



YOU WANT ME TO LIFT THAT?
SPORTS AND ENERGY IN WEEKEND TOURNAMENT
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In Weekend Tournament, presented at Raisononné's 16 Crosby Street gallery, co-curators Raquel Cayre and Ariel Ashe have assembled around sixty art and design objects that examine the ways in which energy can be captured in the athletic—and aesthetic—space. As I walked through the exhibition's rooms—practically teeming with objects, displayed as if to rub and push against one another, like so many sharp-elbowed players in a ball game—I felt the works' poignant attempt to transcend their own boundaries, to capture the swing and thump of athletic action, but also transmit it outward, to their viewers.

The exhibition groups together pieces from the wholesomely straightforward to the more slyly tricky, all linked in some way to sports. And while the show doesn't emphasize an expressly male perspective, it nonetheless immediately brought to my mind Philip Roth's 1969 classic "Portnoy's Complaint," with its protagonist's wild, masculine life force imprinting itself, any which way, on the things making up the world around him. There's something about the restlessness contained within the works in Weekend Tournament that calls to mind Alex Portnoy's central dilemma: where the hell to put all the energy roiling within him. (As a lover and, some might say, a bit of a scholar of Jewish masculinity, I'm always

attuned to these questions of channeling and displacement—the way energy converts itself, variously, into intellectual pursuits, worldly ambition, antagonism toward family and peers, or, naturally, into the realm of sports.)

Adam McEwan's *Fountain* (2008) is seemingly a readymade of a drinking fountain of the sort found in any school or gym but is, in fact, a graphite sculpture cast as a monument to uselessness, its dumb, gray denseness packing within it a frustrated energy. No one will be able to quench their post-game thirst using this fountain, just like no one will be able to play pickup using Richard Prince's *Untitled (Backboard)* (2008)—a blunted, vertically positioned car hood fitted with a basketball hoop that hovers a mere inch or two above floor level, like a monocle gripped in the hollow of a blind eye. The implement's thwarted desire, however, still resides within the work. In Rachel Harrison's sculptural installation *FCHEM* (2016), too, the polystyrene, cement, and burlap makings of an outsize orange kettle ball render it a kind of sick joke, an energy bomb with no place to go. (You want me to lift that?)

These pieces capture something essential about the relationship between athletic equipment and the body—the way objects can become repositories for both shame and aspiration. Roth understood this duality perfectly when he had teenage Portnoy slink into a burlesque house in downtown Newark on a Sunday morning to surreptitiously masturbate his way to completion, using his baseball mitt to catch his own

ejaculate. Here, sports equipment is made shameful for its role as repository for sleazy bodily activity. ("What misery descends upon me as the last drops finally dribble into my mitt," Portnoy laments, neatly capturing that depressingly familiar post-jerk-off feeling.) But athletics, and athletic gear, can also take on a more wholesome quality in Portnoy's world, as when, inhaling "that sour springtime bouquet in the pocket of my fielder's mitt," he sits in the bleachers watching neighborhood men playing softball, thinking: "I love those men! I want to grow up to be one of those men!"

The artists in Weekend Tournament seem equally aware of this push and pull between hope and frustration, between the promise of athletic transcendence and its inevitable limitations. Jasper Marsellis's *Rachel* (2024), in which a roughly whittled piece of wood is stuck brutally in a bowling ball's gripping hole, enacts a kind of chakra-blocking within the sculpture itself, and the various vintage medicine balls strewn near it remind us that sometimes, the point of sports equipment is pain rather than ease. In Chadwick Rantanen's *Telescopic Pole* (2015), adjustable aluminum pegs stretch from ceiling to floor, where they are rooted in tennis balls decorated with smiley faces. The balls' grins read as long-suffering rather than game. How much longer must they withstand this pressure, this tension? In a series of small paintings by John Roman Brown (all 2025), each depicting a member of a high-school basketball team posing in his uniform, the players'

smiles, too, seem rictus-like. Looking at them, I was reminded of the immortal words of Drake, that present-day bard of Black-Canadian-Jewish masculinity, "I got enemies, got a lot of enemies / Got a lot of people tryna drain me of this energy." The weight of portraying the role of "athlete" appears to be a thorny performance, laden with pressures. Sometimes the energy that sports promise to channel can become yet another burden to bear.

But the exhibition's most poignant pieces may be those that pay tribute to Philip Roth's approximate contemporary, the midcentury ping-pong champ Marty Reisman. In Sam Stewart's Ping-Pong Table (2025), the artist models a functional bespoke table on Reisman's own, which can be used by visitors to the exhibition, allowing actual athletic energy to be let loose, in situ. The Marty Cabinet (2025), also by Stewart, serves as that table's counterpart. Fashioned out of plywood, in the shape of a life-size man's torso and legs, clad in a striped button-down shirt and pants, the wall-hung cabinet opens to reveal a shelving unit, on which extra ping-pong balls are kept. What would we see if we were able to open a man up to look inside him? To judge by Stewart's piece, we would discover a single desire: to always retain a bit more energy within, ready to be spent whenever the moment calls for it.

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