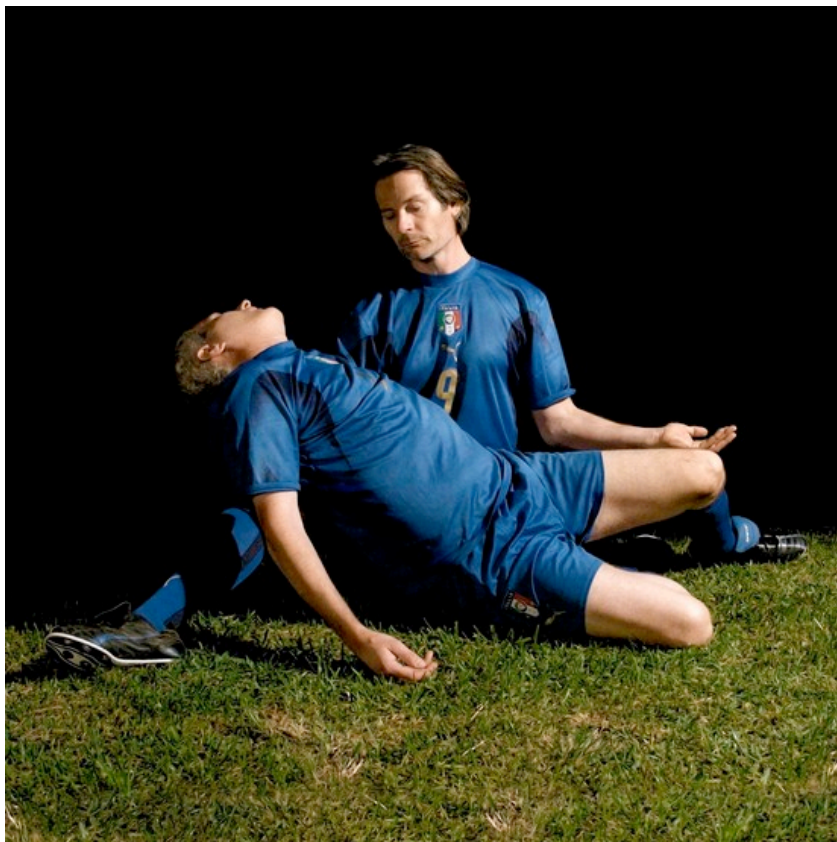


THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Lacma Celebrates Soccer's World Cup

A Los Angeles museum's exhibition, 'Fútbol: The Beautiful Game,' features such artists as Andy Warhol with his silk-screen of Brazil's Pelé

By Adam Elder
Feb 5, 2014



The 2008 'Pietà' of the collaborative duo Generic Art Solutions. © Generic Art Solutions/Jonathan Ferrara Gallery, New Orleans

A Los Angeles museum is getting a head start on the rest of the planet by celebrating soccer's quadrennial World Cup a few months early. A new exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, "Fútbol: The Beautiful Game," portrays soccer as the world's lingua franca, highlighting the

sport's globalization, commercialism, player worship and, perhaps most important, its exhilaration.

Brazil is the host nation for the World Cup, which begins June 12 and ends July 13. Appropriately, the commercial-ready smile of the country's most famous export, Pelé, will greet viewers entering the exhibition. In 1978, Andy Warhol portrayed the star on a vivid silk-screen. "Fútbol" runs through July 20.

Lacma contemporary-art curator Franklin Sirmans is no stranger to this type of show: During the 2006 World Cup, he organized concurrent soccer art exhibitions at Roebing Hall galleries in Manhattan's Chelsea neighborhood and in Brooklyn. "Fútbol" is in some ways an expansion of those early shows. Soccer is "something I think about all the time," Mr. Sirmans says. "Between being a curator and a fan at the same time, I try to stay on top of any new work I see addressing the game."



Kehinde Wiley's 2010 portrait of Samuel Eto'o © Kehinde Wiley/Roberts & Tilton, Culver City, California

Beyond São Paulo artist Nelson Leirner's deliberately kitschy "Maracanã," in which plastic toy figurines populate a miniature stadium ringed with statuettes of Christ the Redeemer, is a 9-foot-tall Andreas Gursky photograph that renders a bird's-eye perspective of a Netherlands-France match. The floodlit grass encompasses the entire field of view. In contrast, a nearby video of a pickup game in Latin America captures the sights and sounds of a convivial neighborhood gathering.

Of course, any game that is followed by billions of people is never just a game. Lyle Ashton Harris's black-and-white photojournalism reveals the darker side of fandom, portraying Verona supporters' terrifying passion as they scale fences separating them from the field.

Nearby, British artist Satch Hoyt's unsettling sculpture "Kick That" appears to recall the Faustian bargain some African players have made to play in Europe, as they're showered with fame and money but also exposed to racism. A black soccer ball adorned with jewels and euro currency signs sits atop a pedestal of bananas (projectiles that have been thrown at black players). From a distance, the artwork deceptively resembles a trophy.

The videos of American Paul Pfeiffer mock the cynical diving and flopping by players attempting to draw a foul. By removing the ball and everyone else, the artist leaves these grown men to collapse and writhe all alone, in histrionic agony. Two videos illustrate micro and macro elements of soccer. "Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait" celebrates the player as artist by following the retired French midfield legend Zinedine Zidane through 90 minutes of a match, with 17 cameras trained on his every move. Opposite this is Stephen Dean's "Volta," portraying a stadium crowd of thousands that heaves and sways in unison.

"It's one thing to see a great football star in Europe, another to go to his nation of origin, where so many young people don't have the wherewithal to buy sports equipment or accouterments," says New York portraitist Kehinde Wiley. So Mr. Wiley's radiant oil painting of Cameroonian legend Samuel Eto'o confronts the issue of athlete idolatry, looking up at him and giving his skin a glossy sheen. Mr. Wiley adds, "I think in many ways [Eto'o is] a stand-in for the dreams of these people. I met him at a hotel and people were scaling walls and climbing trees outside, just trying to get a glimpse of him."

Among the show's many other highlights: Mexico City prankster Miguel Calderón offers a surreal video collage of Mexico putting 17 goals past Brazil in a single

match; the provocative illustration by L.A. artist Amitis Motevalli of an armed jihadist protecting a co-ed children's soccer game; and Antoni Muntadas ' euphoric video montage of goal celebrations.