

## Nathalie Quagliotto: *Maturity Playgrounds*

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## Nathalie QUAGLIOTTO: *Maturity Playgrounds*

Interview with Alexandre NUNES

Nathalie Quagliotto presented a solo exhibition, *Public Circles*, at Toronto's DeLeon White Gallery from July 30-August 30, 2009 and was part of the group show, *Play/Ground*, curated by Patrick Macaulay at Toronto's Harbourfront Centre from September 26-November 8, 2009. She received a MFA from the University of Waterloo in 2009 and a BFA from Concordia University in 2007. She works in the field of relational art, and in her practice, she takes everyday objects associated with childhood and disrupts their form by reconfiguring their placement and colour to the point in which they become socially tense and awkward situations for adults. She focuses on how play can be a method for people to work something out.

Alexandre NUNES: *Your recent works are quite humorous and obviously are a reference to playgrounds and everyday childhood objects. These installations, most of which could be used for play, possess aesthetic qualities such as a predominantly vibrant yellow colour that can be perceived as a warning to viewers. Could you tell us more about this?*

Nathalie QUAGLIOTTO: Yes, I'm glad you picked up on that. I'm using a very specific colour known as "safety yellow." You see it most often on street signs or on construction sites in the public sphere: it refers to an area of danger. This colour means to proceed, but with caution. The works are humorous because there's a twist to them. They remind people of childhood and excessive fun but at the same time they provide a distance from such memory because of their disruption

and reconfiguration. The yellow colour is a clue to this.

*Have such aspects always been part of your practice?*

Well I've always been interested in the connotations of reconfiguring objects. I've always liked the idea of taking an existing object and changing it somehow so that it could be perceived and used differently. You know I wasn't always working with childhood objects and I wasn't always working with one solid colour. I started incorporating these aspects into my sculptures in 2007. Before that, I was doing some interventionist public art. I love to target different places outside of the gallery and change objects in a candid manner by changing their materiality to see how people react to them or how they use them in a new context. Then I guess

Nathalie QUAGLIOTTO,  
*Maturity Reach*, 2008.  
Two trampolines, helmets,  
bins, ladders. 12 ft dia.  
Trampolines. Photo:  
courtesy of the artist.





look. And I'm absolutely fine with both groups because people do not have to go on the work to understand it. You can see the reconfigurations of objects and their consequences without physically experiencing them. I expect people to notice and consider the social disruption that is in front of them.

*The Sucker Series and Double your chances works are different from the playground ones. They are more focused on food and are sugar-oriented objects. Is it a way for you to take the childhood references to another level?*

Of course, I don't only work with commercial playground equipment. I'm also interested in using other public objects that are reminiscent of childhood social play. And candy is definitely a sculptural material that fits into my practice. The *Sucker Series* incorporates multiples of two yellow lollipops fused into each other with two sticks coming out on opposite ends. They are repackaged using their existing candy wrappers. My intention in this work is to make you negotiate with this problematic stick. The normal way of sucking on a lollipop is questioned because

Nathalie QUAGLIOTTO, *Maturity Bend*, 2007.

A slide with an upward second bend. 11 X 2 x 6.5 ft. Photo: courtesy of the artist.

I started to become more specific with the objects I use, and I began working only with those related to play and childhood. The first object that caught my attention in this sense was a playground slide and I saw a resistance in its being used. It bothered me that it was only socially acceptable for children to play with such objects. Well, what about the rest of us? I think it is very good and healthy to play no matter what age you are. So I thought of possible ways to make such objects more amusing for adults.

*It appears to me that your work could be perceived and understood from an intellectual and conceptual point of view or through a more engaged, relational and physical experience in the context of a gallery or a public space. How do children and adults react to your work?*

Now, I don't want to speak for everyone who looks at the work, but most of the time, children and adults tend to react differently. Children often see the sculpture as these happy things that they want to play on because of the bright colour and because of the familiar objects they see (i.e. a merry-go-round). However, adults are more aware of what is in front of them and take a cautious stance before deciding to play because they pick up on the significance of the yellow and the disturbing proximity of the doubled objects.

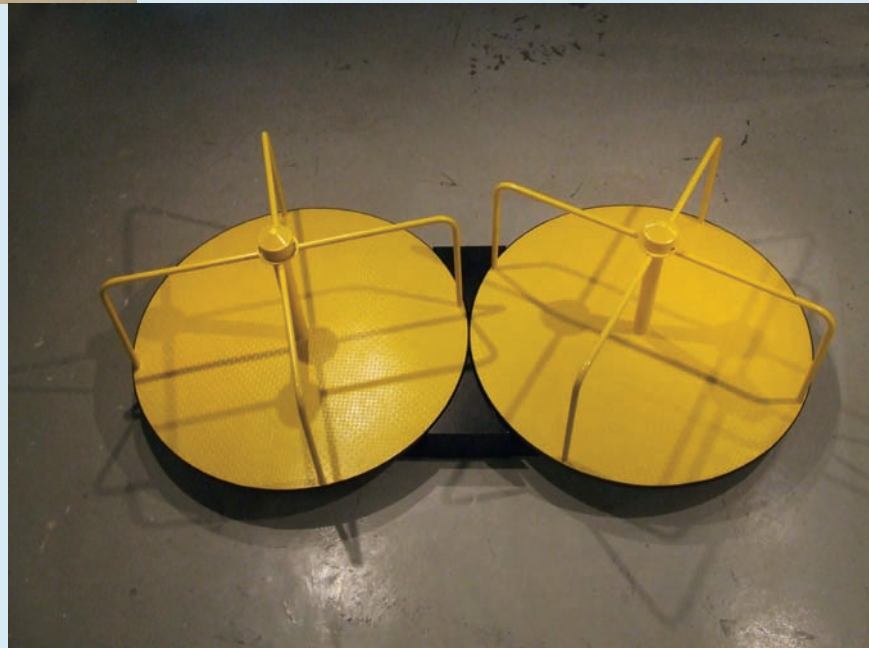
*In his book, Relational Aesthetics,<sup>1</sup> French curator and critic Nicolas Bourriaud talks about Cuban artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres for whom the number two was something*

*omnipresent in his work. Both of you have this double presence in common.*

That's true. His installations involving doubled objects side-by-side always bring up the idea of a partnership. I think that the double in his work describes an amorous duality within a social relationship. I think that the double in my work presents a co-operation within a social negotiation. Take the swings for example—I placed one swing in front of another swing. Two people can take the seats and swing if they trust each other to synchronize their swinging together. And this doesn't mean that only couples or friends participate. Complete strangers also come together and play on the work. I like it when this happens because the results are completely unexpected.

*Definitely, the viewer is engaged in an unpredictable experience. This is a step-by-step discovery of the unknown in a surprising and pleasant area of communication. It's a social interstice where people can interact and be faced with their own social manners. What do you expect from people? What is your goal?*

There are two groups of people who view the work: those who participate and those who



of this. For *Double your chances*, I took two bubble-gum machines and filled them with yellow gumballs. I tampered with the machines: I found two springs in each one that were responsible for dispensing the gumballs (these are \$1 machines so if you put in this amount, you will always get 1 gumball). Well, I took out those springs and now the wheel inside rotates more quickly, thus allowing more than one ball to drop when money goes in. So, people are invited to put money into the machines and thus receive more than one gumball. Sometimes people get two gumballs, sometimes four. The results fluctuate because the game is

Nathalie QUAGLIOTTO, *Maturity Spin*, 2009.

Two playground merry-go-rounds, wood, rubber, metal. 12 X 6 X 3.5 ft. Photo: courtesy of the artist.

based on chance. This work is a way of making the uncertainty of gambling part of the childhood pleasure of receiving candy.

*This reminds me of those plush toy machines that one finds in bars and supermarkets. You've got an infinite number of possibilities and models out there to inspire you. When did you start this series?*

I thought of using candy and dispensing machines in 2008... about a year after I began using playground equipment. It was not until 2009 that I really wanted to exhibit candy in a gallery context. This material was another way for me to express my ideas other than using the playgrounds. Candy automatically references childhood, provides pleasure because of its sweetness, is indicative of a celebration or reward, and is socially acceptable to be consumed in public. I wanted to use this and disrupt it.

*What is the starting point in your creative process? Is it an object, an idea, or your influences?*

Most of the time, I think what really catches my attention is an object in the public sphere. Something that children are attracted to and that adults seem to lose interest in or are shy to engage with in front of other people. I get really influenced by objects associated with hyper-amusement in areas of play. So visiting playgrounds, parks, carnivals, theme parks, amusement parks, waterslides, ice-cream stores and candy stores are inspiring. But there is so much more than this. I mean the list can go on and on!

*Are your sculptures built from scratch or do you use found objects?*

I use pre-fabricated objects. I believe there is more of a disruption and reconfiguration that takes place when I use an object that is real and has a history rather than constructing my sculptures from scratch.

*In the conception and construction of your projects, do you collaborate with others?*

I have worked with technicians and engineers for my sculptures but not for all of them. The reason for this is because I allow participation from the audience. The work must be solid and stable enough to support anyone who accesses it.

*Are your works shown and tested by your family and friends before they are presented in the public sphere?*

I will always be the one to test each work, but what I usually do (and I think this is the best thing to do) is get a thin person and a

heavy person to try out the work and if the object doesn't break—it's ready. A sculpture is never exhibited if it hasn't been tested by me and people I know.

*I guess that the public authorities would have to do some similar security and test approvals before your work could be accepted and integrated in a public context where there's no supervision, such as city parks. Is this something you have experienced before or are interested in pursuing?*

I agree that I would need the permission of public authorities if I were to put these structures in parks, but I'm not at all interested in that. I'm not making these installations so that I can place them in a public park. The reason for this is that the work must be monitored otherwise it can't be exhibited. Another reason is that I am dealing with illegality in the work. I mean you would never find two merry-go-rounds right next to each other. In fact, a merry-go-round must be 18 feet away from any other structure in a park for safety purposes. I'm placing them together and exhibiting them in the gallery environment on purpose.

*To conclude, do you feel that you have been through the entire process of creating playground installations? What are the plans for your next project?*

To be honest, I feel that I have only begun the playground series. There's still other playground equipment that I want to disrupt and reconfigure in new ways. This is an ongoing series. However, what I'm actually interested in next... is doing a participative project with two bumper cars. Carnival

structures and rides are starting to grab my attention. Hold on tight! ←

**Alexandre NUNES** is a visual artist based in Montreal. He has studied graphic design, worked as a cartoon colourist for a production house and completed coursework in an intensive web development program at Maisonneuve College. Currently, he is enrolled in a BFA program at Concordia University and works for *Espace* magazine.

NOTE

1. Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, Trans. S. Pleasance & F. Woods with M. Copeland, Dijon, Les Presses du réel, 2002.



**Nathalie QUAGLIOTTO**, *Maturity Correlation*, 2008. Two swings facing each other. 12 X 5 X 8.2 ft. Photo: courtesy of the artist.

**Nathalie QUAGLIOTTO**, *Double Your Chances*, 2009. Tampered bubble-gum machines, bubble gum. 2 X 1 X 4 feet. Photo: courtesy of the artist.