

Michelle Furlong, Inter“play”, Centre Clark, Montréal

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Michelle Furlong *Inter“play”*

Baseball is a meditative pursuit for some and an infuriatingly slow-paced experience for others. Like most sports, it is dictated by time-honoured traditions, rules and regulations, and various other circadian rhythms of the playing field and clubhouse. It also has its own ecosystem of movements (swings, throws, catches, runs), codes (fastball, ace, dinger, punch out), and objects (ball, bat, mitt, base, mound, helmet). The prototypical fanatic knows this universe well, becoming a fervent reader of the game's undercurrents.

Michelle Furlong's solo exhibition *Inter“play”* at Centre Clark explores the liminal and spiritual qualities of sports. The first object encountered, the negative mold of a golden visage, is isolated from the others in the main gallery by a white wall. Delicate and small, pressing into the wall, the piece resembles the inverted form of a statuette typically found on a trophy. The presentation of a present/absent figure connotes a deconstructive approach to celebratory pageantry. This more quiet, introspective look at athletic achievement is supported by Alisha Piercy's introductory essay, which describes *Inter“play”* as “stepping over a boundary into another space, a non-space.”

Walking beyond the dividing wall into the second gallery, the viewer is ushered into a captivating interstitial sporting landscape. Furlong's installation is composed of sculptures and paintings that draw on the visible and invisible forces of sports iconography and patterns of play. A large painting at the centre of the gallery depicts overlapping black numbers partially framed by a thin-lined pink rectangle, mimicking the back of a sports jersey. From a distance, the shapes generated by the critical mass of digits creates chance assemblages, but from close up, each individual number can be read independently. Another painting layers white and pink lines on a jet-black background, resembling set plays from a coach's playbook. Making an abstraction out of the

rigid, ingrained painted lines of a court by reassembling and decontextualizing them, Furlong steps into the intangibles of magical sporting moments. An additional green painting of a white and ethereal wind-caught net, dangling over the sections of a pitch, compliments the free-flowing unknowns of the installation.

The cast of a bare foot stepping on a green ball, upright and prone baseball bats with charred tips, stacks of gold ceramic gongs with paint-bucket handles, and clear plastic drum mallets populate the exhibition's floorspace. A series of cast hands hangs from the wall, recreating sign language reminiscent of a catcher's coded exchanges with his pitcher. Ceramic face masks, broken and reassembled, are also present. Recalling the commotion of the infield, a circular cut-out of a sandy surface bears traces of handprints. The wonderfully suggestive objects in *Inter“play”*, seemingly caught mid-game, act as apparitions that underscore the unpredictability of sport. Suggesting both a darker, flip side of the game, and a faith in the higher powers often ascribed to in order to win, Furlong successfully encapsulates the affective reaches of play and fandom.

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Michelle Furlong
Inter“play”, exhibition
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