

CRISTIN TIERNEY

The New York Times

ART & DESIGN

Review: In ‘Game On!’ the Stuff of Sports Becomes the Stuff of Art

By LAUREL GRAEBER AUG. 11, 2016



A photograph from the Christin Rose series “#ShePlaysWeWin” at the “Game On!” exhibition. Credit Christin Rose

To many young people, and certainly to Olympic athletes, sports are to be played. But to the men and women showing their work at the [Children’s Museum of the Arts](#), sports are to be played *with*.

That’s one message of “[Game On!](#),” an exhibition in which nine adult artists examine athletics from perspectives that are occasionally reverent but more often whimsical and even critical. The show underscores one way that this children’s museum remains a rarity among its fellows: In addition to offering educational and exploratory experiences, it continuously displays work that you might encounter at a SoHo gallery or the New Museum.

“Game On!” refreshingly emphasizes women as both artists and athletes. It includes examples from the Los Angeles photographer [Christin Rose](#)’s “[#ShePlaysWeWin](#)” series, which depicts girls as hockey, baseball and basketball players; runners and racecar drivers; skateboarders and surfers. They project pride, a “don’t mess with me” self-assurance. In the show’s audio tour, Ms. Rose says, “My dream for ‘#ShePlaysWeWin’ is that it becomes a social movement.”

[Zoë Buckman](#), a London artist, gives the masculine accouterments of her sport, boxing, a playfully feminine — and feminist — spin. “Bubblegum Boxing Glove,” in hot-pink handblown glass, looks like Pop Art, while “This Side Down,” a framed textile weaving, packs a subtle punch by combining pastel ribbons with a boxer’s hand wraps, bandages and gauze.

CRISTIN TIERNEY

Some works turn sports equipment into abstract art. [Dario Escobar](#), a Guatemalan artist, transforms pool cues into a treelike sculpture, and soccer balls into what looks like an alien seed pod. Others make social commentary. [Jean Shin](#), who's based in Brooklyn, alters sports trophies so that they lionize ordinary people: The small figure on top now moves a broom or a stroller instead of a hockey stick or a soccer ball.



One of Jean Shin's remade sports trophies. Credit Jean Shin

Still others reflect on the use and abuse of athletes. [Norm Paris](#)'s "Cards," a wall hanging, consists of faded glories: baseball and football cards that he has scratched, whited out, drawn over or sometimes reproduced as skeletal or robotlike sketches. [Hank Willis Thomas](#)'s "Uprising" evokes a slavery-era quilt with squares made from football jerseys.



Another of Jean Shin's remade trophies.

Will children understand such references? The show's labels define words like "commodification," and the display includes stations where the smallest visitors can sit, touch related objects (like a split-open football) and ponder simple questions. Even if only those over 10 grasp some of the artwork's nuances, "Game On!" deserves its own trophy for proving that one way to raise children's awareness is not to talk down to them.