

The Nation's Finest: Sports, Art and the Moving Image

Saturday, February 17, 2018 at 7:30 pm — Yerba Buena Center for the Arts

Curated and presented by Brett Kashmere and Astria Suparak

This program deconstructs the athlete body – how it is used for national, political, and social agendas, and how it is viewed and re-crafted by artists (who are sometimes athletic!).

The Nation's Finest is part of A Non-Zero-Sum Game: Sports, Art, and the Moving Image, a series of exhibitions and events launching, and part of, INCITE: Journal of Experimental Media's newest issue, *Sports*. For millennia, sports have been intrinsic to daily life, physical well-being, education, civic identity, and social harmony. That presence has expanded in the last century to occupy entire sections of newspapers and news hours, in turn begetting 24-hour television channels, talk radio stations, and endless punditry devoted to sports. We contend that over the past decade, sports have assumed an even larger, more multidimensional place in our culture, advancing, for instance, further into the fields of contemporary film, art, and media. This move, facilitated by projects such as ESPN's prominent 30 for 30 documentary series, the founding of sport film festivals, a rise in sports-themed gallery exhibitions, and the births of Twitter, sports blogging, and localized, fan-driven websites like those comprising SB Nation, is reflected in the ongoing legitimation of sport within the academy. As Jennifer Hargreaves noted in 1982, although "Sport has traditionally been accorded low academic status in higher education... there has developed an increasing interest in sport as a cultural phenomenon" which carries through to today.

Just as sport has been embraced by artists across mediums and genres, so too has it been taken up as an object of study, broadly; traversing physical education, communication studies, the social sciences, and more recently, the humanities. A new academic subfield—critical sport studies—has emerged in response to this swell of cross-disciplinary research. As a result, the traditional schisms, and often times, antagonisms between sports performance and spectatorship, creative production, and scholarly activity (jocks vs nerds, square vs cool), have been blurred. Sports are now readily assimilated into pop culture, celebrity culture, music, and fashion trends. In this program, we look at five decades of artists' video and film focusing on sports, including perspectives across gender, racial, and national identities. (Astria Suparak and Brett Kashmere; INCITE Vol. 78 : Sports)

Two Finger Kung Fu (2009) by Internet; GIF, color, silent, 20 second total (played 2-3 times), exhibition file from the maker

19 year old Shaolin martial artist Huang Shaosong (monk name Si Xingsong) balances his entire body on two index fingers, starting from a seated position, going into a handstand, and ending with a front handspring (this GIF reverses the footage). Huang is in a state of meditation during this performance. He is one of two people in the world who can do this, says the internet.

Lake Placid '80 (1980) by Nam June Paik; digital video, color, sound, 4 minutes, exhibition file from the maker

"Paik produced this exuberant, high-speed collage as a commission for the National Fine Arts Committee of the 1980 Olympic Winter Games. In a fractured explosion of densely layered movement and action, images of Olympic sports events are mixed with Paik's recurring visual and audio motifs: the dancers from Global Groove, Allen Ginsberg, the song Devil With a Blue Dress On. Ski jumpers, skaters and hockey

players are re-edited, fragmented, colorized, accelerated and transformed, colliding on the screen in a frenzy of synthesized energy. Movements, time-frames and images shift in seemingly random, often ironic juxtapositions. The hyperbolic pace and rhythm of this energetic 'music video' ends with Paik's computer-graphic version of the Olympic logo superimposed over a chanting Allen Ginsberg." (Electronic Arts Intermix)

Putting the Balls Away (2008) by Tara Mateik; digital video, color, sound, 19 minutes, exhibition file from maker

"[A] reenactment of the historic September 21, 1973, tennis match between Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs, created for broadcast on the 35th anniversary of the original event. The Battle of the Sexes was the most-watched live sporting event at that time, and pitted chauvinist against feminist, when women tennis players demanded equal pay to that of their male counterparts. Both players are performed by Mateik, whose work wages strategic operations to overthrow institutions of compulsory gender. After each game the competitors 'switch sides.'" (Video Data Bank)

The Nation's Finest (1990) by Keith Piper; digital video, color, sound, 7 minutes, exhibition file from the maker

"This short video explores, through a collage of images, text and voice over, some of the issues raised when Black athletes are called upon to 'represent' what have been historically seen as 'White' nations, within the international sporting arena... Through referencing historical legacies of the disenfranchisement and exclusion faced by Black people, the piece goes on to examine how the transition of the Black athlete from the periphery to the centre of the nation's psyche, carries with it a network of contradictions and limitations." (LUX)

demonstrating the imaginary body (2015) by I AM A BOYS CHOIR; digital video, b&w, sound, 12 minutes (excerpt from 28 min), exhibition file from the makers

"[A] work that exists somewhere between a gender studies lecture and an ice skating competition. Powered by the queer imagination, I AM A BOYS CHOIR investigates the body myth of the female athlete and the process of earning institutional validation by conforming to specific identity markers in regards to class and gender. There is also a lot of Tonya Harding." (I AM A BOYS CHOIR)

How Great You Are O Son of the Desert!, Part 1 (2013) by Haig Aivaizan; digital video, color, sound, 26 minutes, exhibition file from the maker

"[T]he infamous headbutt of Zinedine Zidane of the Italian defender Marco Materazzi in the World Cup final in 2006 becomes a time portal into systemic social transgression, class warfare, and violence across histories both intimate and regional." (Sfeir-Semler Gallery)

Olympiad (1971) by Lillian Schwartz; 16mm film, color, sound, 2.5 minutes, exhibition file from the maker

"Figures of computer stylized athletes are seen in brilliant hues chasing each other across the screen. Images are then reversed and run across the screen in the other direction; then images are flopped until athletes are running in countless ways... not unlike a pack of humanity on a football field." (Bob Lehmann, Today's Film-maker magazine)

Half-Court Flip Basketball Shot (2013) by Internet; GIF, color, silent, 12 second total (played 2-3 times), exhibition file from the maker

Ashlee Arnau, a cheerleader at William Carey University in Mississippi, makes an acrobatic half-court shot, scooping the ball up during a front handspring and hitting nothing but net.

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