

FORT GANSEVOORT

The New Yorker

ART APRIL 10, 2017

“MARCH MADNESS” IN THE MEATPACKING DISTRICT

Sports gets political in a new show of works by women.

Fort Gansevoort | 5 Ninth Ave. | 917-639-3113

By Andrea K. Scott



GOINGS ON
ABOUT TOWN

EXPLORE



*"Beauty (K.T.)" (2002), by Collier Schorr, in the exhibition "March Madness," at Fort Gansevoort.
Courtesy Collier Schorr / 303 Gallery*

The N.C.A.A. brackets have come and gone, but “March Madness” prevails in the meatpacking district, where a terrific group show by that name is installed at Fort Gansevoort, an idiosyncratic gallery (and occasional barbecue joint) in a three-story town house at 5 Ninth Ave. As its title implies, the show’s theme is sports, which, on its own, is nothing novel. A quick spin through the Met will turn up figures of wrestlers painted on an Ancient Greek amphora in 500 B.C., a Mesoamerican stone carving of a ballplayer made roughly a thousand years later, and mid-nineteenth-century portraits of matadors by Édouard Manet. But Fort Gansevoort flips the script on millennia of male-dominated athletics with art works by thirty-one women made between the mid-twentieth century and now, from Elizabeth Catlett’s jubilant 1958 print of a barefoot girl jumping rope to a just-finished collage of a pigtailed boxer by Deborah Roberts, a young artist who borrows the Dadaist strategies of Hannah Höch for the era of Black Lives Matter.

The show (which runs through May 6) was co-curated by the artist Hank Willis Thomas and the gallerist Adam Shopkorn (who is also a film producer, with a basketball documentary under his belt). The fact that this all-women show is the brainchild of men might have drawn fire for paternalism were it not for the show’s persuasive politics, at the intersection of feminism and race. The first sign that we aren’t in for a Leroy Neimanesque straight sports experience arrives just inside the front door: a 1:100 scale model of a two-hundred-metre track constructed from two thousand acrylic fake fingernails, painted with stars and stripes and embellished with rhinestones by Pamela Council. The sculpture is an homage to the Olympic gold medalist Florence Griffith Joyner, an insouciant monument to black power and beauty. Nearby hang two elegiac works by Gina Adams, which incorporate vintage photographs of the girls’ basketball team at the assimilationist Osage Boarding School, in Oklahoma, where children were forbidden to speak their native language—even denied the right to say their own names.

There are obligatory works by the well-known, including the photographer Catherine Opie’s 2008 take on high-school football and a black-and-white gem from 1979 by Cindy Sherman, in Sonja Henie mode as a stocking-capped figure skater. But discoveries—and rediscoveries, in the case of a 1976 series of “video drawings” of televised sports by Howardena Pindell—outmatch the usual suspects. One standout is the Washington, D.C.-based performer Holly Bass, who, like Sherman, suits up for

photographic self-portraits. In a quartet of studio shots, Bass styles herself as a posthuman athlete, so at one with her game that a pair of basketballs replaces her derrière. It's a joyous slam dunk of a conceit—a pointedly absurdist sendup of misogynist visual clichés. ♦

This article appears in other versions of the April 10, 2017, issue, with the headline “On the Ball.”