective¹ project, we are also organizing a team of Observers. We have sent the following invitation:

"... The Future is on the Table is inviting you to become a special audience. An interest or knowledge of the arts is not necessary. You have been invited because you are unique and can bring different opinions that we may have overlooked and would have never have imagined. We invite you to watch, listen, and react. Your input will enrich our content and boost our sense that audience is not always passive. You will be entertained, challenged, and most importantly a part of the creative process. If you are interested in becoming part of our "team of observers" please let us know when you are available and how much participation you would like to have. "

Observers are not traditional journalists or critics. They can use stories, story circles, photos, film, object sharing, critical discussion process or any other means to report on parts of this project. The closing weekend offers them an audience. *The Future is on the Table* is hoping to provide multiple entries. The Observers choose their entries, and the level of their involvement. They are volunteers in a rocky adventure of imagination and realization.

ART PRACTICE and HISTORY

The borders between the professions of artist and that of curator have blurred. Artists and curators experiment in each other's steps or tracks. If an artist is also becoming a curator - something that could be expected since we have been pushed to learn all aspects of art administration and the economics of the field - this artist is bound to do it as an insider and often as a troublemaker. What about the involvement of non-artists, the place of sub-cultures, the role of social justice, of dissent and the critique of art history?

As artists our goals are, in large part, to explore the place of the arts in our "cultures to come". We like to echo the "Another World is possible" of the Social Forum movement with "Another Culture is possible, Other Arts are possible". Collaboration with non-artists is a must in our work. However we consider that it is our specific task to experiment, plan, document, research and create new potentials. It is also our task to attempt to incorporate all creative forms of community-minded artwork into the art

history that will be taught to younger generations: our way to resist the hegemony of a merchant-based culture.

Our projects are mostly long term. We contextualize our art in its process, its making and its future. With cultural and social change as a constant, we research the space between creating to prevent and creating to mend, creating with and for social justice. As immigrants – French-Americans who came to the South 25 years ago - we practice daily our status of outsiders/insiders, viewers/actors. We are always on a swing or a seesaw. For me, Gwylene, after the hurricanes of the sixties/seventies (feminism/decolonization/ political changes), art became The Open Field. Everything that was not classified elsewhere was acceptable in that field, a view totally opposite to any selective system. However that field was not isolated from society or socio-political surroundings, or from other disciplines. Its borders became soft, an edge to deal with, a frame to break, a square angle to round. And then its edges became horizons, subject to tides, the rotation of the earth, the weather temperament and one's own perception and movement.

For me, Jean-Marie, art cannot be blind to the world. Whether art, business or leisure our motivations have to do with our belonging to the human race, pre-global, global or post-global ... Don't give up quite yet, there will be a post-global world, if we work at it! *The Future is on the Table* claims relevance. Yes, art is relevant: a tool for knowledge, a tool for analysis, a tool for accomplishment. Yes, art can bring together cultures without denying diversity. Yes, art can be beautiful, if we do not forget that there is no aesthetics without ethics. No, art may not match the color of our favorite couch. No, art may make us feel excluded. No, we will not offend anyone. We will playfully offer alternatives.

For us, artistic merit includes: a challenging process to build community – even a temporary placeless community - or to develop communications and collaborations; a level of experimentation or risk taking in the relationship with partners and audiences; the clear intent to promote art as a discipline, an activity which creates alternatives to the neo-conservative culture and its ways of writing history. “Metaphorically, the modern world – and *The Future is on the Table* project – must be conceptualized in *italics*, rather than plain text; in *italics* the letters lean toward their companion. Similarly, art may function as a continuum builder, forged of personal and handmade objects; a continuum stamped with cultural authenticity and integrity, as opposed to the streamlined, cultural hodgepodge and erasure that characterize the entertainment industry via the Internet and the mass media.”(D.W.) As opposed to an art, which supports, promotes and acts as a system of oppression and segregation, and is not even considered valid enough to be part of a minimum educational curriculum.

As we do this kind of work, you the reader, the viewer, the commentator, the observer are much more than witnesses to its unfolding. For sure, whether you want it or not, you are integral to the process. Thank you so much for reading.

Would you like a coffee?

GG/JM

ⁱ The Charleston Rhizome Collective is a workgroup within the Charleston Rhizome, itself a local extension of Alternate ROOTS. It brainstorms, travels and develops collaborations. Please ask us about it.