

LOCKER ROOM CULTURE: Strategy, Play and Commentary in Sports and Art.

INTRO:

The thoughts and images that are conjured up in a phrase such as this tend to be of sweaty, smelly, chauvinistic misbehaviors found in the locker rooms of sports facilities, often with the aid of a towel or champagne. Instead I use this title to talk about a different kind of behind-the-scene culture altogether: one involving the mind. The aim of this exhibition is threefold: 1. To make comparisons between the strategic practice found in both sports and art; 2. To describe how art uses sport as subject in a manner that is not traditional illustration, in order to confront and comment on other areas of our culture; and 3. to make the argument that the aesthetics of strategy and play, rather than the obvious physical grace appearances (or lack thereof) can legitimize the notion that sports are another art form.

This exhibition is the culmination of some unlikely circumstances, starting as a subject on a blog where I would feature unlikely subjects in conjunction with visual art, continued on as a lecture at the NYC based art and ideas forum *Communitas* at Dixon Place, and now here at the Grimshaw-Gudewicz Gallery. I offer my gratitude to Frank J. Miles director of *Communitas*, and gallery director Kathleen Hancock, of both of whom took my ideas on this seriously and allowed me to run with it. (sorry for the pun).

STRATEGY

In the arts there is a philosophical component called aesthetics or aesthetic theory, that concerns itself with analyzing issues of sensory experiences, for purposes of assigning judgement and taste. Descriptions of beauty, ugliness, meaning and form are central to the dialog. As of late ideas surrounding the non-aesthetic or Anti-aesthetic in art have surfaced, helping to usher in the world of conceptual art forms. These aesthetic descriptions and theories, as they are now applied to the conceptual realms of the arts, must in turn, be applied to the less-considered conceptual aspects of sports. While the aim of sports differs from art, there is none-the-less, an artistry in the designed stratagems from coaches and athletes, the process of carrying them out through play, and the various forms these take within the given framework of rules and spatial parameters of the game.

PLAY

Just as the making of an art object is dependent upon the idea, the play on the field is dependent upon the strategy. This means when Johan Huizinga, the great philosopher on sports and play, wrote in his *Homo Ludens* (1938) of art as dependent upon the "creative impulse" and is "always subjected to the skill and proficiency of the forming hand." he is incorrect. There is an equivalence between the play in sports and the processes of the visual arts. Jackson Pollock may look like he is acting purely on intuition but there is a guiding principle, an idea at work, just as a pass from Joe Namuth may look like impulse, but is the enactment of an idea, a strategy. There is no difference between the processes of a coaches thinking, the athlete's playing, and the artist's own rules and actions and processes in the studio.

COMMENTARY

I discovered, In assembling this exhibition it was easier to find artists whose work tackled issues related to sports, either directly or tangentially, than to find work that made juxtapositions between the strategic in sports and art. Therefore I thought it prudent to include this aspect into the exhibition. I feel it is necessary to make some mention of the relation of sports and art to social commentary, and to make clear that this was not illustration, that the collision of sports and art could also be expressions of social commentary, and not just the depiction of athletes in motion.