

Audio file

[Mandy Palasik Interview_Vers2.mp3](#)

Transcript

Danielle Garza (Staff)

Hi everyone and welcome to our Artist Spotlight Series, on behalf of the City of Glendale Arts and Culture Commission, and the Arts and Culture Commission reinforces Glendale 's identity through arts and culture projects and integrates these arts projects into the lives of the people of Glendale. Amongst the many programs that's the arts and Culture Commission has is the Adams Square Mini Park Gas Station Program. It's a historic landmark built in the nineteen thirties, which is a streamlined modern gas station. It's now utilized for these public arts projects, has three hundred - three hundred sixty-degree views and has very, very cool space in a public park. One of the artists putting on an exhibition here at the Adams Square Mini Park Gas Station is Mandy Palasik who will be telling us a bit more about her exhibition. But briefly, it's a customizable inflatable exhibition will be very colorful and cool, and everyone should come check it out. So yeah, thank you, Mandy, for meeting with us today. And giving us your time to pick your brain about art and life and everything.

Mandy Palasik

Yeah. Thank you for having me. I'm really excited to be here.

Danielle Garza (Staff)

Of course. So, I do have a series of questions. for you. We kind of just wanted to start with your background and inspiration. Your studio emphasizes curating experiences that blend art, architecture, and community. So, we would just like to know what inspired you to adopt this integrative approach in your practice?

Mandy Palasik

Yeah, my interest in art, architecture and community is really a continuation of the experiences and interests that were fostered during my upbringing and those just kind of naturally evolved into my professional passions. As a child, I was immersed in a world of making and creativity. Whether that was helping my dad renovate our house or I became really obsessed with earning Girl Scout badges through arts and crafts and community service projects. And a lot of those values I still keep with me today, especially the Girl Scout motto, "to leave a place better than you found it". And so, from very early on, I developed an appreciation and a passion for transformation. Learning that you can improve the lives in places around you just through your creative contributions was really empowering. And so fast forward, I finally found my way to architecture and that was after my art teacher told me that I had a good hand and that I should look into architecture. To be honest, I was in my first year of college. It was - I was undeclared at this point. And it was the first time that I've ever heard of architecture or been exposed to architecture. And it really resonated with me. The more that I looked into it, I was unfortunately discouraged from pursuing a traditional career in art.

And so, architecture really brought together my interest in, you know, creating spaces that people enjoy and – and having the ability to exercise your artistic expression and for me, architecture is really an art form and art is really the soul of architecture. And so, I've always found these two disciplines to be integrative and at the service of the community. And so that became really the, the core of my practice.

Danielle Garza (Staff)

That's awesome. So, it sounds like that was kind of a sort of catalyst moment of integrating art and architecture together. Would you say there was any sort of project that happened after that that really cemented you wanting to intertwine art and architecture together?

Mandy Palasik

I would say there's probably not a single moment or project per say, but it was really a series of these realizations throughout the past to where I am now. So after architecture school, I was really fortunate to gain hands on experience working on critical community projects in my hometown of Baltimore, I worked with nonprofits, community based organizations, and community members through engagement strategies to bring projects like more affordable housing, revitalization of storefronts, community centers, public libraries, and through these experience I witnessed firsthand, the power of art and design to really make a difference and transform communities. Some of these projects had little to no funding and were just simply like more guerrilla urbanism interventions where the community would come together and paint a mural on a crosswalk or a vacant side of a building or turn a vacant lawn into a sculpture garden. And so that really spoke volumes to me about the power of community and collaboration and the ability of art and design no matter the scale or cost to really make a positive impact. I also, along the way in my early career got to work with public artists through the one percent for public art program. And that was really cool, because just seeing artists bring their creativity and bring more life to the spaces that you designed in ways that you don't even imagine was really, really inspiring and it also introduced me to the world of public art. You know, how - how do artists find work? How do they work, and with architects and that kind of also put the thought in my head that well, maybe I want to be an artist too. I've always wanted to be an artist, but maybe there's opportunities for me to also work on projects similar to, to those. And so, it was really these experiences that solidified it for me that art, architecture, and community is what I'm most passionate about and what really drives my work. From there I was really just dedicated to trying to find a career pathway that would allow me to balance those interests.

Danielle Garza (Staff)

That's so awesome. I love hearing about all of the different areas that you've worked in. That sounds so cool. It does seem like narrative seems to be a big influence on your practice and you've mentioned via like your website that your work begins with a concept or story. Can you elaborate on how storytelling influences your design process?

Mandy Palasik

Sure. I - I guess I'll start by saying in architecture school, it's really drilled into you that everything should have a purpose, that nothing should be done without intention or meaning. And it seems

rather militant, you know, for a creative to be kind of bound by those regulations that you can't make anything that's just ornamental or simply made for it to be beautiful and to bring joy to people, and so I think that - I think you know, making art that's beautiful and that brings joy to people is a totally valid reason to make art. So, I do struggle a little bit with trying to justify my - my work in that sense, to really start with a blank canvas. And so, for me, umm, my work is very sight responsive and those parameters kind of guide my work and help me to ensure that the work is not only an authentic reflection of the people in the community that it serves but also the place. And again, this - this really stems from my background in community engagement and working in architecture where you're - you're working to unify diverse voices and feedback and trying to manifest them in a physical form. Be it a building or a public space or a work of art that reflects the values, the identity and the voices of those individuals, it's a challenge. But it's also a privilege and a responsibility that we, as stewards of the built environment, need to take seriously. And so, to inform that process to make sure that it's reflective of the community and tells the story of the community. I begin with historical research, site analysis, and really reliance on community engagement to understand, you know, the context in which I'm working. And within that process, the critical information starts to emerge. You know, the common themes, identities and those are really what I take and I draw inspiration from to then, inform the themes and the geometries and the scale and the materials that are employed in my work and - and so that's - that's in a nutshell, the process of how I began a concept or know what story to tell for each different community in which I work.

Danielle Garza (Staff)

Yeah. And so that would ensure that your public art installations or public artworks are really reflecting those communities where they're inhabiting.

Mandy Palasik

Yeah, exactly.

Danielle Garza (Staff)

So as far as the City of Glendale and the Adams Square Mini Park Gas Station, you have an upcoming exhibition titled "Soft Surrealism", and that's going to open at the Adams Square Mini Park Gas Station on March third, so congratulations. Very exciting coming up. What message or experience did you aim to convey at this particular site?

Mandy Palasik

Yeah, I. Well, I'm very, very, very excited about this project because of course it seeks to activate this beautiful historic structure in the park. And so, for this piece, I'm focusing on inspiring wonder, curiosity, play, and imagination. So, the glass cube will be filled with these inflatable biomorphic shapes that will create an abstract sculpture within. And I think that the interesting thing is that it's a juxtaposition of these rigid and soft structures and so they will seemingly expand within the architecture. And frame views to and from this base, inviting visitors to, to see their community from different perspectives and to engage in the, the work. At night it will be illuminated in a colorful array to serve as sort of this beacon within the park. And it's just my hope that visitors will stop for a moment and just take a pause and reflect and allow their mind to wander when they're looking at the work. Umm, you know, sort of like finding shapes in the clouds. And I think as a society, our day-

to-day lives are so vast, and we just forget to take that moment and to ourselves and whether that's letting your mind wander or just appreciating something or finding nostalgia in forms. Just hope to give - to give people that pause.

Danielle Garza (Staff)

That's awesome. Yeah, I myself, as someone who has worked in the arts and then also as an artist who's done a lot of public artwork. I think I love personally public art. I love that sort of idea of, like getting it out-of-the-box. You know, the - the cube gallery space that people typically think of, a lot of the time when they're thinking of art and exhibitions. So, with this particular space, it's so cool because it's in a public park and you can go anytime you can see it day or night and have those three hundred- and sixty-degree views. Which is, yeah. Really exciting for you, someone who's incorporating lighting as well as part of the exhibition really thinking about all aspects of what the viewer experience is like. In the "Soft Surrealism" exhibition coming up, you'll be using lightweight synthetic plastic to create the customizable, biomorphic inflatables that you're just talking about. Generally, how do you approach the selection of materials for your projects and what role does materiality play in conveying your artistic vision?

Mandy Palasik

Yeah. So, I'm not an artist that works in any particular material or style and because my work is site responsive, the project contacts and sites really what drives material considerations as well as other you know project design considerations. And that's really empowering for me because I have a constant desire to learn and explore and evolve and so the challenges that each project brings really affords that opportunity. And so actually "Soft Surrealism" was inspired by pop art and surrealist art, and so the - these inflatable pieces reference the vibrant, playful forms of the pop art movement. You know, think of Jeff Koons while being lightweight enough to be portable and safe for community engagement. The organic shapes, they have these biomorphic qualities to them, and together they can form these abstract geometries that's present in surrealist work and when you look at it, it makes you wonder what is that? What's it trying to do, what does it look like. And I think that's - that's the fun behind Surrealist work. It's up to the viewer to really perceive what they think it is or what it wants to be. And so, this work was actually originally designed as an interactive kit to parts installation that could be assembled by the community. On the ends of the inflatables are magnetic nodes so it's much like an inflatable - inflatable Legos. And the idea is that the community would come together and create these abstract, evolving sculptures. And these elements of error were - literally allows the pieces to take on a new life form while being easily transported to various sites and so I'm very conscious of the lifespan of temporary artworks and wanted to ensure that this piece would be able to be reincarnated and recycled and recycled into new engaging art forms rather than, you know, end up in a landfill. So, the versatile nature of this piece allowed it to adapt to various different settings and to be reincarnated and have these different lifeforms for people to enjoy in different capacities. And so, for the Adam Square Mini Park Gas Station, I wanted to explore that juxtaposition of rigidity and fluidity. And so, the glass and steel of the gas station structure becomes essentially a container for these soft inflatable pieces that smush against the glass and fill the void in a really interesting way. And so that's yeah, that's - that's when I and saw the call and I saw the structure that's I initially thought of this piece as bringing in a new life.

Danielle Garza (Staff)

That's so cool. I love that juxtaposition, juxtaposition that you're just talking about as well. That's – that's awesome. So, you've really considered this entire exhibition like from all angles. Is there any particular aspect that you're excited about that you'd like to share?

Mandy Palasik

Yeah, I'm most excited, as with all my projects, to see how people enjoy and interact with the installation. As we mentioned before, the sculpture takes on a new life form with the space and even for me and composing this, you know, I can do the renderings and I can envision, but when I constructed it just it just takes on a new alien form, for lack of better words within the space. And yeah, I envision this, especially at night. I'm excited to play with light. This is the first time that I really got to experiment with lighting. I envision this will take on kind of an extra-terrestrial quality. It's like an alien form and I don't know, like a test tube or something or, you know, maybe the viewer will see it as a calming, like aquatic scene and so to me, you know, that's where the surrealism comes in. The beauty of interpreting art as you as you want it to be or what it means to you. Umm. So, I'm – I'm looking forward to activating the gas station with something contemporary and unexpected and bridging past and present in an engaging way.

Danielle Garza (Staff)

I love that. That's so cool. Yeah, and with surrealism, consciously what someone is seeing with the work, but also unconsciously what's coming out of these shapes for different people, kind of like the clouds that you mentioned earlier, like looking up at the clouds and seeing different sorts of things. That's so exciting. So as far as your artistic design process. What challenges have you encountered in balancing your roles as an architect, artist, and educator, and how have you addressed them?

Mandy Palasik

Yeah, balancing these roles has been both, you know, rewarding. Very rewarding, but also challenging. But they've all contributed to my work and – and values as a creative to if I had to summarize, you know it in some way. I wasn't able to find a career in architecture or art that would really allow me to balance these interests and so, you know, after – after trying to work in different capacities, I just decided that in order to do this, I had to go on my own and try to forge that path. And, you know, artists, architects are not known to be great businesspeople. You know, we're thinking with other parts of our brains, and that was certainly an adjustment. You know the uncertainty of finding work and making sure that you can keep the lights on. But also trying to be authentic to yourself and stick to your values in a society that you know, values influence and the latest trends and a capitalist society. And so yeah, trying not to give into marketing demands or selling out quote unquote was something that I'm very conscious of. And, and even breaking into the world of public art, as any artist who has applied to calls or tried to get into public art knows it's – it's extremely, extremely difficult. And a lot of calls want experienced artists with a breadth of work. But there are no resources to support emerging artists in a lot of case, and especially minority artists, and it can be very defeating. And so, you know, through – through those processes, I've, I've learned to grow thick skin. You know, build confidence and just keep putting myself out there and my work out there. And I think so far that's my key to survival that I'm sure that will change. I hope that will change.

Danielle Garza (Staff)

It's so true. It's so true. I think being any sort of professional artist, you do have to somehow develop the business sense whether you like it or not. Like understanding that sort of world and then like you said, growing a really thick skin like getting used to rejection at times and putting all that effort into applications or grant writing or whatever it is you're doing and yeah, sometimes you knock it out of the park and sometimes you don't. But it's like there's something to be learned from every experience, and especially those rejections too. But yeah, you've definitely had a lot of wins under your belt, which is awesome and exciting. And we're really excited about this upcoming exhibition for Glendale. How would you say your artistic identity has evolved over time, and what factors have influenced this evolution?

Mandy Palasik

Yeah, my artistic identity has been shaped mostly through my journey and our pathway to where I am now and it is and will continue to be in a constant state of evolution, and I think that's intentional. That's by design. Because each project does, you know, present new opportunities to work with different communities and materials and that's really exciting to me as an artist and an architect. And I would say early in my career I was focused a lot on the technical execution, you know, understanding building codes, you know, structural and safety considerations. And that really gave me a solid foundation to my practice. And then over time, with that knowledge, I was able to embrace a more experimental and intuitive approach to design and that's still very much rooted in my architectural and community development background. But I've grown more confident in allowing playfulness and interaction to drive my work and recognizing that meaningful design doesn't always have to be rigid or overly controlled, or, you know, have too much purpose. And I would say public art in particular has been really instrumental in pushing my practice because it's allowed me to really explore these creative different mediums and working with different collaborators, fabricators, I'm – they're learning new trades and learning through working with other tradespeople. But also playing at different scales and integrating new community engagement strategies. And so, yeah, I've seen my work as can constantly evolving and I'm excited to continue exploring the intersections of art, architecture and community in unexpected ways.

Danielle Garza (Staff)

That's so cool. I'm keeping it modular.

Mandy Palasik

Yeah.

Danielle Garza (Staff)

That totally makes sense, yeah. Especially, yeah, coming from an architect and, that's been really wonderful to hear more about you and your past projects and just your sort of design sense as far as architecture and art and public art, and yeah, what it's like being an artist. So yeah, thank you again for taking the time with us today. Again, this is Mandy Palasik and we are interviewing her on behalf of the Glendale Arts and Culture Commission for our Artist Spotlight Series. So yeah, thanks again, Mandy.

Mandy Palasik

Thank you so much for having me and thank you to that Adams Hill community and the City of Glendale for this great opportunity.

Danielle Garza (Staff)

Awesome. Thank you.