

"Playing by the Rules" explores systems and games as inspiration, working method, and subject matter for contemporary art. To answer a frequent question – I did not set out with this exhibition (or any other) to confirm a curatorial premise. I look and listen as artists reflect the tremors and movements in the contemporary art community. "What is next" is always my interest and making sense of that is my curatorial goal.

"Playing by the Rules"

There is a density of thought and material in the art on exhibit; the viscous solidity of rubber cast in the colors of the playground, the inked remnants of Ben Day dot patterns on woodblock prints, staccato circular forms emerging from the surface of a painting then cascading to the floor of the gallery. Color theory, gender roles, ephemera, the newest technology and the sweep of the artist's arm all find their place in the richly thought-through and superbly executed work on exhibit.

Tory Fair, John Schulz and Linda Price-Sneddon have taken a leap of faith in allowing the Montserrat Gallery to showcase their dynamic works of art in conversation. Visitors to "Playing by the Rules" complete the synthetic energy and allow a new relatedness to emerge. Thanks to all: the many artists who allow me into their studios, the Montserrat college staff – especially Laura Donaldson – and you, the viewer, for your part in this venture.

– Barbara O'Brien





Tory Fair, *Running Bases*, Detail

Tory Fair uses the architecture of sports to create a self-portrait *in absentia*¹. *Four Square* and *Running Bases* are site-dependent sculptures developed for the Montserrat Gallery. As sculptural memoirs, they draw inspiration from a childhood spent as a 'tomboy.' They are also the efforts of a young artist to find and utilize her own aesthetic and personal vocabulary. "The objects get stronger in relation to a specific space. The gallery has become the idea of 'game time.' I want to create idiosyncratic objects that exist by themselves and create their own terms."

The gallery is its own playing field with anticipated rules and rewards. Fair upends our expectations of its discreet demeanor. *Running Bases*

"One of the reasons you choose to become an artist is to set your own rules: there is no protocol. You approach the day in a way consistent with the next day – you wake up and make a piece or a drawing or whatever. As a young artist I don't find myself being drawn to any 'school of art.' I am excited by artists who are breaking the rules." – Tory Fair

brings the parquet floor of the gymnasium to the gallery. The understated linoleum tile of the gallery is mirrored and gently mocked as saturated red and blue, and translucent yellow tiles define the interior space of *Four Square*.

The primary identity of these sculptures, however, comes from Fair's use of cast rubber—dense, awkward and heavy. She employs an industrial palette, using the rubber just as it comes from the supplier. The sculpture is cast using plaster molds, which leaves the surface of the lines and balls rough. "The forms would be too neat if I made the molds of rubber. The seams would be too neat. I like the excavated sense of them as not perfect."

Tory Fair

Born in 1968 in Washington, D.C.
Residence and studio: Waltham, MA

Currently: Artist in Residence, Brandeis University

1997 Master of Fine Art, painting and printmaking, Massachusetts College of Art

1993 Additional study, School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

1993 Bachelor of Arts, sculpture and religion, Harvard University

Awards

2001 Blanche Coleman Award
1997 Joan Mitchell Foundation Award

"I thought it would be fun to make courts and scenarios out of materials that are so dysfunctional. I love the idea of having a dysfunctional game. It is a great metaphor. I've been thinking about the difference between making a game – iterating it – and using the game as a source for sculpture. One of the major questions is 'Is the sculpture something to be looked at or to be engaged?' For now, I don't want people to move the pieces around. I don't want the elements to be props."

In this choice, Fair declares the primacy of the sculpture; the materiality overrides the person in the game. "As a painter, I could never get past the edges of where the work began and ended. I was never satisfied with the physicality of it. When I was working on etchings, I was moving lines around a court. With sculpture, there is an elegant play between inside and outside. The edges relate to where you are standing. When you play soccer there is also that play between inside and outside. The soccer field becomes more like an organism moving and expanding in relation to you, your team and the goals."

There is humor and delight in these sculptures, a reflection of the life of the body in synergy with the life of the mind. "I'm much happier now working in the context of sport. It has been so much of my life – a girl in New Jersey playing on the boys' soccer team."

¹Borzello, F., *Seeing Ourselves: women's self-portraits*, Harry Abrams, New York, 1998