

Everyday Grappling Operations  
Orange County Museum of Art, California  
Mariángeles Soto-Díaz, 2018

### Artist's Statement

In the martial art of Judo, one never uses direct force against an opponent. Through training, one learns to neutralize the opponent's energy, that is, to use their strength against them by timely redirection, thereby nullifying it.

In *Everyday Grappling Operations*, I engage with Judo as a framework for accessing affect. I'm interested in affect as embodied and bound up with consciousness, as an intensity beyond both the body and conscious cognition, as a reminder of their ontological entanglement. Affect has a mobilizing energy that projects beyond the self, as an aesthetic and performative force.

What are the ways that affect can encourage or hinder powerful action for political projects of emancipation? How can affect enable us to build strength and resilience in order to counter - to nullify - social, economic and symbolic forces of domination?

Growing up in Caracas, Venezuela, I practiced Judo for 16 years under a teacher who emphasized the philosophical aspects of the practice as much as the physical forms. Culturally, Venezuela is no exception in associating martial arts with hypermasculinity, and its entrenched culture of machismo created a field of contradictory meanings around women's engagement with them.

Although I did not continue my Judo practice after immigrating to the US, the teachings left a deep impression, and provided me with a strong contrast to the cultural, gendered and religious norms of my native country. In particular, I was inspired by Judo's pacifist ethos and its approach to violence. It is precisely this area of Judo that I now find so urgent today, as violence in so many forms pervades both the US and my native country, and so much of the world.

*Everyday Grappling Operations* explores Judo as a philosophy, a feminist praxis and a demanding physical practice. The project itself takes place over a six-month period and is multidimensional in form, consisting of a museum installation; my own commitment to Judo training both within and outside the museum; a series of public events including films, panels and performances; and a social media campaign for people engaging in #everydaygrapplingoperations.

In the installation for *Everyday Grappling Operations*, I reconfigure Judo mats, texts (by Judo founder Jigoro Kano and other relevant material), imperfect symmetry and color, and the

visual element of the coil or spiral as a gesture of steady, gradual unfolding. I am interested here in the spiral as an enduring ancient symbol of renewal, present in the large 2,000-year-old petroglyphs found in Venezuela last year.

As part of the project, I have also renewed my own Judo practice, and before the exhibition began training with Sensei Nori Bunasawa, a 9th Dan (4/2016), Kodokan Judo, at Bunasawa Jukkendo in Costa Mesa, California. During the course of Everyday Grappling Operations, I will continue to study and train, both within the Judo mats installation at OCMA and at Sensei Bunasawa's dojo.

The phrase "everyday grappling operations" captures my own practice at the moment: it describes a great challenge that is surrounded by vulnerability, given the possibility of failure at any time. In that spirit, I invite the public to join me in engaging with a difficult practice of their own for at least 21 days, and write in their challenge with the tag #everydaygrapplingoperations, as a way to access this shared affect, to register oneself as a subject but projecting elsewhere, in other subjects at the same time.

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\*This project is lovingly dedicated to the memory of my grandmother, who I only recently learned was the subject of physical violence by my alcoholic and sometimes charming grandfather, and to my mother and her siblings, who were too young to process this.