

WHAT IF, at The Future is on the Table #3?

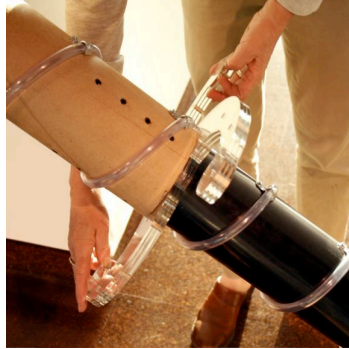
Sometimes I want to see The Future is on the Table as a show, just a show, trying to catch the moves, decisions, run around that went into the making, building and arrangements of every part of the show at the City Gallery; as if I was designing a new choreography (with Aurore?) or directing the rehearsal for a play (with Darryl?) or making a film (with Delphine?) with a collection of stories in movement. Can I afford this time to reflect and hopefully transfer some knowledge to a few, as opposed to indulge in a new adventure? This has been a constant dilemma for me and my closet is full of halfway done videos and paintings commemorating those larger projects like 33 Gorenflo Gap, Fast-Food-Chain-Feeding, The Charleston/Atlanta/Alaska Challenge, My Journey Yours, Why do they want to be rich without us, You Comin'. Their memory is my blood. My heart beats with their success and problems. The reading of the following part should be best accompanied by pictures. You may wish to look at: How does it look today?.pdf



Market Place: Handwork from India:

The shelter was a market. You could buy clothes - hand sewn and embroidered - at a very cheap price. And despite a dim light you could also learn about festivals in the beautiful hand made book. The bamboo structure designed a perfect place for our invitees to feel home and make their unexpected present: a 'rangoli', or floor design made of salt and marigold to welcome people.

And what if the video projection of the slow moving portraits of the Indian ladies was bigger, therefore floating in the space, with their feet on the ground playing with the marigold and salt of the 'rangoli'? What if the film of the crowded streets of Mumbai could get out of the DVD players and move like the people we are watching: an early morning crowd marching to the train station? Would the figures then, half real- half model, have told better the full story of the event: the yes to the stools by a fair trade company based in Chicago? The meetings of the Arpan Cooperative with Gwylene Gallimard and Michèle Waquant, which resulted in this portrait series? The voting process among the Arpan cooperative members to send Sunanda and Sharda as their representatives in the States? Their work as embroidery specialists and their determination to let us know about their festivals?



Tropical Ice and Phreatic Shift:

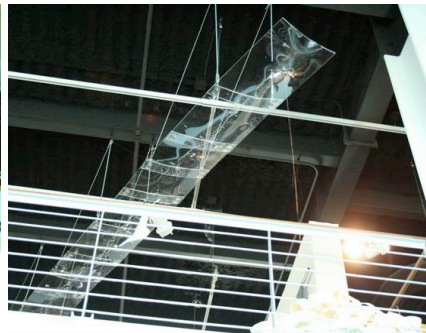
The students of Clemson received the gift of Delphine's project reshaped by Jean-Marie as a table for the space. They understood the concept: the necessity to make all of us aware of the Water problem worldwide and the tiny scale of the potential effects of our work.

What if the Zen garden of ice had been a mountain of ice, generating running water all the time? What if the Archimedes screw had been automatically powered by the weight of that water? What if the glass of water had been bottles? And bottles packed as a memory present?

What if a dance class - dancing with ice - had been proposed?

"TROPICAL ICE found its best place in the "in-between" of the organized events and exhibitions. Just like the ice turning into water is never in the same state, just like, depending on the ambient light, the gallery window panels disclose glimpses of the cold in the East of France, it was never just "right-there-here-for-good" for us but it was a culmination of "here-and-now" moments and shared experiences: in the bus, in the car, at the café, at the different homes or places where we were invited, during rehearsals with the musicians, in the gallery during the preparation of the show, during tropical storm Hanna, etc.... all of this led to transient states of our mind that were captured by Aurore's dance and by our cameras." Delphine Ziegler

What if the gallery window panels were bought as curtains? What if we send them to participants in Table of Ice on the Doubs river?





The Burqua as a Shelter:

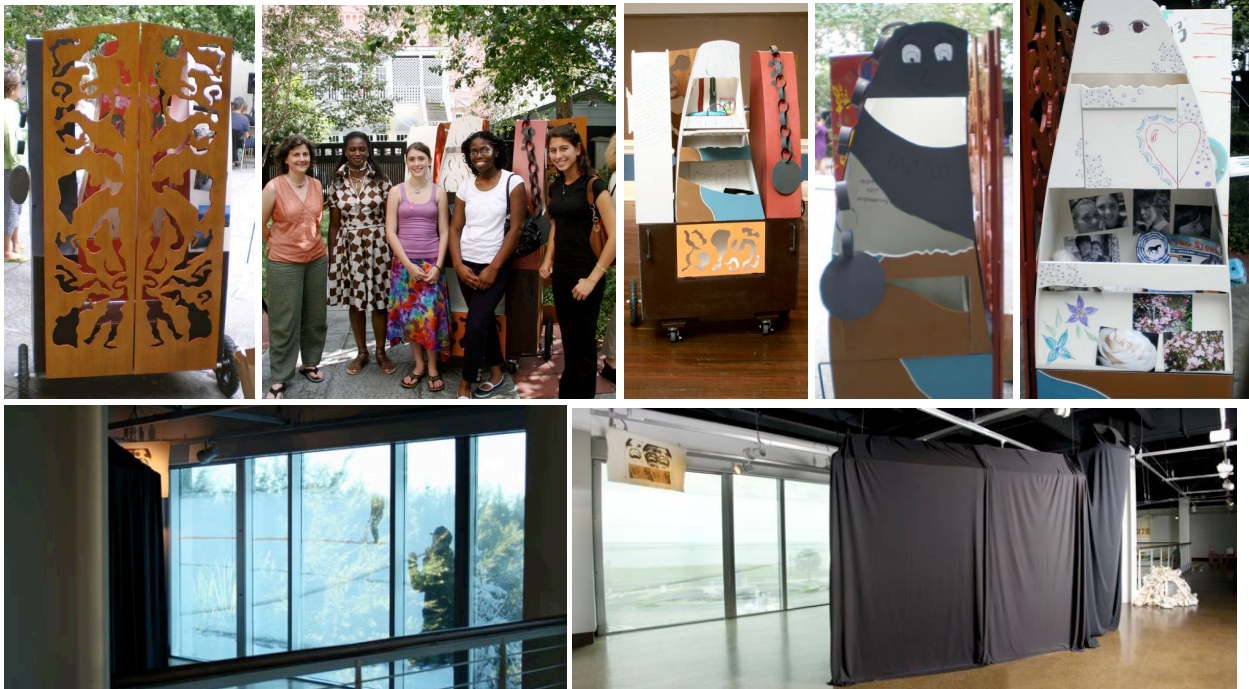
The Burqua as a shelter has been at the same time the locus of disappointments and the generator of so many discussions Therefore it did work.

Here is a caption for it by Marcia;

Dark Knight
Weightless Clouds
Cotton Candy
Sharp thorns
Burning light
Words
Dagger to the Heart
Words that Bleed
Feel my hands
Touch my Soul
Warm like you
Pray
Oh ye Dark Knight.

What if we could have heard Thierry Madiot with his long trump as seen on the window behind the burqua?

What if Marcia Kure could have worked for two weeks with the teenagers? What if we could have seen some of the videos shot with Donna Hurt and other artists as soon as the Burqua was installed?





A Gift-Exchange space:

“What would you say to a stranger whom you will never meet again?”

Here are a few answers that came out of the first workshop held by Rajni Shah on August 30th:

- A compliment, especially on someone's clothing, which can spark a story - What's your favorite city? - Do you take vitamins? - “Change your life”(quote from Nietzsche).- Where are you from? - How wonderful is this weather! - Whom are you going to vote for? - If you are both from Charleston you might ask, “Who's your family, what island are you from, do I know anybody you know?” - I usually ask a man, are you married? - I'll probably never meet you again but right now I am very happy to meet you - Good luck (universal and can be modified in tone to reflect situation) - Breathe and embrace chaos! - Nice shirt - Say something extremely funny and make them laugh hysterically – Smile and make other faces...

And a few comments: we do not usually give things away without expecting some kind of reaction or return; we can receive things in very unusual ways; a piece of advice can be a gift; unusual to be in a place where you give without expecting anything back, an important part of the process is making the gift and then just letting go (later Rajni compared this process to meditation, in which “you let go, let go, let go, and get really clear”)

Gifts then were made of photos from magazines, colored paper, ribbons, string, glue, tape, markers, pencils, envelopes, small pieces of paper that explained the project, and postcards for The Future is on the Table. Thought through and handmade.

What if the gifts had been given at Christmas time? What if the gifts at the cafe had been part of the Christmas decorations and available as a Christmas bonus for customers to take. As opposed to the staff giving them to customers?

What if the bird/fish traps had open their ‘mouths’ to the whole space, instead of designing a corridor/trail? Whatever you wish to leave, whatever you wish to take, whatever you wish to give, whatever you want to exchange...





A Hip-Hop Shelter:

*A train station? Basic benches, anchored just in case, solid enough to open your suitcase on or bring your gear.
A confessional? From the outside you can only see legs unless you peep through "The New Danger" sign. Then you are in and sit down.*

A dangerous place? Bin Laden's face pops up.

A cache? Big enough for a conversation to take place.

What if more than one artist had done the drawings?

What if an endless sound had made us discover South Carolina Hip-Hop adventurers? Or films?



The Future is on the Table #1:

This table started with conversations about race. What if those had been printed and offered to be continued?

A pound of pencil shavings is in the red drawer attached to the wall. Mostly kids have used the pencils also some drawings were very strong. What if we had organized workshops around the table? The throne has been used with pleasure, mostly looking the other way, not toward the conversation.





The Conversation Tree and “My Little House” as a seesaw:

“I loved the tree, so historically and functionally appropriate to draw others under, and beautifully made. Indeed, I sat comfortably under it with friends. In many ways the U.S. is the tree, but those who seek its shelter give it greater purpose.” Christine Castaneda

A live oak tree carried the myth of the South into my Parisian education. “Gone with the wind...”. Then it became a risky love. We had a gathering in the winter at Arianne’s house to talk about the tree. People mentioned faces. And here they were. I was prudent in looking at them. What are they going to tell me? I was on a seesaw. The seesaw as a performative object?

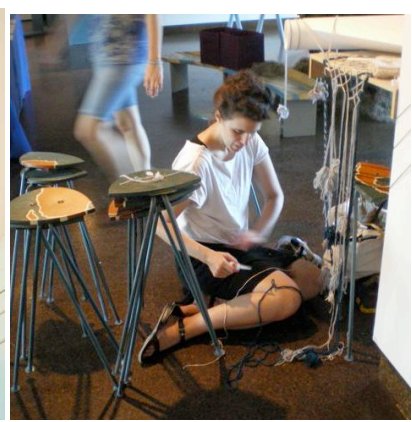
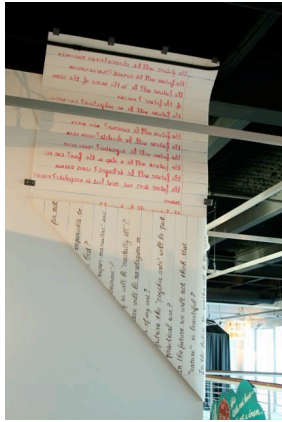
What if the tree had told horror stories? Fairy tale stories?

What if the tree had been higher? Finding its pass to reach eye level when you were on the second floor. A new discovery then?

What if the lights had been nourished by the sun hitting the roof?

What if it had found a place with the small seesaw at the Children’s Museum?

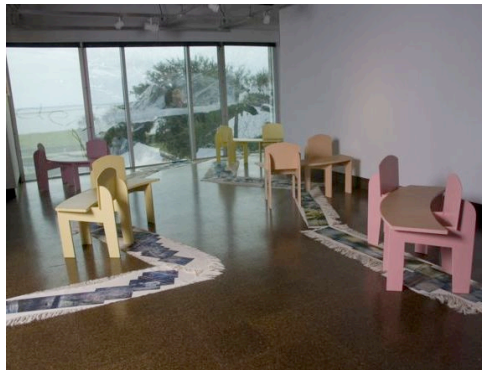




The Future is... and Please Have a Seat:

"The Future is..." came from "preface: Participation lasts forever" by Hans Ulrich Obrist in "Did Someone Say Participate?", edited by Markus Miessen and Shumon Basar. One way to incorporate the art history makers of the day in this project. Painting those quotes straightforward or mirrored, depending on the wall and the consequent fold, was an attempt to leave a ghost imprint in the space and mold them into an already transformed future. But here was a mistake. A straight cut, a bigger-than-nature woolen hand and one with long majestic knitted fingers could give actually the long handmade process a meaning to be continued with precaution.

The Love seats of 'Please Have a Seat' were offering excerpts from Paul Kivel's "Uprooting Racism" book, something to ponder about quietly with a partner. There was also an offer for a coffee. What if those same texts had been presented as a poster right in your face and the meandering canvases on the floor had been designing more clearly the rivers around the Charleston peninsula? There was a whole world and a special light in that space with Li Ping Ting performing Table of Ice on the windows and the Atlantic Ocean behind it. What if my mother had been able to watch her own face screaming 'Attention! Attention!' to the visitors? Would she have written comments in the Khary king book on the Red Desk?



Sounds of Home:

Participants are invited by Bill Carson: to contribute a written description of a particular sound they hear at home: "It may be heard everyday or only have been heard once. It may be a common sound or one that's unique to a specific living space. It may be man, machine, or beast; anything is fair game."

LAURA from Greensboro NC – "My ice cube maker, which I am convinced is a robber every time I hear it from the kitchen past 11pm. Only a tiptoed examination of the kitchen convinces me otherwise. I don't want to admit how many times this has happened".

REID from North Charleston – "Every night I hear gunshots. To me that is a clear sign of frustration or a need to be heard."

MEREDITH from Pauline, SC – "The croaks of the bullfrogs during humid summer nights, their low drones annoying at first become comforting and lull me to sleep".

And so many more. What if they were serving as starters for a multi instrumental composition?



Salute to the waters of Charleston and Mumbai:

This work is an accumulation of details one cannot avoid to see. Every embroidered detail is meaningful and carries a message. Sharda Hanumant Ghadge and Sunanda Shashikant Junjar did not want any non-professional embroiderer to work with them on that piece

The pictures of the show at the City Gallery reflect a vision of space arrangement and only now that my cataracts are removed do I see clearly all the details I was only aware of, like the embroidery work by the Arpan ladies on the batik work of the Salute to the Waters of Charleston and Mumbai by Arianne King Comer.

What if I had seen better? The pictures in the catalog would have been different.

What if the UNESCO was interested in that piece?





The Future is on the Table #2:

This table was made for FOCAS, a festival of Community Arts South organized by Alternate ROOTS in Lexington KY. It was meant to be on uneven grounds outside. Its legs were adaptable. If you are on the second floor, this table shows you the world seen from the North Pole, coupled with a gold-leaf moon and star like on the South Carolina sky. It is a beautiful artwork. You go to the first floor. You want to sit at that table. No one has second thoughts for long. Let's pull a stool...

What if it could be redone to be able to stand any harsh weather for hundreds of years?



Capturing the Moving Mind:

The day after the opening what I loved the most about the show at the City Gallery at Waterfront Park was the sound: something that was so little talked about in the planning process. Train, water, ice, Mumbai streets, Arpan talks and some conversations – recorded and live - were melting together. The trains from the five videos dispersed in the space among calligraphed sheetrock tapes handle freight and passengers in South Carolina, Russia, Mongolia, China and France. Video pictures are disappearing under a growing amount of running titles, which prevent the viewer from appreciating anything in a fixed form.

What if the small DVD players had been all together, hung on a clean white wall?



The African village as a shelter:

It took Phinias, Martha, Lasheia, Pam, Sarah, Scotty, and 25 4 to 6th graders of Fraser Elementary to raise a village!

We visited the Medical University Simulation Center, a state of the arts facility, full of performing mannequins. Huge surprise for me: the mannequins, except one arm, represent white people. We are coming with 25 black youth. Behind the fun of the field trip with hands on manipulation, aren't they going to think that this hospital is not for them? That the careers this hospital offers and promotes to them are actually not for them really? Charleston is only 50% white. Pam, an African American teacher reassures me: "Oh no! We will make sure they don't think that way". But what about their subconscious?

What if all the mannequins were representing black people?

After the tour at the Medical University, Phinias Chirubvu helped inspire the students to express the five senses. Some students were also taking notes, photographs or videos. After this session he and Sarah started a new project with the students: the making in clay of African huts. A basic process that they executed perfectly. They were not expressing themselves, just learning the know how. How surprising for all of us was the discovery of all their huts together in a circle! They had built a village! There they learned a sense of community.

"Students and Safety in Art: These kids have art in them, but no outlet. Get the kids to learn art so they can use it how they like."

Latonnnya and Meredith shared how proud the students were when they came and placed their work for the display. "One little boy wanted to sell his art and insisted on asking how he can get on the auction.... The students picked up the lingo and taught each other what to do after such a short amount of time, they were indeed artists... I feel that if you give them something else to learn and do, they will be glad to accept it and teach their peers. Art is so important for education." Latonnnya Wallace



The shows, and Jean-Marie and I, got great local attention from the Charleston City Paper and the Post & Courier. Thank you so much. But then we can only feel very isolated again, since there were no professional art reviewers to pinpoint some aesthetic questions and the limits of the various collaborations the way they have been half-frozen in the shows. No Charleston community organizers saw the possible use of our work and maybe the use of us as artists trailing to understand a changing South. And there were not many buyers who took advantage of our auction promoted by the amazing detailed documentation Erin Glaze and her team of interns put together. We, as artists, are left alone to document and interpret the work. For sure we knew it in advance: we planned a three-phase catalog and we organized a “team of observers”.

So when Georgina grabbed the railroad track, the seesaw and Arianne’s tree for the Children’s Museum she directs; when the Avery Center readily accepted the blue stands from the African village; when the Halsey Institute of the College of Charleston took the table of Tropical Ice for their new building; when Georgina again, Shannon and Erin, looked in the depth of their pockets to acquire loveseats of “Please have a seat”, The Future is on the Table #1 throne and its slanted drawer, a stool and a photograph; when the musicians collaborators of Aurore chose their own stools, from land to full sea; when the City of Charleston bought the Red Desk; when, despite the fact that the carts could be perceived as flowerpots in the presentation at the North Charleston City Gallery, the leadership of the North Charleston Office of Cultural Affairs came to our presentation and heard stories of content...; Jean-Marie and I felt that layers of meaning and things, were being passed on here, in Charleston, although in a very traditional way. We liked that as well.

It is time to end this long report of sorts. And it seems that we can only end with Observers’ remarks: they provide connections with our future. And the carts are on the road!

“so hot today
could i lick the ice

Accept a gift
what then

imagine need risk experience

we say we are moved
but do we move”

Tim Taylor

“I ducked under the curtain of the wooden house on the second floor of the Waterfront gallery and sank into one of two beanbag chairs there. In the middle of all the hubbub and people at the exhibit-happening I was coziest there, tucked away, listening through the open roof and zoning out over the snapshots of floating petals, streams, and moms and kids together. It reminded me of the club house I had tried to build when I was in the ninth grade and living in North Carolina. I wanted a secret getaway in which to lounge and read and was mortified that someone might find out I was building what basically amounted to a fort at my age. So I found a little hidden spot near a field where there was a pond and a small flock of sheep--a bizarre vestige of when my suburb was farmland. I swiped scrap lumber from a nearby construction site and was out there hammering away one Saturday when I heard a swooping sound; I turned to catch a wall of plywood in the face. My nose cracked audibly and I was terrified I’d pass out way out there where no one knew I was, so I took off running for home. I told my mom I had a bad headache and went to bed to ice my face. I never went back to the fort and never told anyone about my nose, which I found out recently in some X-rays had been smash-broken. So flash forward to the exhibit-happening and being 37 and not caring a flip if anyone knew I was

sacked out and hiding in someone else's clubhouse-fort-getaway. A friend poked her head in and I told her to sit a while with me. It was the best recharge I've had in ages and when a fellow we knew drew the curtain back to peek in, we giggled that boys miiiiiight be allowed. I swear, when I think back on all that went on with the future on the table, I'm going to respite.” *Melissa Bigner*



“One of the most important things that I will take away from my experience is the emphasis on challenge and experimentation through collaboration that Gwylene and Jean-Marie develop in their work, the embracing of the unknown, which is especially appropriate for a project that focuses on the future. When Gwylene and Jean-Marie sent the map stools out into the world they had no idea what would result, and built the project around actively watching many mysteries unfold, nurturing their growth, and then leading them into collaboration.

... As someone who has always felt uncomfortable with intellectual conversations, I am now actually excited to talk about art and politics with anyone. Perhaps even more important, I have taken ownership of the word "Artist", which is something I couldn't say out loud a few months ago. I am also feeling a possibility for engagement with activism beyond the academic, which I haven't felt since high school.” *Ruby Thorkelson*

OMARI: Art is definitely a vehicle to bring information to folks among other things and this might be “The New Danger” in places where “it is cool to be ignorant”.
