

Jessica Gomula-Kruzic's *Complicit Participants*

Jessica Gomula-Kruzic is subversive. In her artwork, she playfully introduces ideas. As a viewer, you follow her logic and new notions are revealed. She subtly encourages participation and you naturally join in. Here a new performer is created, as you change from observer to participant. As an educator, Jessica Gomula-Kruzic encourages you to ask questions. As an artist, she asks her own questions—they are subversive, and you want in.

Given the variety of media she uses, from installation pieces like *Semantic Frottage* and web-only adventure games like *Modesto Reborn*, to the community created, fabric-based *Dream Garden*, strikingly consistent thematic and visual motifs remain throughout Gomula-Kruzic's work. She states, "Weaving these seemingly diverse works into a collective whole is an investigation of how to make tomorrow better." Her work explores societal constraints with a visual style that places viewers in the midst of her questioning as active participants. Core elements to Gomula-Kruzic's style include a dynamic, shifting nature that feels responsive to the environment, accompanied by a whimsical critique of modern American culture and social norms. Many of her works are brightly colored with contrasting hues, layered with moving imagery that frequently includes the human form, and a multitude of provocative short statements or single words. Visually, her work is colorful, corporeal, and constantly changing. Socially, her work explores gender politics, sexuality, and societal taboos.

Gomula-Kruzic also takes play seriously. Game designer and futurist Jane McGonigal, whose *Games for Change* uses gamification to create societal change for good, serves as an inspiration for her work. Gomula-Kruzic's choose-your-adventure game, *Modesto Reborn*, has been reincarnated in several different formats: a web-based game-for-change; a location-based scavenger hunt; and as an iPad interactive story. In each encompassing version, it inspires game players—many of whom are local residents—to imagine Modesto differently. Through animations and imagery, the game helps people visualize the city in the future. Social commentary is layered into the game through choices presented to the player—all of which have in-game consequences. The piece examines ideas from education reform and transportation options to employment issues and cultural support within the community. These ideas link the game to other creative placemaking efforts nationally— projects in which art plays an intentional and integrated role in community development. Indeed, Gomula-Kruzic received a nationally competitive ArtPlace grant specifically to support her creative placemaking efforts.

Whether through game theory or multi-source video projection, Gomula-Kruzic actively finds ways to immerse the viewer in the work. Audience participation is most pronounced in her frequent collaborations with Double Vision, a group creating experimental performances for dance, music, and video that embody the changing landscape of contemporary culture. When she works with other

performance artists, Gomula-Kruzic creates a conceptual guide and dynamic visual foundation for collaborators to interact with during real-time performances. Here she seems most at home with both performers and viewers, who are at times indistinguishable from one another as both explore and respond to her work. Sean Clute, sound designer and frequent collaborator, describes, “During our performances, I am improvising sound—just as the dancers are improvising movement—in response to Jessica’s work. We are all in dialogue with her work. She is the fixed piece and sets the mood for the performance.”

As the social commentary of her work engages viewers with layered and complex meanings, her visual forms flow with overlapping, constantly fluctuating imagery and vivid colors. Especially with her installations and collaborative performance pieces, viewers are submersed in a vibrant and dynamic world of hanging, maze-like fabric exploding with colors and provocative content. Imagery, though, is only one aspect of her work as the environment is equally crucial to the experience. Gomula-Kruzic scrutinizes the minute details of each installation: How many projectors? Where should they be placed? What surfaces should be projected upon? How should they be installed? The physicality of the experience, coupled with the dynamic imagery and vibrant colors, seduces viewers. Although typically playful rather than confrontational, the content envelopes viewers until they are seemingly inside the piece themselves, wrestling with the artist’s questioning of social norms.

Images from *Eleven Dimensions*, a recent installation/performance piece, are included in this show and catalogue. Compared to her previous installations, *Eleven Dimensions* contains more fluid, organic shapes, less overlaid text, and larger moments of negative space. Shifts between deeper, darker colors become more dramatic throughout the piece. While Gomula-Kruzic refines her use of the human form and contrasting colors in *Eleven Dimensions*, the real evolution is the piece’s dynamic nature. Throughout the piece, time is slowed down and then sped up—constantly being remapped. Stacked imagery moves at different speeds, at times pausing, reversing, or speeding ahead. Overlays of text ponder alternate dimensions of space and time. These refinements lend themselves to larger installations that merge dancers with other elements—including the audience members, who become part of the work as they walk through the artist’s environment. The audience finds themselves moving through a maze of hanging scrim, multi-source video projection, and sound. Willingly, or not, the audience’s own bodies become participants as light and shadows create overlays echoing throughout the space. Three dancers share the space with the audience, and move in response to the presence and actions of the audience. In fact, the audience plays an active role in directing the course of the event. According to Gomula-Kruzic, the interaction between installations, dancers, and audience is “a subtle embodiment of socialism and communal activism, [and] as an evolving game whose creation is affected by everyone present, the piece does not allow for passive bystanders.”

Judging by the plethora of distinct technologies used in her work, Gomula-Kruzic has never been afraid to embrace new media. She seems to gain inspiration from each medium to refine the core elements of her work. New technologies allow her to further explore her corporeal themes and refine her bold visual style. Whether her work is viewed through the web or mobile devices, in installation environments, or through more traditional filmmaking, she encourages the viewer to become an active participant in the work and to question the social structures referenced.

In her most recent video piece, *Quotidian Mandala*, Gomula-Kruzic evolves her visual trademarks by creating mercurial shots of the human form with latent social commentary. Conceived as a filmed dance piece with choreographer Pauline Jennings and dancer Jennifer Mellor, the camera work is just as integral to *Quotidian Mandala's* dynamism as the dancer's movements. What could be a documentation of a dance performance now becomes a video exploration that takes viewers inside the choreography to experience the dance itself—at times from within the dancer's personal space. Gomula-Kruzic, Jennings, and Mellor give the viewer new perspectives to understand modern dance.

By using multiple viewing angles, unexpected shifts in contrast, and moments of soft focus, the viewer's gaze swirls in and around the dancer—becoming an active participant. As *Quotidian Mandala* starts, the lighting is broadly even, and the color is fully saturated before shifting to a softer and less vibrant focus towards the middle sequences. Then, the light source moves dramatically to be directly above the dancer and becomes intensely harsh, before slowly fading out by the end of the piece—with a flash of full saturation, for a moment, before it is over. With her monochromatic white and blue costume, the dancer's movements leap off the pitch-black background and she appears to be dancing in a void. The dancer invites you to view her as a universal symbol, a woman searching for enlightenment through endless repetition of dance phrases, echoing the mundane repetition of daily tasks and routines within human daily life. The viewer is often pulled inside the dancer's movements through tightly framed intimate shots, as the dancer frequently breaks the edge of the frame with her arms, head, or legs extending out of view. Rarely do you see the entire dancer in the image. There are moments of direct confrontation between the dancer and the viewer, which places the viewer squarely inside the action. While the bold kaleidoscope of colors found in her earlier works are gone, contrasting tonality and dynamic changes form the central visual elements of *Quotidian Mandala*.

During the piece's development, Gomula-Kruzic communicated regularly with *Quotidian Mandala's* choreographer, dancer, cinematographer, and sound designer to create a level of trust and an easy collaboration. While Gomula-Kruzic directed and produced the film, there was a high degree of teamwork with Pauline Jennings, who filmed herself doing test movements and sent footage to Gomula-Kruzic, who then used a 3D modeling program to map the camera shots, sending them to Jennings for feedback. The complete video was storyboarded to address the detailed camera movements before filming. While this meticulous planning helped to create a sense of immersion for

the viewer, typical of Gomula-Kruzic's work, it also demonstrated her adaptation to new media to further explore her own style, prompting collaborators to respond to her work in new ways, which is also common trait to her work.

In her art, Gomula-Kruzic explores the nature of the physical body and societal constraints with an enveloping visual style that places the viewer in the action—frequently as a complicit participant. Changes in media reconfirm the dynamic nature of her work and her desire to create conversations around social consciousness. In both online and in-person interactions, her work is where the body meets the digital experience, a confluence of spinning ideas to be viewed from different perspectives. Gomula-Kruzic turns the audience into her partner—to see her work is to travel within her world, and to share the stage with her fellow collaborators.

Jason B. Jones
Executive Director, Western Museums Association

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California State University, Stanislaus
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