Željko Beljan, Aleksandra Saška Gruden
Gumi Twist

When our inner senses turn to the games of living rooms, concrete playgrounds, and childhood tables, what are the elements that shape those memories? We may recall the rules of the games and the ways in which they were observed (or ignored). We may remember whether we were alone and what story was told, or the playmates with whom we jumped, shouted, and quarrelled over a defeat that still stings today. The experience of play itself may linger in memory through sounds, repetitions, rebounds, moments of exhilaration, and bursts of frustration; we remember it through rhythm, through our relationships with fellow players, with our own bodies, and with the bodies of others.

The temporary cosmos of play, governed by its own internal laws, rhythms, and rituals, is set apart from 'ordinary' life.[1] Entry into such worlds is an intuitive and essential part of childhood, but also of adult life: an integral element in the formation of meaningful social relationships, and in those first moments when, alone with an object in hand, we begin to tell stories. Donald Winnicott situates play in an intermediate space between the inner and the outer, imagination and reality, where a physical object occupies this unstable territory. A found stick is simultaneously an object made of wood, a fragment of a branch, and a character or tool within a story told about it; it becomes a magic wand, a sword, or the horn of an imaginary animal. Many games involving multiple players, on the other hand, operate through systems of rules that evolve as the needs of the group change. Any group wishing to play UNO, for example, must first reach a consensus about the level of cruelty permitted in the rounds to follow, since the 'official' rules printed on the back of the box have long ceased to matter. Games endure precisely because their rules are continually renegotiated collectively.

The exhibition *Gumi Twist*, named after the popular playground game in which players jump and weave through a loop of elastic stretched between two participants, explores games, toys, and playing through newly created objects by Željko Beljan, video works by Aleksandra Saška Gruden, and the transformation of the gallery into a site of interaction. Much like the way we remember childhood games, *Gumi Twist* approaches play through fragments or interpretations of fragments. Rather than presenting complete games accompanied by printed instructions, it offers movement, rhythm, sound imagined from a silent object, a close-up of a hand, or a toy waiting to be set in motion.

Željko Beljan's new series of works consists of simple toys assembled from found objects. In formal terms, Beljan's toys draw on the tradition of wooden push toys, rattles, and hobbyhorses from the Hrvatsko Zagorje region, combined with the vivid colour palette and symbolic vocabulary characteristic of Beljan's artistic practice. Footballers mounted on wheeled push toys and somewhat Dadaesque interpretations of the bicycle-hobbyhorse motif[2] dominate the series, inviting touch, sonic discovery, and interaction. The German philosopher Walter

1 Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*

Benjamin observed that children, working with discarded materials, "do not so much imitate the works of adults as bring together materials of widely differing kinds in a new, intuitive relationship" within the artefacts they create in play. In doing so, they construct their own small world within the larger one, following the same principle that guides Beljan's approach to making his toys. The essential point here is not nostalgia for traditional toys, but the renewal of an imaginative relationship with material.

Aleksandra Saška Gruden builds on this exploration of dynamic play by focusing on the body, gesture, fragments, and the forms that emerge through the act of play. In her video works, Gruden focuses on details: feet touching concrete, a body strained by the effort of maintaining balance, intertwined fingers, movement and pause. A body that retains and knows the gesture of play before the mind recalls its explanation. In this context, play persists as muscular habit, rhythm, and reflex preserved in body memory, which Gruden records, multiplies, and arranges into sequences within her video compositions. There is something contemplative and ritualistic in the way these movements are presented, something that comments on the ritual nature of play itself and on the occupation of space through play, sometimes no more than the surface of a table, sometimes entire rooms, playgrounds, or streets.

By occupying the space of Karas Gallery, Gruden and Beljan create a temporary world of play in which the gallery is transformed into a kind of playground, where the artworks are not untouchable artefacts displayed on walls but prompts and sets of rules that encourage visitors to move through the space and explore the fragments presented to them. A gesture seen in a video becomes a proposed gesture in the gallery; a coloured line across a grey floor is transformed into a path leading towards the exploration of a toy. The rules are written nowhere, and interpretation remains open: jump; stop; push; make a sound, the choice belongs to the players.

Marija Kamber

2 The very term *Dada* itself derives from a word that was (allegedly) chosen at random and which, in colloquial French, refers to a hobbyhorse.