

BASIL SELLEERS ART PRIZE 2010

Anyone who has attended an event at a major sporting stadium in recent years will have encountered an art-historical curiosity: a planar anamorphic projection. These are the distorted corporate logos that are painted onto the playing surface. Stretched along carefully defined mathematical vectors, the warped shapes become 'flat' and legible logos when viewed from the correct angle. In art, the most renowned example of the process is found in the anamorphic skull introduced by Hans Holbein the Younger into his painting *The ambassadors* (1533).

Today, the correct viewing angle for sports stadium anamorphosis is from the couch. The illegible image on the stadium turf becomes a readable brand when it is adjusted by the television camera and relayed to our homes. Surprisingly, one of the first to experiment with this process—a distortion of the real world and its correction in the camera—was a Dutch conceptual artist, Jan Dibbets; another case of artistic experiment co-opted by advertising 'creatives'. In today's televisual anamorphic projections, Juan Ford finds an apt metaphor for contemporary sporting spectacles: the actual, physical events of the arena take second place to the virtual reality of the commercial broadcast.

In works like *An aberrant history of sports hydration* (2010), Ford returns to the more familiar form of anamorphic projection in art; mirror anamorphosis. Historically, artists used anamorphic projection's combination of mathematics, technical virtuosity and perceptual puzzles to ponder the complexities of vision and representation. Ford's work is a reflection on a conundrum at the heart of representations of sport. For thousands of years, artists have struggled to reconcile the dynamism of sport with the stasis of art. Whether represented on a Greek vase or in a twentieth-century Futurist sculpture, sport ceases to be a mobile, physical act and becomes a frozen, somewhat diagrammatic, representation.

Of course, the gap between the real and the represented is challenge to any artist but those choosing to tackle sport feel it most keenly. In Ford's painting, the distorted anamorphic forms, illegible as athletes, nevertheless have a sense of energy and activity; the elongated forms evoke racers flashing past or a blurred action photograph. When they pop into focus by dint of the perspectival correction wrought by light, mirror and eye, they become legible but static. Paradoxically, Ford suggests, 'seeing' sport freezes the action. In any case, they are representations of earlier representations of sport. They, too, are a kind of virtual reality.

The other great virtual reality mechanism is memory. Memory conjures vivid but ever-changing visions of the past. When a sport fan declares, 'I was there', the story will be rich in detail but may have only a tenuous relationship to the facts. *A memoir from the break of day* (2010), a self-portrait of the artist as an eight-year-old cross-country runner, plots this rhythm of intensity and distance in sporting memories.

Juan Ford

An aberrant history of sports hydration 2010
oil on wood, steel jug, steel sports bottle
35 x 90 x 60 cm
Courtesy the artist, Dianne Tanzer Gallery,
Melbourne; Jan Manton Art, Brisbane; and
Sullivan+Strumpf Fine Art, Sydney

A memoir from the break of day 2010
oil on wood, steel fire extinguisher
37 x 59 x 59 cm
Courtesy the artist, Dianne Tanzer Gallery,
Melbourne; Jan Manton Art, Brisbane; and
Sullivan+Strumpf Fine Art, Sydney

