



Queer superheroine athlete, a frozen tennis match, and a hundred thousand spectators on a stadium:

Two new exhibitions at Copenhagen Contemporary

Copenhagen Contemporary (CC) is marking up the pitch for two topical exhibitions that will open up the complex dilemmas and multifaceted world of sport on 21 April.

The acclaimed artist duo Elmgreen & Dragset transforms Hall 2 into a tennis court while the group exhibition *Art of Sport* fills out Hall 1 with works by celebrated Danish and international artists. *Art of Sport* takes a close look at hero worship within sport, its gender and ethnicity codes, its inclusion and exclusion mechanisms, and the relation of sport to politics, power, and money.

HALL 1

Art of Sport

21 April – 24 October 2021

A divided community

A glistening yellow sculpture is writhing athletically and, between its legs, an oversized phallus is jutting out. This is the artist Sarah Lucas's humorous portrait of the sports icon and legendary footballer Diego Maradona – and among the first sights to greet visitors to the *Art of Sport* exhibition.

Some view sports activities as a haven, as fostering community spirit, friendships, and self-development while others experience it as excluding and threatening their identity and self-perception. This is precisely the duality that *Art of Sport* sets out to examine. Via numerous works created by more than thirty prominent Danish and international artists, *Art of Sport* directs focus at the qualities and community aspects of sport, but also at its negative sides where sexism, xenophobia, commercialism, and political interest make us think about the meaning of 'fair play' – both on and off the pitch.

The downside of sport

Art of Sport mirrors the world in which we live through works by artists including Mark Bradford, Sarah Lucas, Camille Henrot, Sylvie Fleury, Jeff Koons, Kota Ezawa, Hank Willis Thomas, Lyle Ashton Harris, and others, addressing topical issues within the world of sport. Although sport is for everyone and crosses cultural, economic, and social boundaries, it also embodies racism and xenophobia, sexism and homophobic attitudes.

This is evident, for example, in *Leatherboys* – an installation by Louka Anargyros in the form of three ceramic sculptures of entangled male bodies dressed in motor sport outfits. The usual sponsor logos on the suits have been replaced by humiliating homophobic slurs, originally directed at the artist himself.

Challenging inflexible ideas on gender

Several works in the *Art of Sport* exhibition make a stand against the prevailing traditional sex segregation and stereotyped gender constructs evident, for example, in the artist Mark Bradford's awkward attempts at playing basketball dressed in a voluminous crinoline. We watch him tumble repeatedly but willing himself to get up and continue despite cultural, gender, and racial challenges.

Power play

Centrally placed in the exhibition, Olaf Nicolai's nine-metre inflatable Nike shoe towers in the landscape of sports works. The shoe is surrounded by much hype in the world of fashion and most people know the popular Nike Air Jordans – here apparently symbolising the commercialisation of sport. A world where top athletes achieve god-like status, influence, and power worth millions to sports clubs, agents, advertising agencies, and the fashion business.

Whether fascinated or repelled by it, we recognise that the world of sport is full of complex dilemmas concerning us all.

Artists taking part: Sarah Lucas, Jeff Koons, Mark Bradford, Stephen Dean, Sam Taylor-Johnson, Paul Pfeiffer, Laura Owens, Kota Ezawa, Hank Willis Thomas, Erik A. Frandsen, Per Hebsgaard, Miguel Calderón, Hellmuth Costard, Fiona McMonagle, Nicolai Howalt, Hazel Meyer, Andreas Gursky, Louka Anargyros, Olaf Nicolai, Sylvie Fleury, Brian Jungen, Camille Henrot, Rineke Dijkstra, Jeffrey Gibson, Jean-Luc Godard, Kathy Acker, Cajsja von Zeipel, Robert Mapplethorpe, Catherine Opie, Ei Arakawa, Lea Guldditte Hestelund, Sara Sjölin, Martin Schoeller, Emelie Carlén, Lyle Ashton Harris, Thierry Geoffroy, Bianca Argimón, and Cyprien Gaillard.

The exhibition is curated by: Marie Nipper, director, Copenhagen Contemporary, Line Wium Olesen, assistant curator, and Louka Anargyros, external curator.

For this exhibition, CC has initiated a collaborative project with Skjold Contemporary, an exhibition venue based at two changing rooms at Østerbro Stadium. Three exhibitions featuring Sara Sjölin, Kristoffer Akselbo, and Mogens Jacobsen will be presented there during the exhibition period.

HALL 2

Short Story

Elmgreen & Dragset

21 April – 24 October 2021

Fighting, competing, and the individual

With the installation *Short Story*, the Danish-Norwegian artist duo Elmgreen & Dragset has transformed Hall 2 into a virtually full-size tennis court. The familiar

orange floor, the white chalk lines, and the net frame a hushed scene where the three sculptures *Flo*, *Kev*, and *Bogdan* play the leading roles.

Elmgreen og Dragset's *Short Story* is a film still, capturing the moment after a match; however, it is up to viewers to fill out the narratives frozen in time and space before them. *Short Story* does not provide much in the way of answers or explanations. Three characters stand before us, but the underlying subtle narratives remain fleeting and difficult to decipher. Instead, we step into an arena where we can reflect on and discuss subjects like competition, individualism, inclusion, and exclusion.

Winners and losers?

The posture of the two white-painted bronze sculptures of the young boys named *Flo* and *Kev* indicate that they have just finished a match. The boys look tiny and isolated on the huge tennis court, their bodies and gazes deflected from one another – their dialogue and interaction having ended. Instead of exultation, the scene is characterised by a hushed discomfort for both the 'winner' and the 'loser'. The sculpture *Flo* has turned his back on his opponent and is staring on the trophy he appears to have won. But instead of being proud of his victory, he seems sad and lonely while *Kev*, prostrate on the other side of the court, appears to be overwhelmed by his defeat.

In a corner outside the tennis court, a third figure is seated, namely the old man *Bogdan*, sitting in his wheelchair, half asleep, surveying the court. With drooping eyelids, he appears to be withdrawing from the reality surrounding him, perhaps allowing an inner world to replace reality. Is he perhaps imagining the tennis match between the two boys – a remote memory appearing in a dream? Or is he just a spectator like the rest of us? In *Short Story*, the narrative is open.

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