

PROMOTION RECOMMENDATION  
The University of Michigan  
School of Art and Design

Elona D. Van Gent, associate professor of art, with tenure, School of Art and Design, is recommended for promotion to professor of art and design, with tenure, School of Art and Design.

Academic Degrees:

M.F.A. 1989 Tyler School of Art, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA  
B.A. 1984 Hope College, Holland, MI

Professional Record:

2005 – present Associate Professor of Art, with tenure, School of Art and Design, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI  
2004 – 2005 Visiting Associate Professor of Art, without tenure, School of Art and Design, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI  
1999 – 2004 Associate Professor, with tenure, Department of Art and Design, Grand Valley State University, Allendale, MI  
1993 – 1999 Assistant Professor, Department of Art and Design, Grand Valley State University, Allendale, MI

Summary of Evaluation:

Teaching – Professor Van Gent is a compelling teacher and mentor. One of the objectives of her teaching is to demystify the subject under consideration, whether the content is technical or conceptual. This is important because she often teaches in areas that might otherwise become bogged down in technical proficiency at the expense of creativity and vision. She stresses clarity of articulation in the classroom for herself and requires the same of her students. She encourages students to become active participants in their educational process utilizing strategies for shared and mutual authority in the classroom. This creates an atmosphere of mutual respect and shared knowledge. An important distinction in her teaching is her ability to bridge the paradigms of art and design. Letters from Professor Van Gent’s students testify that she engages them in activities beyond the classroom that have high relevance to their future creative practices and careers.

Creative Work / Research – Professor Van Gent is a highly creative, insightful, and accomplished artist and designer in the emerging field of cybersculpture. She has been recognized nationally and internationally for her challenging and engaging sculptures which are contemporary mash-ups of historical and mythical biological forms – chimeras, monsters, and hybrids. She has received widespread acclaim for her use of digital technologies to inventory virtual biological forms, create virtual recombinations of these forms, simulate evolutionary development of hypothetical organisms, animate these hybrids, and ultimately bring these imaginary beings into the tangible and material world using digital fabrication processes such as rapid-prototyping. Professor Van Gent’s work has been particularly distinguished by her juxtaposition of these sculptural hybrid creatures and characters with biological and cultural artifacts in historical collections, museums and “cabinets of wonder,” such as the *Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology* in St. Petersburg, Russia. Her work has been included in numerous national and international exhibitions and film screenings and she has been a frequent guest lecturer. Her sculptural work is pioneering in the use of contemporary technology, yet it consistently reveals sensitivity to and an awareness of human gesture and emotion.

### Significant Recent Works and Activities:

- 2011 Lecture, *How do you teach a course about interdisciplinary creativity...*, Creativity, Play, and the Imagination Conference, Columbia University, New York, NY
- 2011 Group Exhibition, *Full Circle: The Art of Materials, Research and Creation in Rapid Prototyping*, Sarofim School of Fine Arts Gallery, Southwestern Univ., Austin, TX
- 2011 Fellow, Academic Leadership Program, Committee on Institutional Cooperation
- 2010 Group Exhibition, *Dimensional Figures and Environments: Artists Engaging Technology*, Northern Illinois University Art Museum, DeKalb, IL
- 2009 Group Exhibition, *The Darwinauts' Travels, Celebration of Science in Lorraine*, Metz Station, Metz, France
- 2008 Group Traveling Exhibition, *e-Form*, Today Art Museum – Beijing; Duolun Museum of Modern Art – Shanghai; Jinse Gallery – Chongqing; Art Map Gallery – Wenzhou, China
- 2008 Group Exhibition, *Digital Sculpture and Biomorphism*, Conseil Général de Muerthe et Moselle, Nancy, France
- 2007 Screening, *Fallen*, Close Encounters Conference, Society of Literature, Art and Science Conference, Amsterdam University, Amsterdam, Netherlands

Service – Professor Van Gent is a fully engaged citizen of the school, university, and national and international communities. She has actively and regularly participated as a juror, project coordinator, and art gallery chair for SIGGRaph's Computer Graphics and Interactive Techniques' organization since 2001. She represented the School of Art and Design in co-writing a successful proposal for and recruiting a new faculty member in the Computational Media Cluster hire, part of the university-wide Interdisciplinary Faculty Initiative (with faculty from A. Alfred Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning, the School of Music, Theatre & Dance, and College of Engineering). She recently made valuable contributions to the school as a member of the Art and Design Dean Search Committee, the UM3D Lab Director Search Committee, and she chaired an Art and Design Faculty Search Committee in 2005. Professor Van Gent has been an active and insightful contributor on university and school committees such as the Art and Design Executive Committee (2006-08), A&D Grand Rapids Initiative (2010-11), and numerous additional administrative and academic groups.

### External Reviewers:

Reviewer A: "The cutting edge technical processes that Elona Van Gent engages with in the production of her work are in themselves analogous to the subject of the creation of 'monsters'...I find that the work that appears to be most successful is the work that, although sited in an actual space, remains virtual, for example 'WalkerOne' which playfully overlays the virtual with the *real* view available from out of the gallery window."

Reviewer B: "The body of work as a whole is innovative and constitutes a critically important addition to the dialogue surrounding the intersection of art and technology. It stakes out significant territory for the role digital media can play within the larger arc of cultural practice. The work is pioneering—both in its investigation of the possibilities of digital fabrication technologies (particularly rapid prototyping) and as a model for the design and organization of digitally generated experiences in general...Her work maintains a highly professional standard deserving of the broad critical review and international recognition she has received to date."

Reviewer C: “The works stand out because of their bold disregard for formal aesthetics, which only seems to strengthen their impact. This is not to say the works are not built competently, in fact, Professor Van Gent’s work is very technologically strong...Professor Van Gent’s work is more at home in exhibits that are either in academic environments or in technology-based shows. Professor Van Gent’s exhibit record is strong in these settings. In addition, her work is included in important international travelling exhibits that provide good exposure.”

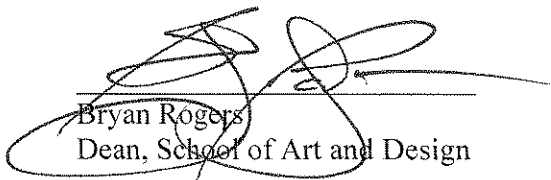
Reviewer D: “Elona Van Gent’s artistic practice combines scholarly research with technological experimentation. It is remarkable for its unique synthesis of the technological, the aesthetic and the humanistic....That she has exhibited widely and internationally, and created important public commissions, indicates her stature in the non-commercial art world....Her professional accomplishments to date are remarkable, and her current artistic inquiries are evolving in fascinating ways.”

Reviewer E: “She is a thorough researcher when it comes to establishing the philosophical associations between her work and contemporary theories about making art. Van Gent is one of those unique and rare individuals who bring a whole field to a higher level of functioning. She has an original vision that allows her to make intelligent and rightful connections to the past and the present in her work...The quality and quantity of work she has produced are at an excellent level demonstrated by the fact that it is routinely exhibited with the best in this field...I do not believe that you could find another sculptor/educator with a better balance of exhibitions, research, teaching and public involvement in the field.”

Reviewer F: “Her recent roles as project coordinator, Arts director and Chair of the various publication, exhibition and juried projects for Leonardo Journal and SIGGraph, indicates not only her deep involvement within her professional circles, but a level of respect and credibility in terms of her leadership within these organizations.”

Summary of Recommendation:

Elona Van Gent is an exceptional artist-designer-educator, one who is working at the intersections of art, design, digital technology, and traditional media. I strongly recommend Elona D. Van Gent for promotion to professor of art and design, with tenure, School of Art and Design.



Bryan Rogers  
Dean, School of Art and Design

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