

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a small, clear glass petri dish containing a single, light-colored egg with dark brown speckles. The hand is positioned on the left side of the frame. The background is a dense, vibrant green mossy forest floor, with some dry twigs and a small, dark, textured object (possibly a piece of bark or a small animal) visible in the upper right. Three other similar petri dishes are scattered on the moss: one at the top center, one at the bottom right, and one partially visible at the bottom left. The overall scene suggests a field study or a scientific experiment in a natural environment.

STANDING IN THE SALT

ALEXANDRE BENETAS-OTTOBRINI



Lattara II

Mer Sidérale
Sideral Sea

STANDING IN THE SALT

NEO-LATTARA



dialog city

DIALOG CITY

A HOLISTIC APPROACH TOWARDS A DIGITAL CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE IN EUROPEAN CITIES

Digital transformation is more of a mindset than a purely technical innovation. Hence the overall goal of this project proposal is to create a socially inclusive, environmentally friendly, and economically sustainable urban digital environment.

By developing new practices on how to connect digital innovation directly to citizens' physical participation, DIALOG CITY aims at contributing to increase access to culture through a dialogical approach. Co-creation is at the core of our project idea encompassing a CITIZEN ARCHIVE PLATFORM for the cultural heritage sector and an innovative design thinking toolkit on FUTURE LITERACY. Four FESTIVALS serve as physical and digital cultural platforms to reach diverse audiences.

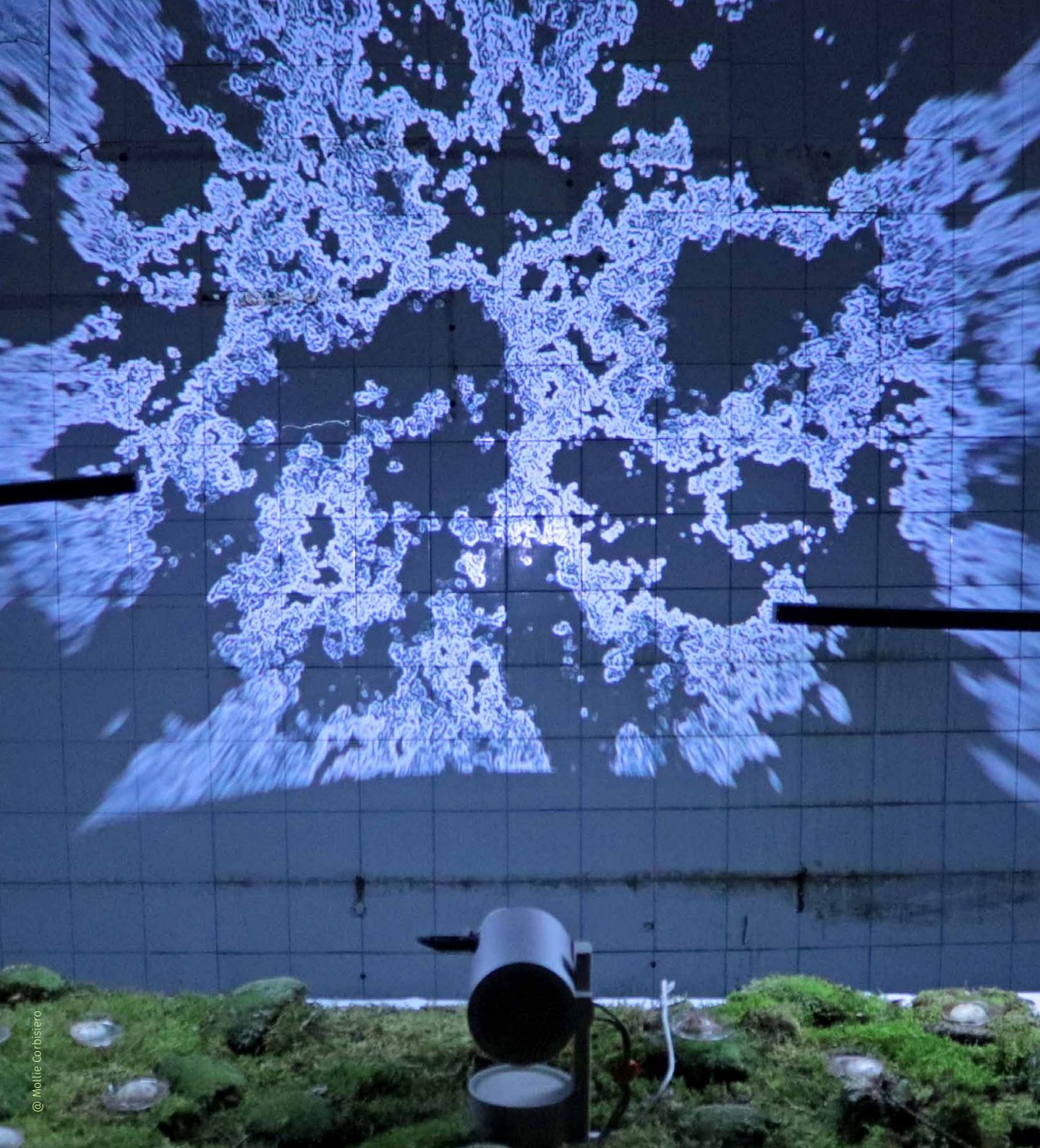
An ART FOR PUBLIC RESIDENCY PROGRAMME invites artists to develop ideas for urban interventions dealing with local or global topics that are of great significance for the respective urban society based on participatory approach.

The CITIZEN ARCHIVE PLATFORM is a web tool to archive all kinds of data-based objects of various citizen groups, direct engagement and mediation with the audience in the interpretation, communication and presentation of cultural heritage will be widened.

The creation of a FUTURE LITERACY toolkit and the subsequent implementation of workshops by trained artists, the methodology has outstanding potential to give citizens and stakeholders a compass in the face of the increasing complexity of our globally interconnected world.

DIALOG CITY builds partnerships between small and medium-size cities in five European countries – Austria, France, Germany, Greece and Italy - based on collaboration comprising city museums, city archives, cultural organisations, urban activists, social architects as well as training facilities.

This way, it includes different viewpoints and creates the basis of a humane-centred digitization and ongoing 'user engagement'. And it enables a sustainable network where creative solutions are continuously developed in the most diverse areas of society.



STANDING IN THE SALT

NEO-LATTARA

Speculative Design explores potential future scenarios, often through critical and imaginative design proposals. It's a way to examine the social, ethical, and political implications of emerging technologies and societal changes by creating future artifacts, narratives, and prototypes.

Alexandre Benetas-Ottobrini is a Paris-based food artist with a master's degree in design and culinary arts from the École Supérieure d'Art et de Design in Reims. In his practice, he uses speculative design to stage knowledge creation around food. In his work, food becomes data processed by bodies, turning into a living archive that forges social bonds and sparks debate. With this aim, he opens a poetic dialogue about who we are and who we might be in imagined realities.

The DIALOG CITY FUTURE FESTIVAL in Montpellier was realized in collaboration with and under the umbrella of the Festival of Living Architecture (FAV), which in 2025 took place under the theme of *La Gourmandise*. For two decades, FAV has invited architects, urban and landscape planners each summer to explore the connection between architecture and an annual theme, transforming the courtyards of Montpellier's townhouses with installations.

During his residency, Benetas-Ottobrini created a narrative buffet in the form of a walk-in installation made of salt, moss, projection, and an old refrigerator found in the former youth hostel that hosted the FUTURE FESTIVAL. Inspired by the Archaeological Museum of Lattara south of Montpellier and the nearby saltworks of Aigues-Mortes, he devised the "Institute for Post-Sidereal Research," an entity dedicated to studying altered or dissolved societies.

Before entering the installation, the artist, in his fictional role as an archivist, asked visitors a few fundamental questions: What was last eaten? What is archived? How is overall well-being? What is the personal acceptance of change between ingestion and subsequent excretion? The survey turned the work into a living performance about leaving traces.

Benetas-Ottobrini's work sketches a declining community seeking to preserve itself through a ritual of mushroom-shooting-star consumption. The audience is invited to taste a fragment as an act of archiving or remembrance—interweaving mythology, inner ecology, and food fiction.



ASSOCIATION QUATORZE IN MONTPELLIER

In the heart of Montpellier's old town, Quatorze is investing in a 17th-century building that is part of the historical heritage of the old city. Nestled at the crossroads of typical sloping streets of the old town centre - not visible from the street as it overlooks it, the three-storey L-shaped building encompasses a 188m² raised courtyard. In it, is an unoccupied youth hostel that has been vacant for several years, which Quatorze, associates and institutional partners propose to renovate for the implementation of a temporary housing program for 3 years, responding to the Montpellier Zero Slums initiative.

On the upper floors, the aim is to provide dignified housing for families currently living in slums. The ground floor houses associative offices and a communal space open to the neighbourhood with, in time, activities and openings to the wider public of Montpellier.

The renovation, both technical and participatory, involved specialized companies and volunteers supervised by Quatorze. From February to June 2025, the site progressively and punctually opened to the public, hosting community architectural drop-in sessions.

Within this dynamic of opening the doors of the Auberge to the public and as part of the Dialog City consortium, Quatorze went on to partner with the Festival des Architectures Vives (FAV) and organise an artist residency and a Future Festival on site of the Auberge and its courtyard. This year's theme of the FAV was la Gourmandise - a typical French term which could be translated as the refined pleasure of savouring food with delight and curiosity.

A PAVILION FOR THE FUTURE

Our 15 m² Pavilion of the Future, designed according to a parametric and evolutionary logic, embodies solidarity and interdependence through a reciprocal framework.

Here, architecture and gastronomy come together in common gestures: assembling, sharing, offering. The pavilion hosts an assembly where words and food circulate. Built in Montpellier and Aschaffenburg, the pavilion is to outlive the temporary nature of the events as it is designed to form a sound yet easy to disassemble and reassemble structure.

In time, its half-portals reassembled in a wooden truss structure may even become a greenhouse: a gourmet extension where links, ideas and harvests germinate. In the design, much attention was also paid to the economy of resources to build such a shape, which unfolds like a wooden nest, open yet embracing and protective.





STANDING IN THE SALT

**STEFAN HORN, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF
DIALOG CITY IN CONVERSATION WITH
ALEXANDRE BENETAS-OTTOBRINI**

**How do you define speculative design in your practice,
and what makes food a uniquely effective medium for it?**

For me, speculative design is a way of staging possible futures through objects, rituals, and narratives. Food is a particularly effective medium because it engages the body: it is ingested, transformed, and circulated through the metabolism. It therefore very directly materializes fiction, moving from narrative to physiology.

**How do you balance criticality and poetics when
designing food-driven “future artifacts”?**

I always try to maintain tensions: on the one hand, a sensitive, poetic, almost mythological narrative that stimulates the imagination; on the other, a critical reflection on political, ecological, or identity issues. In Standing in the salt - Neo-Lattara, the poetics come from the invention of an astral lichen and its rituals, while the critique is embedded in references to rising sea levels, climate issues, and contemporary desideration.

**What role do audience surveys play as design tools,
not just documentation?**

Feedback from the public via the survey is essential because the project lives in their bodies: they are the ones who ingest, accept or reject, and project their own narratives. The survey allows me to integrate these imaginaries not as simple feedback, but as design material for future iterations.

**Where do you draw ethical lines when staging ingestion
as part of a speculative ritual?**

I draw the line at the point where the experience could become coercive or dangerous. Ingestion remains symbolic and voluntary: each person chooses whether to participate in the ritual. I also ensure the quality and food safety of the preparations, so that critical fiction never undermines confidence in the act of eating.

**How does taste function as a knowledge system
in your work?**

Taste is a language. It can be considered the first universal language that ever existed. It conveys not only flavours but also stories: saltiness, bitterness, fermentation, recipes—these are vectors of memory and history. Tasting becomes a way of understanding the world beyond text or images.

Can culinary invention be a form of civic imagination?

Yes, because inventing a dish or a food ritual proposes a way of living and creating together. The invention of the ritual lichen imagines a post-catastrophe community that gathers around a survival food that has become sacred.





Can eating be a method of archiving—turning memory into physiology?

Eating records memories, stories, and even gestures in the body. The archive does not remain at a distance but becomes physiology—embodied memory, nourishing body and mind.

In what ways can salt erode, corrupt, or subvert—materially or metaphorically—within your piece?

Salt corrodes metal, dries out the earth, and burns wounds. In my piece, it also symbolizes the corrosion of narratives, like the disappearance of oral and/or written accounts by our elders, the distortion of discourse and stories by current politics, the fragility of memory, or the possibility of subverting dominant discourse through erosion.

How do you choreograph multisensory cues—taste, smell, touch, sound, light—to shape cognition?

I think of each sense as a narrative vector: taste crystallizes myth, smell recalls mutation, light evokes the stars, and sound accompanies rising waters. Together, they produce sensory cognition—thinking through the body.

Where do you see the line between sensory seduction and critical reflection for audiences?

In balance! You must seduce enough for the audience to immerse themselves, but not so much that they lose critical



@ Mathilde Giron

distance. I often introduce breaks—unexpected flavors, unsettling textures, or recitations/experiences depicting dystopias—to interrupt simple seduction.

What trace should visitors leave behind—data, memory, or metabolic change?

Ideally, a metabolic trace: that taste, ingestion, and bodily memory linger longer than a mere visual memory. By “metabolic trace,” I mean the project seeks not only to produce an image or an intellectual memory, but a physical imprint.

By ingesting the lichen salt, visitors transform the work into themselves: the taste lingers on the tongue, the salt circulates in the blood, and digestion inscribes the ritual in the body.

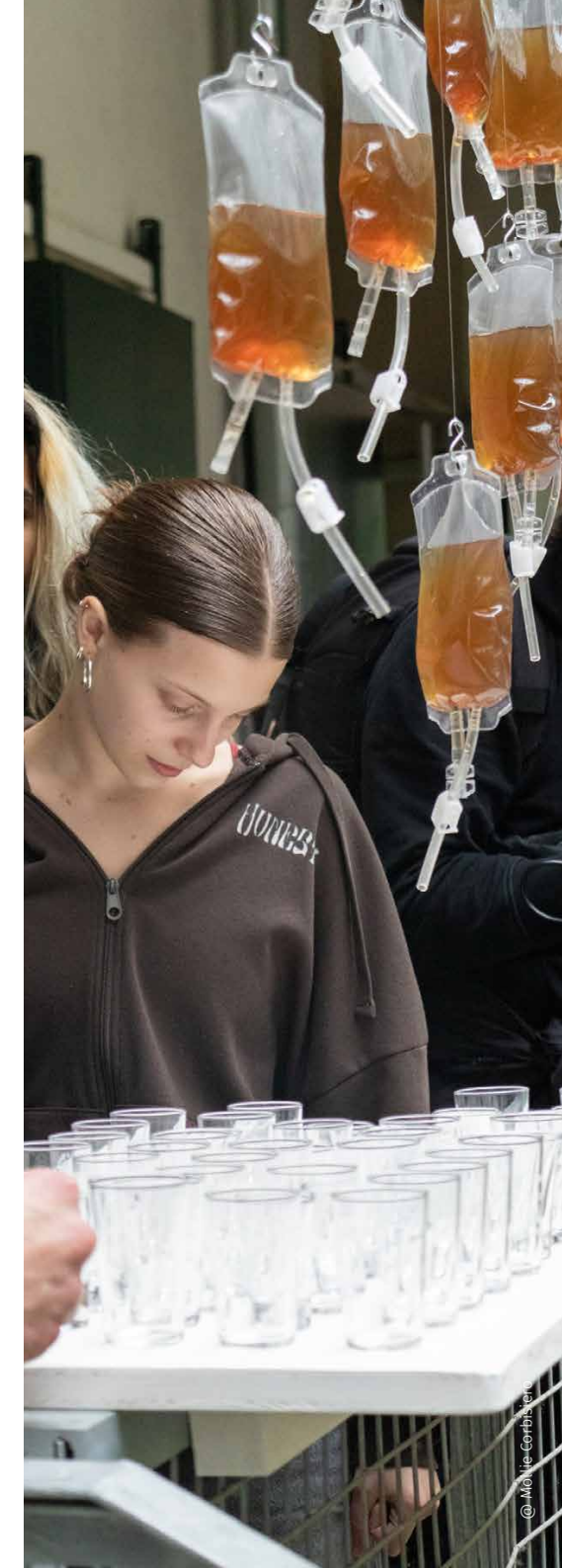
It is an intimate, invisible, physiological archive—a memory that cannot be placed on a shelf but persists in each person through sensory and chemical experience.

The idea is that the piece continues to exist afterward in a metabolic form, rather than as a photograph or text.

How do local resources and minimal ecological impact guide your material choices?

I try to work with simple, minimally processed materials that are often found locally.

Ecological constraints feed the aesthetic, and they are especially important when working with food and perishable items.



@ Mollie Corbisiero



Alexandre Benetas-Ottobrini

THE ARTIST

Alexandre Benetas-Ottobrini (born 1996) is an artist and culinary designer based in France, whose practice unfolds between gastronomy, installation, performance, and speculative design. He holds a diploma from the École Supérieure d'Art et de Design de Reims, he has been working independently for the past five years, creating edible narratives that blur the boundaries between art, design, and cuisine.

At the core of his work lies the concept of the “tiers-instant,” a notion inspired by Gilles Clément’s “tiers-paysage,” which proposes ephemeral, shared spaces where food becomes a medium for collective imagination. His projects often take the form of banquets, immersive dinners, and scenographic installations where recipes, objects, and storytelling converge into multi-sensory rituals. Benetas-Ottobrini’s practice intertwines speculative research and material experimentation. He explores food as both substance and symbol: salt crystallizations as future fossils, fermented broths as vessels of memory, or lyophilized soups as carriers of forgotten harvests. His narratives draw from archaeology, cosmology, and ecology, inviting audiences to question the ways in which taste embodies memory, identity, and belonging.

Recent works include Neo-Lattara, a fictional archaeology imagining Montpellier as a submerged lagoon city haunted by a comestible lichen born from an astral collision; and Champagne: Micro-Cosmogonies (2025–ongoing), an immersive sound-culinary experience for Champagne houses, staging the drink as a cosmic phenomenon unfolding in four acts.

His projects have been presented in contexts ranging from art centers to festivals, nightclubs, and culinary institutions, reflecting a desire to move fluidly between disciplines and audiences. As a queer artist, he grounds his speculative narratives in personal reflections on displacement, fragmented memory, and the politics of ritual.

Through each project, Benetas-Ottobrini positions food as a critical tool for storytelling: an edible archive, a metaphor of transformation, and a performative gesture of gathering that simultaneously preserves, disrupts, and reimagines our relation to the world.

www.bonjourbjrstudio.com

dialog city

IMPRINT

This publication is issue #3 of the DIALOG CITY series.
It is released on behalf of the City of Aschaffenburg by Joachim Kemper.

ISBN: 978-3-911702-01-0

Conceptualised and Edited by Stefan Horn
Designed by eichfelder artworks
Produced by Kuthal print&binding, 63814 Mainaschaff, Germany

All pictures in this publication are copyrighted by Mollie Corbisiero,
except for the picture on page 14-16, they are copyrighted by Mathilde Giron.

DIALOG CITY was initiated and is coordinated by STADT- UND STIFTSARCHIV ASCHAFFENBURG (DE). Project Partners are CULTUREPOLIS (GR), STADTMUSEUM GRAZ GMBH (AT), FONDAZIONE CIRKO VERTIGO (IT), QUATORZE (FR), CENTRO FORMAZIONE PROFESSIONALE CEBANO MONREGALESE (IT) AND CONSORZIO INTERAZIENDALE CANAVESANO PER LA FORMAZIONE PROFESSIONALE CIAC (IT).

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.



Co-funded by
the European Union



STADT
ASCHAFFENBURG

digital 



