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## Connecting Sports and Art in an Eclectic Mix

In an exhibit this fall, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art explores social trends using sports-related art and design objects.

**By Michael Janofsky**

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“Guernica” hangs prominently on the seventh floor of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, its haphazard forms, oversized limbs and frenetic energy urging visitors to pause and contemplate what it all means.

Oh, this isn’t that “Guernica,” Picasso’s monochromatic antiwar painting of 1937 that hangs in the Museo Reina Sofia in Madrid. This one is a collage-style quilt from 2016 by the Brooklyn artist Hank Willis Thomas, a colorful jumble of basketball jerseys bearing names and numbers of famous NBA players from different eras. Are they all teammates or adversaries? Are they meant to stir debate over who was the greatest? Or are they reminders that athletes fight for victory just as Picasso’s fallen soldier did? The viewer decides.

These are the kinds of questions that SFMOMA’s newest exhibition, “Get in the Game,” is meant to provoke. Using sports-related art and design objects to spark conversations of representation and purpose, it’s the museum’s largest show since its founding in 1935,

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taking up the entire seventh floor with related exhibits on floors below. Altogether, it's an eclectic mix of more than 200 paintings, drawings, photographs, videos, athletic shoes, pennants, banners, trading cards, skateboards, computer game consoles, Formula 1 steering wheels, football helmets and a foosball game large enough for 22 players.

The exhibition opened Oct. 19 and runs through Feb. 18 before traveling to the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville, Ark., and the Perez Museum in Miami.

While the through line is sport, items were selected to project broader concepts such as social justice, violence, gender, race, innovation and the joy of participating in the action or watching it. More than 70 creators are represented, some conveying their ideas through well-known figures like Michael Jordan, Muhammad Ali and Venus Williams, but others through the anonymous athletes who compete on neighborhood playgrounds.

For SFMOMA, the exhibition is part of a strategic shift from special shows built around a particular artist or movement to explorations of societal trends and contemporary issues. It was also conceived to attract people who have more experience with a sports event than a museum exhibition.

A team headed by Jennifer Dunlop Fletcher, the museum's curator of architecture and design; Katy Siegel, the research director; and Seph Rodney, a writer and independent curator, reached beyond the usual sources of the museum's own collection and other institutions to secure pieces from private collectors and sports organizations like the International Tennis Hall of Fame and the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

At the heart of the exhibition are five sections, each meant to reflect different concepts as the viewer moves along a football field length of the seventh floor.

The final section, "Mind and Body," explores the interconnectedness of physical and mental activity. Shaun Leonardo does it through a pair of charcoal drawings of brain scans of athletes who suffered brain damage from the violence they experienced in competition.

Some objects in "Get in the Game" need minimal interpretation, like a prosthetic running leg or a series of Nike running and basketball shoes that have become collectors' items for representing high performance, high fashion or the athletes who actually wore them.

But many more works may cause the viewer to linger, to contemplate their larger meaning or to stir a personal memory — all demonstrating how sports, modern culture and fans are intrinsically linked. That, Bedford insisted, is what he and his curatorial team intended all along.