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Complete *Hard Targets* Interviews + Checklist

DOUG AITKEN

Born 1968, Redondo Beach, California

start swimming, 2008

LED-lit lightbox

82 x 84 x 8 inches

Courtesy of 303 Gallery, New York; Victoria Miro Gallery, London; Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich; and Regen Projects, Los Angeles

Christopher Bedford: *Start swimming* is a very sensual object. Can you talk about this piece and the way you conceive of sensuality as a device in your work?

Doug Aitken: In some ways *start swimming* occupies a “nonrigid” space as an artwork. It can appear passive, neutral, or as a call to action. The work exists in the form of a large sculptural sign—both word and image. When it’s observed with a slow eye, however, the obvious reading of the work begins to short-circuit, and new interpretations arise. What appears to be bold and graphic and confident gives way to a sense of ambiguity and vulnerability.

The imagery that is contained within the letterforms reveals itself to be taken from an aerial view over a subdivision that’s under construction; we have no idea where it is.... As we come closer we discern berms of carved earth, recently erected wooden housing frames, milled lumber piled like match sticks, and black paved cul-de-sac roads not yet lined with houses. The landscape below us appears modern and hyperreal.

We are thrust into a state of both recognition and voyeurism, looking at something that is rendered foreign when we see it redefined from the flattened aerial perspective. As alien as the mountains of the moon, this humanless man-made environment is something we can see but not touch. And it’s an incomplete landscape, an unfinished puzzle, with sections of roads, foundations, and houses all at different states of growth and development. Then we zoom back further again, and once again the large glowing letterforms spelling out “start swimming” frame the landscape. But what do they tell us differently now? Walk, run, get out, jettison cargo, push exit door, burn credit and loans, pull the parachute release, and “start swimming.”

CB: Many of the artists in this show play with the notion of failure in relation to sport. For me, *start swimming* relates not to a failed action but perhaps to a failed or failing body, as in, “you better start swimming...”

DA: Part command, part question: Is it time to “start swimming” or drown?

MATTHEW BARNEY

Born 1967, San Francisco

CREMASTER 4, 1994

35mm film transferred to DVD with sound, 42 minutes

Private collection, New York

+

CREMASTER 4, 1994

Prosthetic plastic, bridal satin banner, Manx tartan, silkscreened laser disk in onionskin sleeve

Vitrine: 36 x 48 x 41 inches

Private collection, New York

CREMASTER 4: VALVE, 1994

4 chromogenic prints, self-lubricating plastic frames

33 1/4 x 27 1/2 x 1 1/2 inches

Private collection, New York

MARK BRADFORD

Born 1961, Los Angeles

Practice, 2003

Single-channel video with sound, 3 mins.

Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York

Double Speak, 2008

Papier-mâché, wire, soccer balls, netting

72 x 48 x 36 inches (app.)

Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York

Kobe I Got Your Back, 2008

Papier-mâché, wire, basketball

20 inches in diameter

Collection of Dave and Nancy Gill, Columbus, Ohio

Pride of Place, 2009

Chromogenic print, set of 20

31 1/8 x 24 inches

Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York

CB: Can you tell me about what draws you to basketball?

Mark Bradford: Oh that's easy: the sanctity of the church. I use the word "church" because if you ever go to a game, it is as if the believers are coming to worship at the throne. But of what? The mere fact of watching physically exaggerated people? Do they all secretly wish to be tall? "If only I were your height..." Do they think they would then be able to ascend like Christ did onto the throne? Working within this landscape, for me, a 6' 7" black male, is likened to Madonna (the singer, that is) being allowed to give a concert in Vatican City. It's just too good to pass up, and what is too good to pass up is the questioning of my maleness and the black body. So many times in America we think we know the black body, enough to understand and draw formal conclusions about it. I wanted to mix it up a little, to peek under the dress.

CB: What about the video *Practice* (2003), the inspiration for the photographs in *Pride of Place* (2009)? In it you play sequences of failure (playing clumsily) against a moment of sweet success (when you shoot a perfect basket, nothing but net)—all while dressed in a cumbersome invented uniform.

MB: *Practice* is about the insistence or desire to—dammit!—get it right. Actually the proposition was quite simple: make one shot, and as you pointed out, it was "all net!" There were no retakes, and the first time I put on this dress (let's call it what it was, a dress) the

momentum of weight just propelled me. After about 20 minutes I just went with it and allowed the performance to take over. Just like the performative nature of playing in front of thousands of people in a stadium, you have to tune in and tune out simultaneously. Yes, I was aware that I was performing with a loaded gun, but at the same time I also had to play and negotiate space, albeit very badly from time to time. I loved doing this piece because it was so personal and awkward at the same time.

CB: Do you identify a formal relationship of any sort between sporting practice and the practice of making art for a living?

MB: No...but the old adage “practice makes perfect” seems salient here.

HARUN FAROCKI

Born 1944, Nový Jicin (Neutitschein), Czechoslovakia (then annexed to Germany; now Czech Republic)

Deep Play, 2007

12-channel video installation

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist and Greene Naftali, New York

CB: What drew you to the 2006 World Cup final as a subject for *Deep Play*?

Harun Farocki: In 2001 curator Roger Buergel had proposed doing something involving soccer. We initially thought about Bayern München football club, but that did not work out, and I forgot about it. After Roger became head of the 2007 Documenta exhibition, he got back to me. Now it had to be about the world championship, which happened to take place in Germany one year before the opening of Documenta. I've played team soccer for 35 years, and I've watched every world championship since 1958, and I know that the finals are rarely the best games. But it had to be the finals—for the same reason that Hitchcock thinks a film set in the Netherlands must have windmills.

CB: What about the strategy of using 12 simultaneous accounts of the game?

HF: We had planned to use some 20 screens—later it turned out that production capabilities and the exhibition space would limit us to 12 screens. From the beginning, it was my idea to find out how soccer will be seen in the future: In a literal sense, which graphic elements will be included when a game is shown on TV? And also, how does our society look at soccer?

Obviously one tries to objectify the performance of a player and to systematically analyze the tactics. The movements of the players and the ball are tracked for those reasons. The images become a means of measurement. Soccer is analyzed in the same way as work or war is. Journalists nowadays address the same issues, and they have become a main part of the public discourse.

Still, there is a huge difference between soldiers and players. In the First World War one learned that soldiers can no longer be heroes. Players still can. They still have room to move.

CB: Were connections between masculinity and sport—central concerns of this exhibition—part of your thinking as you began work on *Deep Play*?

HF: Not so much. Although—at least in Germany—no player has yet admitted being gay publicly, things have changed. Today, when women and men play soccer together, the women perform skillfully with the ball. But it will still take time for them to catch up, because it's difficult to inscribe yourself into a history of 100 years. A star like David Beckham shows

that the idea of masculinity in soccer is changing. On the other hand, one tries to make a computer game out of soccer. And 90% of today's computer games are for boys.

DOUGLAS GORDON

Born 1966, Glasgow, Scotland

PHILIPPE PARRENO

Born 1964, Oran, Algeria

Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait, 2006

Two-video projections

Dimensions variable

Collection Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo

Produced by Anna Lena Films and Palomar Pictures

ANDREAS GURSKY

Born 1955, Leipzig, German Democratic Republic (now Federal Republic of Germany)

F1 Boxenstopp III, 2007

Chromogenic print mounted on Plexiglas in artist's frame

74 x 200 inches

The Broad Art Foundation, Santa Monica, California

F1 Boxenstopp IV, 2007

Chromogenic print mounted on Plexiglas in artist's frame

74 x 200 inches

The Broad Art Foundation, Santa Monica, California

DAVID HAMMONS

Born 1943, Springfield, Illinois

Out of Bounds, 1995–96

Dirt on paper in artist's frame with basketball

53 1/4 x 41 1/2 x 11 1/2 inches

The Museum of Modern Art, New York; gift of the Friends of Contemporary Drawing, The Friends of Education of The Museum of Modern Art, and Peter and Eileen Norton, 1997

Untitled (Basketball Drawing), 2006–07

Dirt on paper, wood frame, asphalt

120 1/2 x 100 x 27 inches

L + M Arts, New York

BRIAN JUNGEN

Born 1970, Fort St. John, British Columbia

Prototype for New Understanding #12 2002

Nike Air Jordans

23 x 11 x 12 inches

Collection of Ruth and William True, Seattle

Prototype for New Understanding #13, 2003

Nike Air Jordans, human hair

30 x 16 x 11 inches
Private collection, Vancouver

Prototype for New Understanding #14, 2003
Nike Air Jordans, human hair
25 x 14 x 12 inches
Collection of Lawrence B. Benenson

Prototype for New Understanding #16, 2004
Nike Air Jordans, human hair
22 1/2 x 12 x 18 inches
Collection of Joel Wachs

Prototype for New Understanding #20, 2004
Nike Air Jordans
24 x 24 x 8 inches
Collection of Alexandre Taillefer and Debbie Zakaib

Michael, 2003
Screen print on powder-coated aluminum, 10 boxes
Overall: approximately 34 x 44 x 33 inches
Rennie Collection, Vancouver

Talking Sticks, 2005
5 carved baseball bats
33 x 3 inches each
Collection of Evan Siddall

Blanket No. 3, 2008
Professional polyester sports jerseys
54 x 47 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Casey Kaplan Gallery, New York

CB: Can you talk about the collision of American athletic apparel and Northwest Coast aboriginal art in your work, and the kind of hybrid language your objects speak as a result?

Brian Jungen: I am interested in exploring the methods of how contemporary Native American/First Nations identity is influenced by popular culture. I see professional sports, and the cultural industry around the star athletes of professional sports, as performing a collective desire in society for shared ceremony and ritual. Aligning this desire with the fetish around the collection and presentation of Native American art and culture seemed like a good place to start.

CB: When you were conceiving your *Prototypes* (made of Nike Air Jordan sneakers) or your blankets (made of sports jerseys) did you have different models of masculinity in mind?

BJ: I would say different models of masculinity are at play, as you put it. I had a warrior figure in mind when I made those pieces, but not necessarily male. Those pieces, especially the blankets, have more to do with regalia and ceremony than they do with battles. Often such pageantry is a display of masculinity at its most feminine. At any rate, those pieces are not meant to be worn, but if they were, I suppose men or women could use them. I never really consider masculinity as gender specific. On a formal note, most of the sports materials I use are made for men.

CB: Do you have a personal connection to sports that drew you to its material culture rather than other commercial products?

BJ: I like sports. Mostly as a participant rather than a fan or spectator. Team sports are something I prefer to watch unless they are casual and unorganized. As a spectator I prefer live events to watching TV. I tend to keep a hand in the NHL just to have something to talk to my family about, as they are not versed in contemporary art.

CB: When you have discussed the *Prototypes* in the past, you have talked about the work you do on the sneakers as a form of violence.

BJ: The violence I mentioned was really an illicit thrill in cutting up a valuable consumer good and a trendy street fashion object. Although I can see the connection people have made to the gesture of cutting as a form of violence or anarchism, that is only minor as a motivation for me. I see the action as transformative rather than destructive. It was never a “kill your idols” tactic, but I do enjoy the interpretation. As far as I know, Michael Jordan got a kick out of the *Prototype* series. He owns one.

JEFF KOONS

Born 1955, York, Pennsylvania

Soccerball (Bumblebee), 1985

Bronze

7 1/2 inches in diameter

The Sonnabend Collection

CARY LEIBOWITZ

Born 1963, New York

Homo State, 1989

2 felt pennants

9 x 10 inches

Courtesy of Alexander Gray Associates, New York

Misery Pennants, 1990

4 felt pennants

9 1/4 x 24 inches

Courtesy of Alexander Gray Associates, New York

Sissy, 1991

Printing on rubber football

5 1/2 x 9 1/4 inches

Courtesy of Alexander Gray Associates, New York

CB: You have produced a variety of multiples that riff on sports paraphernalia—do you have a personal relationship to organized sport?

Cary Leibowitz: My main athletic feats have been eating and shopping, and neither looks too good in tight jeans.

CB: What drew you to the material culture surrounding American sports as a subject?

CL: I was never a part of any team growing up—I never felt attractive or acceptable. I think my desire to be average/normal/thin/liked by everyone initiated these interests. The idea of gallery softball or bowling is still funny and intriguing.

CB: Do you conceive of your multiples as fine art objects sold like an editioned print by a gallery, or do you imagine them having a more commercial or vernacular life as objects in the world?

CL: Fine art is what I am after. It's my world. I like the idea of everyone liking me and my work, but in reality the stuff needs to be judged in context—not as a mass-produced aesthetic. Vernacular still needs its high and low counterparts to make any sense.

GLENN LIGON

Born 1960, Bronx, New York

Gold Mudbone (Liar) #2, 2007

Oilstick and acrylic on canvas

32 x 32 inches

Courtesy of the artist and Regen Projects, Los Angeles

Glenn Ligon and Byron Kim (Born 1961, La Jolla, California)

Rumble Young Man Rumble (Version #2), 1993

Paint stick on canvas punching bag, metal

36 x 13 x 13 inches

Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Butler Family Fund, 1995

CB: Can you characterize your relationship to sports and to male athletes both on a personal level and as subjects?

Glenn Ligon: A friend once said that what he liked about Andy Warhol's *Screen Tests* is that you got to stare at people in the films in ways you could never do in real life. Sporting events allow us to stare at male bodies without fear of reproach.

CB: The most visible sports in this country—particularly football and basketball—are dominated by black men, and those sports articulate through images a very specific model of black masculinity. As an artist, how do you engage with that intractable archetype?

GL: I have explored the black male body in quotes: that is, instead of using images to represent the body, I have used text to think about issues of black masculinity. Even when bodies are represented in my work—as in *Notes on the Margin of the Black Book* (1991–93), a piece that explored Robert Mapplethorpe's photographs of black men—the images are juxtaposed with texts that complicate our ability to “just look.” Through the texts, the social, historical, and political context of the images becomes as important as the images themselves, which works against the seemingly intractable nature of the archetypes.

CB: You have spoken in the past about inhabiting Richard Pryor in your work. How does or can that same operation relate to your engagement with athletes or athletic subjects?

GL: Pryor's business was about inhabiting characters, so it is not so hard to imagine inhabiting him. Also, Pryor's critiques of masculinity were very astute: so many things that I want to say have already been said by him. But with athletic subjects I take a different approach. I don't want to be inside; I want to be outside. Sometimes I want to be just “one of the guys” and watch like everybody else. Where my gaze goes when I am watching is a whole other matter.

KORI NEWKIRK

Born 1970, Bronx, New York

Closely Guarded, 2000
Plastic pony beads, artificial hair, metal basketball hoops
120 x 48 x 24 inches
Collection of Lois Plehn

Untitled, 2004
Basketball hoops, beads, enamel
175 x 19 x 25 inches
Collection of Dennis and Debra Scholl, Miami Beach, Florida

CB: When we both participated in a public discussion about masculinity and sport in contemporary art in 2008, you drew particular attention to the male locker room as a site that focuses feelings of both inclusion and exclusion. Can you talk a little about this observation with regard to your work with sports subjects and imagery?

Kori Newkirk: They all smell a little bit different. Locker rooms that is. Oh and the men who inhabit them.... But that room is perhaps one of the few remaining male-only spaces, at least that I've ever been allowed to enter. And observe. But not in that creepy way. They are such complicated places, full of complicated people and complex issues. Popular culture presents them in various guises as places for predator and prey. Now, I haven't been in a locker room in some time, maybe things have changed a bit. But I suspect the dance is the same.

And live nude men, or would that be "naked" men? Not that the word matters much; this time they mean the same thing. Now, depending on where one stands, those words can elicit what we call "feelings." Which, if you've been paying attention, (real) men are not supposed to have. I think it might be the smell thing again: all those pheromones in the air, throw in the tension, the mirrors, the water, and the bodies....

The locker room is where bodies are thrown up against each other, in the visual sense that is. In other ways too.... Anyway, "feelings" again. I taught high school for some time, and it was always interesting to see the latest crop of ninth graders walk into the school. Now these days, for some reason, there are freshmen boys who resemble almost full-fledged "men" beside "boyish" boys—pre/proto pubescent. *Young men* might be a better description. Most all of them have some construct of what defines and defies masculinity knocking around in their heads. The spectrum of bodies is spectacular (again, not in the creepy way), and I was often dragged back to my own school days, and particularly to memories of PE (physical education) and the "feelings" that went with it. In a way there is no other place where issues of masculinity are made real and even more personal on a weekly basis.

We are face-to-face with questions of who, what, and why we are. As boys to men that is. In those moments, in that place, when we exchange one armor for another, real and imagined notions and questions of masculinity are internalized and externalized at the same time. It's the unending game of *compare* and *contrast* that we (men) play all the time.

CB: Can you expand on sports and related questions that revolve around race and masculinity in your work?

KN: Real men play sports. Or so I've been told, taught, and teased about. As a tall black man, my body is mirrored in various sporting events, though nothing captures the imagination and loosens the tongue as much as basketball. I'm not a fan; never have been really. But because I look like I do, it is naturally assumed that I must love the game.... Black. Check. Tall. Check. Young(ish). Check. Therefore I must like basketball.... It is assumed that I care about last night's game, the point spread, and the score....

A few years ago it got to be too much. Everyday it seemed there was an inquiry. The beer-for-breakfast crowd outside my building was the most intense. Black men of a certain age

knew after a bit that I would easily give up the sports pages of the newspaper. Although they were friendly in general, I could still sense their suspicion toward me.

I've never really been a "team player." I enjoyed the occasional organized team game—capture the flag, volleyball, kickball—but my participation in sport was confined to gymnastics and figure skating. Not exactly the most masculine of sports to the general population. But like the production of culture, mostly a solo endeavor....

My interest in basketball lies with the assumption that my appearance dictates my interest. That it must be part of my genetic makeup. Black man = Must. Love. Basketball. I tread close to traitor territory, not only to my race but to my gender as well. My work on basketball started from a more scientific standpoint. It began at the molecular level with self-portraits and that led me to think more about the idea of the body in the sport. Specifically, the black body that is celebrated and visible while being denied and invisible at the same time.

I've been dealing with that masculinity and sport question my whole life. But what I came to realize is that if you can throw your body around, questions of realness become moot and mute. Though the threat of not being quite masculine enough might remain, spoken or not, the sheer athleticism and potential for disaster and injury can result in a different sense of respect.... Well, at least from hockey players. Pain being a great equalizer.

Does the conversation even have legs to stand on (arthritis and cramped as they can be)? Where and how do dancesport, as well as, say, NASCAR, and even golf, enter into the discussion and definition of sport, much less address questions of masculinity? How does the evolution of gay and transgender competitive sports teams skew the question of what it means to be a (real) man?

CATHERINE OPIE

Born 1961, Sandusky, Ohio

Faifo, 2007

Chromogenic print

30 x 22 1/4 inches

Courtesy of Regen Projects, Los Angeles

Football Landscape #1 (Fairfax vs. Marshall, Los Angeles), 2007

Chromogenic print

48 x 64 inches

Courtesy of Regen Projects, Los Angeles

Football Landscape #5 (Juneau vs. Douglas, Juneau, Alaska), 2007

Chromogenic print

48 x 64 inches

Courtesy of Regen Projects, Los Angeles

Josh, 2007

Chromogenic print

30 x 22 1/4 inches

Courtesy of Regen Projects, Los Angeles

Marcus, 2007

Chromogenic print

30 x 22 1/4 inches

Courtesy of Regen Projects, Los Angeles

Seth, 2007
Chromogenic print
30 x 22 1/4 inches
Courtesy of Regen Projects, Los Angeles

Football Landscape #14 (Twentynine Palms vs. Big Bear, Twentynine Palms, CA), 2008
Chromogenic print
48 x 64 inches
Courtesy of Regen Projects, Los Angeles

Leon, 2008
Chromogenic print
40 x 30 inches
Courtesy of Regen Projects, Los Angeles

Michaiah and Cruze, 2008
Chromogenic print
40 x 30 inches
Courtesy of Regen Projects, Los Angeles

Rusty, 2008
Chromogenic print
30 x 22 1/4 inches
Courtesy of Regen Projects, Los Angeles

David, Austin, and Bryant, 2009
Chromogenic print
40 x 30 inches
Courtesy of Regen Projects, Los Angeles

Football Landscape #16 (Waianae vs. Leilehua, Waianae, HI), 2009
Chromogenic print
48 x 64 inches
Courtesy of Regen Projects, Los Angeles

Martin, 2009
Chromogenic print
30 x 22 1/4 inches
Courtesy of Regen Projects, Los Angeles

CB: What drew you to high school football as a subject?

Catherine Opie: One August, Julie [artist Julie Burleigh] and I were planning a two-week family vacation to her hometown of Church Point, Louisiana. I was a little worried about being away and wanted to work while I was not teaching, so I arranged to photograph my nephew's high school football practice. I was curious about the notion of practice and the intensity of ritual in relationship to football players having to hit one another with such force during the practice. After a week of making images I realized the games became more interesting in relationship to the ritual of performance, the goals of winning, and team spirit. This is a community event not only for the kids involved, but the families as well. It was something that I was a part of in high school—going to the games, cheering on the players—but nothing I have participated in since. I began to think about the notion of every town having a football field, and in my mind it became an extension of the American landscape. The portraits became a way of looking at the individual in relationship to the notion of a team, as well as a way of literally photographing some seniors who are possibly enlisting in the military and going to war upon graduating from high school.

CB: How do you engage with these young men as you are photographing them?

CO: When I photograph the players, it is always after practice, and it is very quick. There is usually a line behind me and a lot of teasing and yelling at the person posing, but I just try to get them to be present with me for that moment. I am basically a witness with a camera on a high school football field. It is chaotic and quick.

CB: How would you describe the relationship between this body of work and previous works like *Self Portrait/Pervert*, *Self Portrait/Cutting*, or your *Domestic* photographs that have become iconic in terms of queer identity?

CO: There is actually no relationship to my queerness in making this work. I have photographed within my identity as a lesbian and outside of it in different bodies of work. I actually have concern that the work will be discussed in terms of my sexuality and think that looking and documenting is much more complex. It doesn't necessarily fall under the pre-prescribed notion of "queer" identity that gets stamped on everything, in the same way that not all of these boys want a singular identity attached to them as just "football player." I think the work is about gender and the examination of masculinity.

CB: Has your established art-world identity as a photographer associated strongly with queer subjects and themes helped or hindered your work with high school football teams? And, how has this series inflected the way your work is understood by the art world?

CO: To be honest I am nervous in approaching the teams and having them google me, and for homophobia to play into an inability to make the work. My experience in the two years of making this body of work has proved to be an amazing experience of inclusiveness in the communities I document. It has become very tender in a funny way. It hangs over my head that I would be excluded because of my sexual preference.

I think at this point there is a broad understanding that I create bodies of work that are not necessarily singular in addressing a specific discourse of identity or one's sexual preference. But that preference carries over in very political ways in terms of documenting my community. That work is to create representations of a community that still faces huge discrimination and at this point is still striving for equality.

PAUL PFEIFFER

Born 1966, Honolulu, Hawaii

The Long Count (Thrilla in Manila), 2001

Digital video loop with sound, metal armature, LCD monitor, DVD player

Overall: 5 1/4 x 6 1/2 x 36 inches

Collection of Dennis and Debra Scholl, Miami Beach, Florida

Three Studies of Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion, 2001

3 digital video loops, projectors, metal armatures, DVD players

Overall screen size: 3 1/2 x 18 1/2 inches

The Broad Art Foundation, Santa Monica

Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse (7), 2002

Duraflex digital chromogenic print

48 x 60 inches

Courtesy of the artist

Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse (12), 2004

Fujiflex digital chromogenic print
48 x 60 inches
Courtesy of the artist and The Project, New York

Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse (14), 2004
Fujiflex digital chromogenic print
48 x 60 inches
The Broad Art Foundation, Santa Monica

Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse (15), 2004
Fujiflex digital chromogenic print
48 x 60 inches
Courtesy of John and Amy Phelan, New York

Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse (28), 2007
Fujiflex digital chromogenic print
48 x 60 inches
Courtesy of the artist and The Project, New York

Caryatid (Red, Yellow, Blue), 2008
Three-channel digital video loop, three custom monitors with embedded media players
96 x 25 x 21 inches
Collection of Dennis and Debra Scholl, Miami Beach, Florida

Caryatid, 2009
Single-channel digital video loop, custom monitor
27 x 30 x 21 1/2 inches
Galerie carlier | gebauer

CB: What do you want to achieve by stripping away advertising, team identifications, other players, and even the ball itself from your images of basketball players?

Paul Pfeiffer: I'm trying to emphasize an uncanny aspect that I see in found images. Whenever I watch sporting events on TV I find myself already looking at the situation divorced from the context of the game. I'm already erasing the player numbers and the scoreboard in my head, and focusing on things like the body language of the athletes or the scale relationship between human figures and the surrounding architecture. It's a certain otherness in the whole scene that interests me. I think of the arena with its glaring lights, masses of spectators, and near-naked performers as emblematic of everyday life.

CB: Much of your work, but particularly the *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* series, has a rapturous quality that almost suggests the depictions of religious ecstasy we know from art history. Can you comment on this elision of the sacred and secular?

PP: I'm generally interested in the way people come together en masse around charismatic personalities or shared beliefs. It's like people are wired to form crowds, as though a deep need exists in individuals that can only find fulfillment in the context of a big group, as big as possible. Whether people come together for religious reasons, political causes, or to root for their favorite sports team almost seems less important than the excitement of being part of the crowd in and of itself. I think there's a constant elision of the sacred and secular where masses of people are concerned. Lots of religious events are held in sports stadiums and arenas. And at sporting events fans often sing church hymns and spirituals together, although I don't know if they think of it that way. The anthem of the English national [rugby] team is "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," for example.

CB: You have also done works related to Muhammad Ali, most explicitly in *The Long Count* series, one of which is exhibited here. Could you talk about it and about your use of broadcast imagery?

PP: I was attracted to Ali specifically because he is an American icon. I based the three works on Ali on a DVD box set that became for me a kind of found object in narrative form, like a readymade history. In making the three works of *The Long Count*, I only focused on the knockout rounds to abstract the narrative even more. [The pieces relate to three of Ali's most famous bouts: versus Sonny Liston in 1964 in Miami (*I Shook up the World*); George Foreman in 1974 in Kinshasa (*Rumble in the Jungle*); and Joe Frazier in 1975 in Manila (*Thrilla in Manila*).]

I wanted to tap into something fundamentally American, but I also wanted to tap into a bigger history enfolding broadcasting and how iconicity is promoted via narratives. This was especially important when I was working on *The Saints* (2007), because the 1966 World Cup final [referenced in that work] was the first final to be broadcast live. So that became ground zero for my exploration of live broadcast history. In visual terms, the footage feels very much like video, linking it further to the present. My work on the footage using modern technology was a way to note the passage of time—history—in the materials of video. The source footage is one bookend and my work is the other.

COLLIER SCHORR

Born 1963, New York

Beauty (K. T.), 2002

Chromogenic print

38 3/4 x 30 in.

Courtesy of 303 Gallery, New York

Hold, 2002

Chromogenic print

38 1/2 x 47 1/4 in.

Courtesy of 303 Gallery, New York

Hooded Figures (B. C.), 2003

Chromogenic print

33 x 44 1/2 in.

Courtesy of 303 Gallery, New York

Lives of Performers (G. R.), 2003

Chromogenic print

39 1/2 x 52 in.

Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Photographic Arts Council, 2007

152 lbs. (H. T.), 2003

Chromogenic print

37 x 47 1/2 in.

Collection of Alan Hergott and Curt Shepard

CB: Can you tell me what first drew you to the subject of high school wrestlers?

Collier Schorr: In the early 1990s I was commissioned by an architecture magazine called *Metropolis* to choose a building and photograph it in the style of portraiture. I chose my high school [in New Jersey]. By chance, I happened to pass by the wrestling gym and saw a practice.

These kids seemed contained, as opposed to the basketball team I saw in the gym and the crowds of kids in the hallways. I think that is what drew me to wrestlers and has kept me compelled: the sense that they are on the ground, in a small space, and completely distracted. Later I sought out the number one team in the country, from Blair Academy, also in New Jersey. For four years I followed the team, mainly in practice. Maybe this is because I was first exposed to wrestling in this intimate setting.

CB: How do you interact with the players to convey such an intimate perspective?

CS: In the Blair practice room it is over 100°F. I wear wrestling shoes as you can't wear street shoes. I wear shorts and a T-shirt, usually a Blair Academy T-shirt. On any given day there are probably 50 boys in the gym, wrestling in pairs and trios. I weave in and out of these flailing couples. Because of the flash on camera, it may seem as though they are isolated figures, but in fact they are, as Joyce Carol Oates has written, a "clumsy ballet of boys." Actually, like anything else, there are incredibly graceful members of the team who seem always aware of where their bodies are. But in general, the heavier they are, the more space they run through. They know I am there, but they do not accommodate me. I know where they will fall as I am used to the drills. I imagine myself as part of the team, though someone who does not have a partner. The obvious metaphor would be someone looking in through a window. If I was a man, I don't think they would be as happy to have me there. I think they like the idea of a female spirit moving about the room and documenting them.

At the end of practice most of the guys take off their shirts and start to stretch or jog. They do this mainly because the minute they stop working, their shirts and singlets become cold. They also do it because I think they are celebrating the beauty of their bodies. I think they are in awe that they survive the rituals. The gym is hotter and practices more intense than those for most college teams. I shot at West Point and I would say the Blair practice was more extreme.

CB: How would you describe your relationship to these young men as subjects? Does your own identity—as a woman, a city dweller, a lesbian—impact the way you picture this sport?

CS: I don't think I could spend the amount of time I did with the wrestlers and not be interested in them. I wanted to absorb their experience. That's why I was there. It wasn't just to get the photographs, but to get the sense of inclusion, of being on a team. I think they acknowledged me as a female, but a female that was equal in terms of interest in the sport.

In general, wrestling is not an "urban" sport. It's not that popular, so it gets less funding and support, there are fewer scholarships for it, and certainly there's no money to be made by it, so it's not a dream sport as compared to basketball and football. I would say that it is predominantly white, and perhaps a rural sport when one considers that the dominant states are Oklahoma and Iowa. At Blair Academy there is generally about one black kid a year on the team. So me and the black kid are usually the only ones of our kinds at a practice.

Wrestling can't help but signal boundaries between bodies. Every wrestler acknowledges that there are some taboos in the way they occupy a space in pairs. I came to see the interaction as much, much less sexual and much, much more like dance or performance. There is just too much pain involved, too much discomfort. The mats burn their faces, they are constantly bleeding, it's too hot, and they are constantly on the verge of tears. But I think the wrestlers also take full advantage of their close proximity to one another. They hang on each other the way girls do. They have a permission to be physical, and that physicality allows them to act out hostilities as well as affections. I look at them less as couples and more as performers, performing for me, so that my gaze is very much a heterosexual one.

JOE SOLA

Born 1966, Chicago

Saint Henry Composition, 2001

Single-channel video with sound, 5 mins., 7 secs.

Courtesy of Bespoke Gallery, New York; production support provided by the Wexner Center for the Arts. On view January 30–February 28 in the Box video space, located near the entrance to the galleries..

CB: How would you characterize your relationship to sport and sports culture, and how has that relationship inflected your practice as an artist?

Joe Sola: Straight off the bat, I love to watch sports. I can't wait for football season to start up again. And then watching Wimbledon and the U.S. Open during the summer, waking up early to watch final matches live. Beautiful! I like to play sports as well, but usually the ones that you play alone or against yourself: tennis and golf. I played some two-on-two basketball the other day with some teenagers, for the first time in 20 years, and I really liked it. I got over my fear of having my wrists snapped off while trying to catch a pass.

CB: You return again and again, often very humorously, to themes of absurd, failed, or compromised masculinity in your work. Can you discuss your motivations here?

JS: These actions of absurdity and/or failure surrounding my masculine identity are tied to real-life experiences. They arise from confusing and sometimes painful or humiliating events that have been part of my life. I often think of the novels of Jean Genet. He renders some pretty awful situations where the weak, feminine, flawed characters are being radically humiliated and turns these into moments of beauty and power for his characters and readers.

I have a recent performance that gets at this idea. For this performance the gallery, a week before my show is to open, puts up fliers around town that say things like "Fed up with art? Want to earn quick cash?" or "Don't understand contemporary art? Want to earn cash?" with my phone number on little tear strips at the bottom. They look like ads for roommates or guitar lessons that you might find at a coffee shop or yoga studio. People who responded to the flier are then invited to the gallery reception later that week. At some time during the opening reception, the respondents grab me and hang me up on the wall by my underwear (usually this takes three or four people). The last time I did this in Los Angeles, just after I ripped out of the underwear and fell to the ground, people at the opening actually clapped! I thought, "Holy shit, art is AMAZING!" People actually enjoyed this and thought I did a good job: a good job at getting wedgied and hung up by my underwear. I don't know if everyone was wedgied and hung up on the wall as I was, a kind of greeter for all the boys to see as they entered the locker room back in Chicago. But here I was some 30 years later still getting wedgied, again in front of a lot of people (a loose-knit group, not unlike high school). But this time around I have chosen it.

CB: Do you think an opposition exists between the culture of commercial sport in the United States and the culture of the art world? If so, why do you think that divide persists?

JS: I am scared of crowds, especially large crowds at professional sporting events. Booze + testosterone + Sundays + stadiums are not a cocktail I relish. When I was younger I traveled to midwestern cities to sell T-shirts illegally in the parking lots at professional football games with my brother. If the Chicago Bears were playing at the Green Bay Packers' Lambeau Field, we would drive from Chicago to Green Bay with a car full of T-shirts that said "Fuck Chicago" and had a picture of the Bears helmet between the Fuck and Chicago. The first time I tried this I went to Cincinnati for a game against their arch rivals, the Cleveland Browns. I was an awful salesman. I tried to appeal to the creative intellect of the customer, ironically hawking things like a carnival pitchman on Coney Island: "Get your Ts here, step right up, get

'um while they're fresh." A couple of guys on their way into the stadium took swings at me. I repeatedly heard the words "faggot!" "Jew!" and "asshole!" (none of which I am) shouted at me by passersby. I learned quickly not to look into any of the drunken bloodshot eyes that streamed by me as that would certainly be read by them as an invitation to stop and make some sort of a belligerent assessment of my faggy city character.

Once the game got underway, I met up with my brother and some of his other friends who had made the drive down at a hotel bar by the stadium to watch the game, have some drinks, and see how much everyone had raked in. My brother had \$700; I had \$40. He and his buddies all had a laugh about what a crappy salesman I was. After we had eaten steaks and grapefruit and drank a couple of drinks we went out to the parking lots and spread out. This time my brother took me with him so I could learn how to "do" it. Soon, as the fans started streaming out into the parking lots, he started screaming at the top of his lungs "Fuck Cleveland!...Fucking Cleveland scumbags!" holding up a T-shirt for all to see. Fans literally started handing him money. We only had about an hour to make sales, so I knew I had to act quickly or go back to Chicago with nothing, having spent all my \$40 at the restaurant. "Fuck Cleveland" I started screaming, "Cleveland sucks!" After a mad rush of jubilant and victorious Cincinnati fans poured out, I had a fanny pack jammed with almost \$500 in less than an hour!

I have to say I have had some interesting run-ins in the "art world," but nothing quite on par with this experience I had in the professional football world. In the sports world people will get all in your face, throw a bottle at you, or a firecracker, and maybe beat you up or scream really nasty things at you if you're different than they are. I haven't had anything quite like that happen in the art world...yet.

SAM TAYLOR-WOOD

Born 1967, London

3 Minute Round, 2008

Two-channel video, 3 minutes

Courtesy Jay Jopling/White Cube, London

David Robert Joseph Beckham ("David"), 2004

Digital video displayed on plasma screen

Dimensions variable

National Portrait Gallery, London

CB: What draws you to athletes as subjects for your work?

Sam Taylor-Wood: I'm not drawn to athletes in particular but to any person or subject matter that interests me. I've shot films and photographs of the ballet dancer Ivan Putrov. Is he an artist or an athlete? I think he's both, and I think the same applies to my interest in David Beckham and Wladimir and Vitali Klitschko [who appear in *3-Minute Round*].

I think it's important to keep yourself open to different ideas and subjects. In both cases, a set of circumstances came together to make these subjects available to me. David was a commission [from the National Portrait Gallery in London]. I met the Klitschko brothers and thought there was something remarkable about them, about their presence, and so I knew they would make good subjects.

CB: Both *David* (2004) and *3-Minute Round* show a less-public, less-constructed, maybe even less-comfortable image of the athletes than usually appears in the media.

ST-W: I'm not sure they are uncomfortable—just calmer and quieter, more meditative. When I made *David*, I knew the picture or film had to be distinct from the countless shots of him as a

superstar athlete or a celebrity caught in the flash of some paparazzi. For the Klitschko brothers, I wanted to capture them in character, as boxers, but away from the sweat and pressure of the ring. For both films, I wanted to portray them as people, to focus on their features, to hint at some kind of inner life, at least partially stripped of their athletes' masks. We are so used to seeing these figures as fast, powerful men, but I wanted to capture them in a moment of stillness and vulnerability.

CB: Does desire play a role in these works—the sorts of sanctioned/acknowledged and unsanctioned/unacknowledged desires that can accompany watching athletes perform?

ST-W: David Beckham and the Klitschko brothers are amazing athletes, but they are also beautiful men. I think most people like to watch great athletes because there is something beautiful about them, whether this is in their abilities or their appearance. I think this is part of being a spectator and something that everyone acknowledges. Although their desirability is important, it's not the only point. I wanted to complicate that relationship between their individuality and their fame, their core self and the persona that they present to the public. In fact, their desirability probably emerges from the tension between these two conditions.

HANK WILLIS THOMAS

Born 1976, Plainsfield, New Jersey

Scarred Chest, 2003

Lightjet print

30 x 20 inches

Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

CB: Your work suggests a commentary on how the ideal male body, especially the black male body, is used in sports advertising. Can you talk about that?

Hank Willis Thomas: I have always been in awe of commercial marketing methods in the modern media. What makes a corporate sign so alluring? A simple logo can be embedded with enough meaning through ad campaigns to fuel a billion-dollar global industry. When considering the historical significance of the slave and cotton trade industries of centuries past, I find a curious connection between the African American male body and the marketing of clothes and sports. I am interested in how advertising chooses to market to and represent black men in the media and also in the impression it has on the black male psyche.

The myth of the idealized black male body is in part grounded in the ideas fabricated during slavery to justify it as an institution. I am building links between the body as traded on the slave post and the trade of the body in sports enterprises. Our ancestors were branded as a sign of ownership; now we brand ourselves to signify the relationship of the body to corporate entities. Through my work I hope to create dialogues about commodity, race, and branding in the 21st century and as linked to the transatlantic slave trade in modern history.

CB: Works like *Scarred Chest* (2003) explicitly equate commercial branding strategies used by companies like Nike with the practice of branding slaves.

HWT: *Scarred Chest* reflects on how 18th- and 19th-century slaves were branded as a sign of ownership, and in the 21st century their descendants perpetuate a state of branded consciousness. It is also a commentary on scarification and how the body can be branded as means of beautification. My goal with the work is to employ the familiar, or what Roland Barthes [in *Mythologies*] calls "what-goes-without-saying" to draw connections and provoke conversations about issues and histories that are often forgotten or avoided in our commerce-infused daily lives.

CB: Rapper The Notorious B.I.G. once commented that to escape urban poverty, "Either you're slingin' crack-rock, or you've got a wicked jump shot" ("Things Done Changed," 1994). In other words, advancement is determined by a very limited range of possible identities. Can you comment on how that idea applies to works such as *Basketball and Chain* (2003)?

HWT: The *B@anded* series is a result of an exploration and subsequent appropriation of the language of advertising. By employing this ubiquitous language in my work, I am able to talk explicitly about race, class, and history in a medium that almost everyone can decode. Your summation of *Basketball and Chain* is closely in line with my original intention. However, I think some aspects of the work should be reviewed in light of the election of President Barack Hussein Obama, who is an avid fan and player of basketball, and who suggests that the sport has shaped his identity. Given that example, one can no longer see only limited possibilities. The conversation about the work is now more complicated.

JONAS WOOD

Born 1977, Boston, Massachusetts

Bullets, 2007

Oil on linen

72 x 52 inches

Collection of Benedikt Taschen

Celtics Diptych, 2008

Gouache, ink, and colored pencil on paper

23 x 15 inches each

UBS Art Collection

Chico, 2008

Gouache, ink, and colored pencil on paper

17 x 19 inches

Private collection, Los Angeles

Greg Oden, 2008

Gouache and colored pencil on paper

30 x 22 ¼ inches

Collection of the artist

CB: What initially drew you to athletes as subjects?

Jonas Wood: I think that I chose these athletes based on my love of sports, but more importantly because they are modern-day heroes to me. Or maybe I dream to be that athlete in the spotlight, with my cool uniform and my headband. I want to be them in some way. A good amount of the sports figures are idols that I grew up loving and watching on TV. I am still a huge fan of basketball and of many of the players who play in the NBA and abroad. I watch a ton of sports on TV.

CB: Can you talk about your painting technique or style and the effect you hope to achieve? The way you handle your materials often gives the subjects a blocky, almost disfigured, quality that is poignant or melancholy.

JW: The sports figures are chosen either based on my interest in them as players or just the fact that they are funny looking to me. The way that I make the figures is to draw them out and slowly fill color into simplified areas. The colors and shapes build up. I am also using the sports figures as a vehicle for portraiture. The image of Paul Pierce [in *0607 Season*], for

example, is about his pain from having been on a terrible team that year. I was trying to reflect that in his face.

CB: You also pay a great deal of attention to the way these players are branded by sports companies and by team logos.

JW: The logos or uniforms are really important because they are colorful and organized in a certain way that to me seems the opposite of human flesh. So these two things collide and that dynamic makes it fun for me to paint. To me, an old card or a great action shot has much to offer in terms of what I like to paint and draw. The backgrounds also offer another contrast to the player and the uniform.

*These interviews with many of the artists in the **Hard Targets** exhibition were conducted via e-mail in the fall and early winter of 2009. They have been edited for publication. The checklist information listed here is a final and updated version of that in the printed brochure and the PDF of it.*