

PRESS COVERAGE



Spectator Sports

April 12 — July 3, 2013

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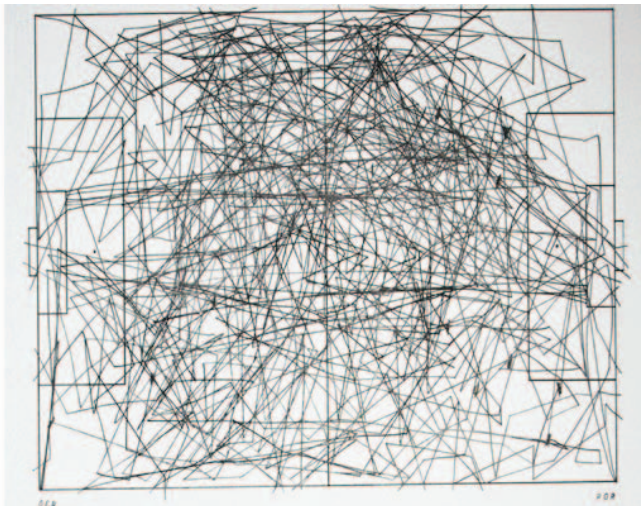


ART

At the Museum of Contemporary Photography's 'Spectator Sports,' You Won't Mind Missing the Big Game

Posted yesterday at 2:15 p.m. | By Jason Foumberg

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PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY

A map of the gameplay in the 2006 FIFA championships, now on display at the Museum of Contemporary Photography.

Susken Rosenthal was just one of the millions of fans who watched all 64 games of the 2006 FIFA Soccer World Cup championships on TV. But Rosenthal, an artist in Germany, spent her TV viewing mapping the ball's position on the field—each kick, pass, and score—during the games, with her pencil on a sheet of paper. The resulting 70 drawings (that's 64 games plus 6 overtime periods) are tangled webs of action. They are also striking as abstract drawings.

Rosenthal's sketches take over an entire wall of Spectator Sports, the new exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Photography. The exhibition takes a look at sports fans and fanatics through the lens of contemporary art. It is a successful marriage of art and sports in a city where both scenes thrive but their audiences rarely overlap.

The above drawing is from the third-place match between Germany and Portugal on July 8, 2006 played in Stuttgart. (Germany 3 - 1 Portugal). It's just the ball's movement during the first half (the second half of the same game is below). An excellent video of the artist producing a drawing is available on her [website](#). "Most of the drawings were made in real time, as the matches were being played on live television," says Allison Grant, curator of Spectator Sports.

Want to see more? Rosenthal is just one of a dozen artists featured in *Spectator Sports*, on view through July 3 at the Museum of Contemporary Photography, 600 S Michigan. For info, [mocp.org](#).

Jason Foumberg is Chicago magazine's contributing art critic.

C Notes is a roundup of the latest theatre, art, music, literature, pop culture, and dance news from around Chicago.

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Spectator Sports

Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago



Julie Henry, *You'll Never Walk Alone*, 1999. Courtesy Museum of Contemporary Photography

What if we were to scream at artworks the way we yell at football on TV? What if the number of people who attended the Whitney Biennial rivaled the number of people who watched the Super Bowl? These questions bubble up in *Spectator Sports* (at the Museum of Contemporary Photography through July 3, 2013), the latest exhibition to attempt a synergistic pairing of an odd couple: art and sports. The arranged marriage is a bold move in Chicago, a sports and art town whose fans

are more like addicts of the gallery or the game—but rarely both. (Bad at Sports is the name of a long-running art podcast hosted in Chicago.)

Both the art world and the sports industry are built on foundations of fantasy, faithfully maintained by legions of fans. With photographs, drawings, film, video, and a video-game by ten artists, spanning the years 1978 to 2013, the exhibition elaborates on the postmodern conceit that to watch a game is also to participate in it. To that end, Michelle Grabner's seven untitled cell-phone pictures of a televised football game magnify the hall-of-mirrors experience of watching from multiple sidelines (the living room, the gallery). But they still embody the thrill of being on an extended team of players and spectators, in that Grabner's football photos are a nod to Nancy Holt, who, as a girl, was told by her parents she could not watch televised sports because she was a girl. Later in her career, Holt snapped photos of televised football games in reflective revolt. Grabner revives Holt's project with her own images. This is what it feels like to be on a team with people whom you may never meet.

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Joshua Lutz: *Hesitating Beauty*
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at SFMOMA, San Francisco

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Julie Henry, "You'll Never Walk Alone," 1999

RECOMMENDED

In the world of sports, spectators are fanatics. And fanatics can only grasp the seemingly unexplainable psychical prowess of professional athletes as artful renditions of otherworldly beings. The media, on the other hand, is complicit in the creation of these false idols. Their job is to provoke a calculated emotional response on the spectator and to have them spend their hard-earned cash on trivialities worn or endorsed by their idols.

Canadian artist Brett Kashmere responds sarcastically to the ways in which spectators place their hopes on the shoulders of these false heroes. In "Anything But Us Is Who We Are," from 2012, a diptych that consists of a burned LeBron James Cavaliers jersey and a flat screen displaying the video game NBA 2K10, we see LeBron's digital clone acting like a puppet, locked in perpetual practice mode on the center of the court, dribbling the ball while giving his back to his fan base. Perhaps proo

that money means much more to professional sports than civic pride and loyalty.

In another great piece by Kashmere, "Valery's Ankle," from 2006, parallels are drawn between competition and national identity. Here the artist constructs a pseudo documentary based on the 1972 Summit Series hockey matchup, which had Canada's ultra-aggressive team competing against the classy Soviets. Tough words like "vengeful" are used to describe team Canada as we see various vicious fights amongst players, official documents, newspaper clippings and historical footage. Kashmere's engrossing narrative eventually led us to believe that hockey was more than just a sport—it was a proxy for the Cold War.