



For Immediate Release
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ICI announces the premiere of the traveling exhibition

Mixed Signals: Artists Consider Masculinity in Sports

An exhibition of works by contemporary artists that probes the stereotype of the American male athlete.

Curated by **Christopher Bedford**

Touring **February 2009 through January 2011**

New York – ICI is pleased to announce the opening of **Mixed Signals: Artists Consider Masculinity in Sports**, an exhibition about contemporary art that deals with the subject of the male athlete. This particular artistic theme has become increasingly prevalent during the past several years, building upon several decades of discourse about identity and gender. Including artists ranging from such well-known individuals as Matthew Barney, Catherine Opie, Collier Schorr, and Sam Taylor-Wood to emerging talents such as Shaun El C. Leonardo and Joe Sola, **Mixed Signals** demonstrates that the male athlete is a far more ambiguous, polyvalent figure in our collective cultural imagination than ever before. Using elements of wit, sarcasm, and controversy, these artists challenge cultural assumptions that gender is ever natural or innate. Instead, they emphasize the many ways masculinity is always performed, coded, and socially constructed, perhaps even more so in the spectacular, media-saturated field of sports.



Catherine Opie, *Josh*, 2007

Mixed Signals is curated by Christopher Bedford, a curator at the Wexner Center for the Visual Arts in Columbus, Ohio. The exhibition will premiere at the Cranbrook Art Museum in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan where it will be on view from February 1, 2009 through March 29, 2009. It will then travel to the Center for Art, Design and Visual Culture, University of Maryland, Baltimore County, Baltimore, Maryland, October 8 through December 12, 2009. Additional venues will be announced.

Artists featured in this exhibition are: Matthew Barney, Mark Bradford, Marcelino Gonçalves, Lyle Ashton Harris, Brian Jungen, Kurt Kauper, Shaun El C. Leonardo, Kori Newkirk, Catherine Opie, Paul Pfeiffer, Marco Rios, Collier Schorr, Joe Sola, Sam Taylor-Wood and Hank Willis Thomas.



Joe Sola, *Saint Henry Composition*, 2001

The foundational figure for this exhibition is American multi-media artist, Matthew Barney, who has mined a range of materials—Vaseline, dumbbells, chalk, and wrestling mats, for example—and imagery—much of it related to football—to foreground the way young men are socio-culturally and psychosexually formed by the intimate experience of competitive sport. Barney isolated themes, imagery, and materials *within* the culture of sport that hinted at related economies of sexuality, objectification, homosociality, and desire, and developed an aesthetic practice to grapple with these difficult themes. Accordingly, **Mixed Signals** will present screenings of an early film (*CREMASTER 4*, 1994) and a later film (*Drawing Restraint 10*, 2005) by Barney, which in combination emphasize the persistence of this theme within the artist's oeuvre.

Rituals of male bonding typical to various different sports are explored elsewhere in **Mixed Signals**. These “homosocial behaviors” (non-sexual expressions of affection and desire, sometimes accompanied by violence) within male-dominated social networks appear in a number of works on view. Here, Shaun El C. Leonardo’s performance-based sculpture and video work is a salient point of reference, as are Marcelino Gonçalves’ sensual paintings of young football stars, and a video work by Joe Sola, of football players sparring with the artist.

Another key theme of this exhibition pertains to the materials, symbols and regalia of sports that signify the prowess of the wearer, and are often construed as synonymous with the



Hank Willis Thomas, *Scarred Chest*, 2004

identity of the male athlete. Brian Jungen’s mixed media works, for example, rework sports merchandise into suggestive works addressing the artist’s individual identity, while Hank Willis Thomas’s haunting image of a head that has been branded with the Nike swoosh logo, using Photoshop, equates athletes with commercialized products, while simultaneously referencing the practice of branding African-American slaves. The concept of athletic events as gendered theater arises in the works of Paul Pfeiffer, Mark Bradford, and in the work of Catherine Opie, whose vivid color photographs of Friday night high school football heightens the dramatized atmosphere. In her individual portraits of the players, she “manages to capture the tentatively constituted self-image of her

teenage subjects....[They] hesitate about themselves, aware of the archetypes they aspire to,” in the words of guest curator Christopher Bedford.

Despite all that has changed as a result of the identity politics of the 1970s, ‘80s, and ‘90s, one American stereotype still remains particularly entrenched: that of the aggressive, hyper-competitive, emotionally undemonstrative, heterosexual male athlete. This subject has, until

recently, been overlooked by critically minded artists, critics, art historians, and curators. Adopting methodologies inspired by feminist and queer theory, gender studies, and racial politics, **Mixed Signals** brings together a significant body of recent work that explores the polyvalent figure of the contemporary male athlete, which has only recently attained sufficient critical mass for such an exhibition to take place.

About the Curator

Christopher Bedford is a curator at the Wexner Center for the Visual Arts. Formerly assistant curator in the department of contemporary art at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, he is now working on a survey of Silvia Kolbowski's work. Bedford is



Brian Jungen, *Michael*, 2003

on the editorial board of the Los Angeles-based journal X-TRA, and is editing a volume of essays for Duke University Press. He has written extensively on art for publications including *Artforum*, *Art in America*, and *October*.

Itinerary

Cranbrook Art Museum
Bloomfield Hills, Michigan
February 1, 2009 - March 29, 2009

Center for Art, Design and Visual Culture, University of Maryland, Baltimore County
Baltimore, Maryland
October 8 – December 12, 2009

Wexner Center for the Arts

Columbus, Ohio

January 29 – April 11, 2010

Mixed Signals Credit Line

Mixed Signals: Artists Consider Masculinity in Sports is a traveling exhibition organized and circulated by ICI (Independent Curators International), New York. The exhibition and tour are made possible, in part, by The Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation the ICI Advocates, the ICI Partners, Agnes Gund, Gerrit and Sydie Lansing, and Barbara and John Robinson.

Mixed Signals is an expanded version of *Contemporary Projects 11: Hard Targets-- Masculinity and American Sports*, an exhibition curated by Bedford, which was organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

About ICI

Founded in 1975, ICI is a non-profit organization dedicated to enhancing the understanding and appreciation of contemporary art through traveling exhibitions and other activities that reach a diverse national and international audience. Collaborating with a wide range of eminent curators, ICI develops innovative traveling exhibitions, accompanied by catalogues and other educational materials, to introduce and document challenging new work in all mediums by younger as well as more established artists from the United States and abroad.

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For additional information or visual materials, please contact Michelle Jubin at 212.254.8200, ext. 21, or jubin@ici-exhibitions.org. Visit ICI's website: www.ici-exhibitions.org