

Goran Tomcic, Statement of Plans

Goran Tomcic, "Pompom Nets"

We're no longer restricted to the white walls of a gallery. We can find different ways to short-circuit culture, or subvert, or even create something that's a secession almost. We use other situations, and we create our own situations. My situation in the past decade has been in building a participatory project, "Pompom Nets." This project is defined as the social situation, the relations of the participants within the environment set in motion by knitting pompom nets. The participants are the active creators of this project, and the participation is voluntary. The participatory art produced here is best described by the notion of "relational aesthetics," referring to the sort of work that creates temporary moments and experiments through interpersonal relations. The emphasis of the project is on the quality of the interaction and dialogue while also building new types of associations among the participants and their communities. These social events or networks are potentially transient, existing in constant making and remaking. This means that relations need to be repeatedly performed or the network will dissolve. Social relations, in other words, exist only when in process, and must be performed continuously.

The major first step of the every new situation of this project is to find ways to build and engage a diverse, local public. Right from the start, the project has attracted the involvement of many individuals, initiatives and institutions, and what I have learned throughout the process is that a community develops from working together in ways that transcend the limits of any one discipline or a desire. In this way, the research and practice of the project embodies the very notion of, as proposed by Bruno Latour, a "collective experiment," which allows and thrives on the uncertainty. The project is constantly modified by what is learned from different experiments, while searching to produce and share the common knowledge.

The participation is a true collaboration in which everybody can become a co-researcher, or as another French philosopher, Jacques Rancière, suggests, an "activated spectator." There is no privileged medium as there is no privileged starting point. Rancière implies that the politics of participation might best lie in putting to work the idea that we are all equally capable of inventing our own translations. Unattached to a privileged artistic medium, this principle doesn't divide collaborators into active and passive, capable and incapable, but instead invite us all to appropriate

the research for ourselves. Participatory art opens the minds up to a new ways of interaction and leaves the participants with new perceptions of the World.

Everyone is invited to join in and become a part of the project, and the research is then constantly enriched by the intertwining of different ideas and experiences. As British scholar Claire Bishop points out, by using people as a medium, participatory art has the capacity to communicate on two levels, to participants and to spectators, but to reach the second level requires a mediating third term, a spectacle. In the case of “Pompom Nets” this third term is pompoms itself. They make both the participants and the public emotional and happy.

I am particularly interested in the history and current state of the local fishing industry. “Pompom Nets” is a participatory installation and performance project, which is derived from, and tells the metaphorical story of an essential part of a fisherman's life: the art of making fishing nets, or the process of mending the used, ripped nets. The making and mending of fishing nets is a traditional communal activity for many fishing communities around the world. This cyclical, cooperative gathering at the fishing nets exemplifies human societies’ ethos of sharing and believing in a common future, both among individuals and as a community dependent on its ability to coexist with the marine ecosystem.

During all the future stations of this project, I will reach as many local communities as possible, including schools, nursing houses, NGOs, and fishing communities. In each of the participatory “Pompom Nets” performances, the participants coalesce as a full “tribe” on the nets, gathering and sharing. There is a great deal to say about this kind of “hands-on” participation: in the process of standing next to one another and among others, all hands on the nets, all searching, cutting, sewing, stringing and stitching in the same way, our lives are stitched together as we construct networks and mend the holes between us. Normally, a public situation such as I envision causes an ongoing conversation among the participants in this rhythmical process, as opposed to a more meditative process when one is alone in the making.

The project moves easily between exterior and interior spaces. Daily making of participatory pompom lines takes the shape of a temporary site-specific installation. All art which is made outside will be added to a growing installation inside, and vice versa. I often say that this project resembles the characteristics of an octopus, as they are known for their ability to squeeze through

any small hole or opening. Similarly the “Pompom Nets” project is able to adjust to any space requirement, always shrinking or expanding and reinventing itself.