

Ways of Perceiving

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Football has one of the greatest sporting histories and is adored by arguably billions of people in the world. In the past year, football has been experienced in a very different manner, due to the effects of an ongoing global pandemic heavily restricting attendance in large numbers. Indeed, football appears to be a different sport with this absence, with TV companies playing artificial crowd noises over the televised games in an attempt to match the presence of the fans.

In this exhibition, it is important to investigate how football fans are perceived and the impact they have on the sport. The passion of football fans cannot be doubted, as they pack stadiums in their masses, dressed in coloured shirts and scarfs, chanting for the triumph of their team. How does the passion the sport inflicts affect the fans? Indeed, there has been many studies into how football fans reveal different types of behaviour through the very culture that the sport seems to encourage.

Before the players walk out onto the pitch in front of thousands of spectators, they wait in the tunnel, next to their opponents. My exhibition will be placed in a football stadium, lining the walls of the tunnel. This should echo the experience of the players before facing the stadium of fans. I want spectators

of the exhibition to understand how fans influence the game of football and shape it in such a way. Indeed, Hans Ulrich Obrist describes the process of curating as “connecting cultures.” (Obrist, 2014, pg.1) I believe situating the exhibition within the tunnel will not only allow spectators to connect with the lives of the fans, but also with the lives of the players, who culturally all live very different lives. However, the game itself seems to bring people of many different cultural, social and racial backgrounds together.

The first artwork will be lined on the left side of the tunnel. This will be the work of Corbin Shaw, “Soften Up Hard Lad.”



Fig. One

Shaw relates his own experiences of dominant masculinity in society to comment on male culture and conformity. (Mawson, 2020) Football has a very male-dominated fanbase, and though greater inclusivity has been advocated for, a large percentage of fans remain to be male. Therefore, masculinity becomes a spectacle of any football game. Shaw tries to question the stereotypical views of masculinity and such break down the barriers that seemed to be placed on the men of our society. It is important to question the typical 'lad culture' the sport is known for, and the damage this could be doing to the men of our society. (Storey, 2017) This can also lead us to question how damaging the football 'lad culture' is to those who are surrounded by it, for instance, women and children. Is a sport dominated by men welcoming of women? Are the sexist remarks made as part of the "lad culture" acceptable? The work of Shaw brings all of this into question.

Placed in the centre of the right side of the tunnel will be the work of Roderick Buchanan.



Fig. Two



Fig. Three

Roderick Buchanan's work is a series of portraits, reminiscent of traditional football stickers. He photographs local Glaswegian amateur footballers who adopted the new colours of red and blue in support of Italy's biggest rivalry. (Hammond, 2020) The artwork comments on the widespread passion of football, with it reaching countries way beyond its region. In addition to this, it demonstrates how football captures a real sense of community and universality throughout the world.

As Buchanan photographed amateur footballers, playing in the shirts of AC and Inter Milan, it is not hard to imagine the escapism that these men were likely

trying to achieve. Football brings a sense of relief from ordinary life for many fans and Buchanan amplifies this through this series.

With Buchanan capturing photographs of local Glaswegians, he also makes a comment on the ordinary working-class football fan. This makes his artwork a vital inclusion in this exhibition. There has always been a disconnect between the working class and the art world. (Alipoor, 2018) With a high percentage of football fans being working-class, and many football clubs, such as Arsenal, being founded under the likes, it is easy to see why some people believe football does not necessarily compliment art. Buchanan's work makes the connection between the two worlds seamlessly and allows for the typical football fan to see themselves within a world which may have felt previously excluded from them.

Lining the left side of the tunnel before the exit onto the pitch will be Craigie Harper's *'Shapeshifter Sad, Alone and Far Away from Home.'*

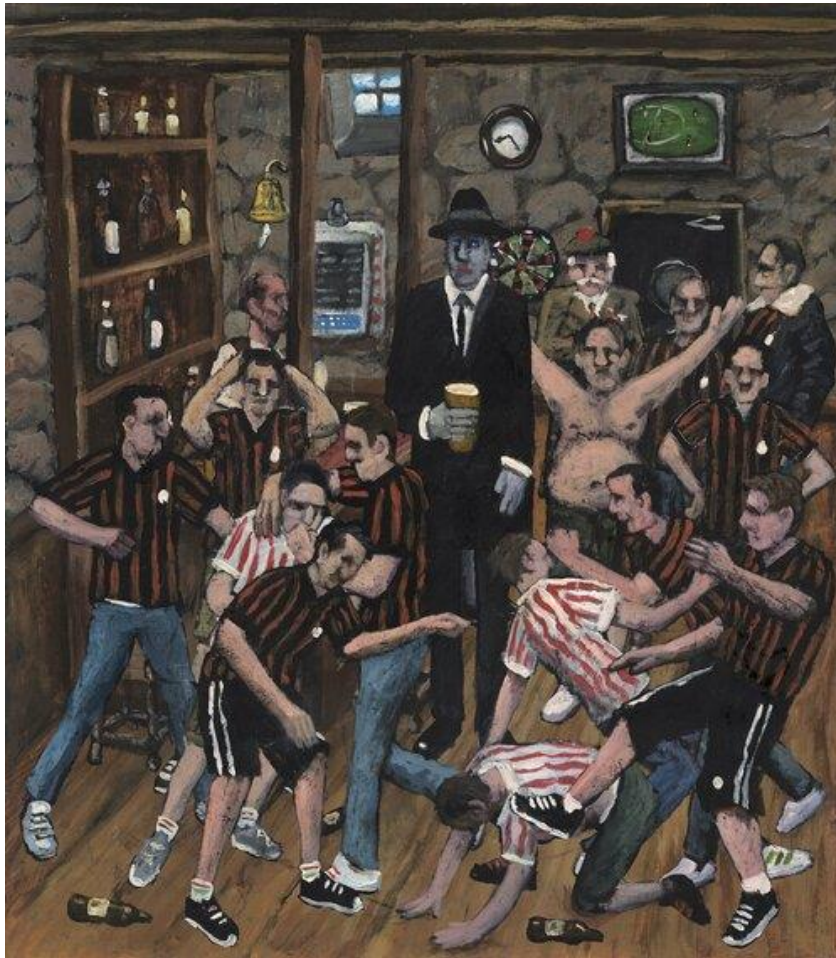


Fig. Four

Craigie Harper's artwork is in the imagined town of Kilmarnock, where sport is considered to be the pride of the town. (Kosinova, 2020) In this artwork, we see a still figure amongst the chaos the football fans appear to be creating. The inclusion of Harper's work in this exhibition is to comment on the mania of football fans and the violence often coming subsequently with it.

The passion of fans and the intense rivalries between teams means often football matches can resort to violence. Aggression and violence can even be commonplace within the match itself amongst the players. Though football-related violence isn't as popular in the UK anymore, it has been steadily increasing in other areas of the world, particularly Eastern Europe. (The Guardian, 2013) There is also an association between football fans and far-right political groups supporting antisemitism and racism. This is commonplace within football today with racism abundantly clear amongst fans. For instance, in Sofia as several English players were racially abused by opposition fans during a European qualifying match. (McNulty. P, 2019) Many football players are also now being racially abused on social media after performances during a game. Harper's work reveals the tendency of football fans to create an atmosphere of fear and chaos. Spectators of the exhibition viewing this in an empty football stadium would be free of this chaos, but it is not hard to imagine as you view Harper's work. This is not to say that all football fans, or even all football stadiums, create this atmosphere, but it is a very common experience. Many chants created by football fans are based on the intimidation of the opposition players/fans, so it is not hard to conceive a fearful environment.

The final artwork of the exhibition would be Mark Wallinger's '*One World*' artwork.



Fig. Five

The football, with a projection of the Earth upon it, will be placed on a podium, as one is prior to a football game. It is then collected by the match officials as the teams file out of the tunnel. Wallinger was commissioned to create the artwork to mark the anniversary of the First World War and the infamous truce between the two sets of soldiers over a game of football. (Brown, 2018) The inspiration behind the artwork creates a clear message of the power of a universal sport like football. Indeed, there are many issues within football regarding toxic masculinity and “lad culture”, greed, violence and racism.

However, it can possess the power to unite the world. Football can very much be a force for good, and this artwork should represent that potential. Only in the past few weeks have we seen how influential football fans can be when they come together. As a new European Super League was proposed, which could have damaged football within the country, fans came together to force the withdrawal of British clubs. (Panja, 2021) Fans demonstrated what can happen when they are passionate together in favour of a strong cause.

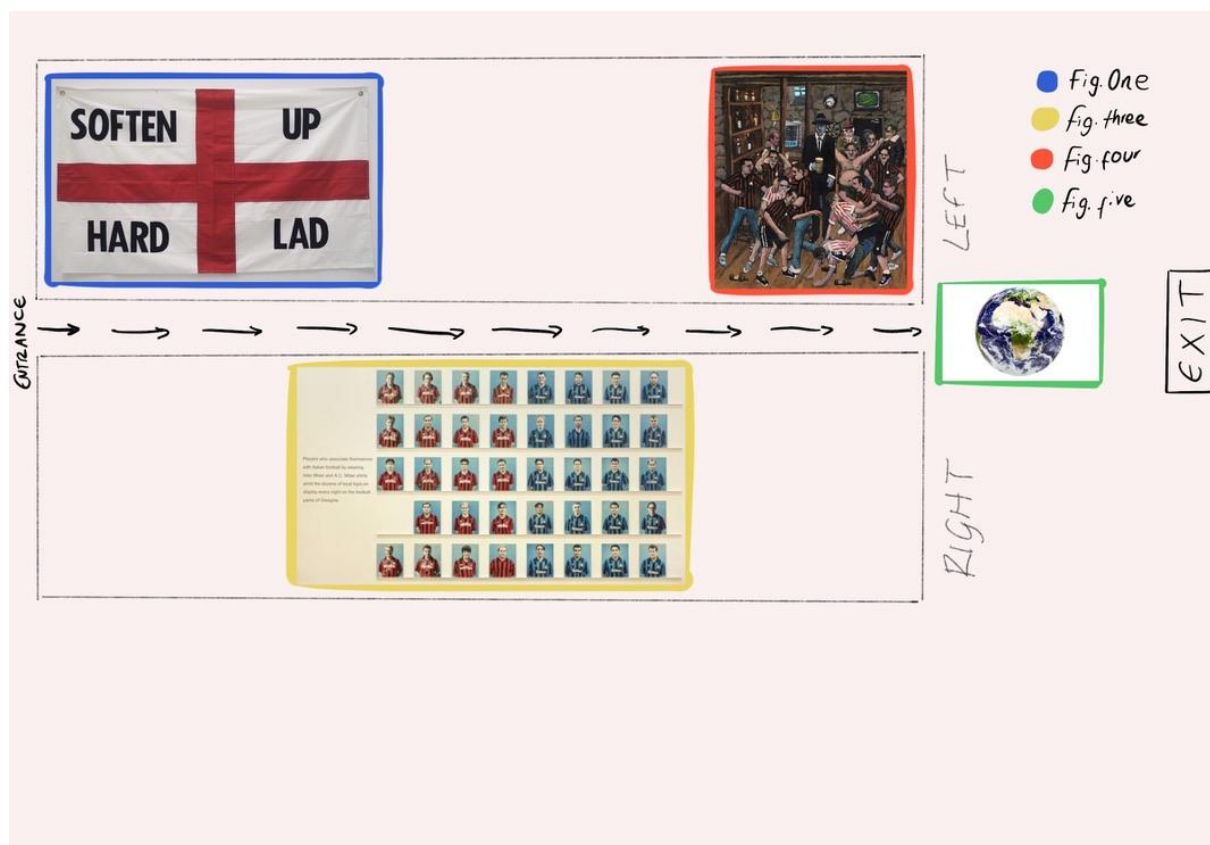


Fig. Six

The exhibition is intended to be a journey. Spectators will walk freely through the tunnel, experiencing each artwork as they go. The final spectacle of the

exhibition will be the football stadium. Stadiums are already architecturally impressive, but at the end of the exhibition, I hope it can bring a sense of what football is. As a game of football is being played, the stadium would be usually packed with football fans, singing passionately and dressed equally. Knowing the stadium would be full of thousands of people, most advocating for the same thing during that moment, is a very impressive feat and one I hope brings together the exhibition entitled 'Passion.'

Football fans are filled with passion in every single way. Unquestionably, they do not always have the greatest way of expressing this passion, but you cannot deny the passion every football match is accustomed to. This exhibition is intended to reveal the ways passion is displayed throughout the sport. The curated artworks display both the positive and negative ways in which passion is experienced through football and should allow spectators to really consider why football fans exhibit the behaviours they do. Spectators will hopefully leave the exhibition questioning – What is football without football fans?

Figures

Fig. One – Corbin. S, (2019), *Soften Up Hard Lad*, [Cotton thread] Available at:

<https://gutsgallery.co.uk/artists/35-corbin-shaw/>, (Accessed: 15 March 2021)

Fig. Two – Buchanan. R, (1995), *Work in Progress*, [Photograph] Available at:

<https://alchetron.com/Roderick-Buchanan>, (Accessed: 26 March 2021)

Fig. Three – Buchanan. R, (1995), *Work in Progress*, [Photograph] Available at:

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Fig. Four – Harper. C, (2020), *Shapeshifter Sad, Alone and Far Away from*

Home. [Acrylic on paper] Available at:

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Fig. Five – Wallinger. M, (2018), *One World*, [Photograph] Available at:

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Fig. Six – Pedler. C, (2021), *Exhibition Map*, [Digital image]

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