

Intro Slide

Hi everybody, thank you for coming to my presentation. It really means a lot to me that you would take time out of your day to come and hear me talk about an installation and topic that is so important to me.

So without further ado I invite you into the world of my SFD: Elegantly Violent: Exploring masculinity and gender expectations within womens sports.

“Throw like a girl”

To start I ask you to read the above quote. A sentence with four words, four words which have both driven and haunted my career as a female athlete and rugby player. Four words that carry significant weight for most female athletes. Please, sit and think about what this phrase might mean to you, what images it conjures.

While this exhibition is inspired by my personal experiences and the amazing athletes I have met over my years, it is also inspired by the desire to break down this statement.

A statement that is too often used as a throwaway comment or insult, invalidating the work and actions of not just female athletes, but all women and girls. A comment that is only a part of the problem and a small piece of the barriers women and girls face when trying to get in or stay in sport

For some context: In 2020, the Women's Sports Foundation released a report highlighting gender disparities in sports participation within the USA. Ages 7-17.

The report showed that girls were more likely to have never played a sport and were even less likely to be actively participating in sport.

While this is telling of sports participation, there are other factors that impact the experiences of girls in sport beyond just whether they play or have played.

Furthermore, 68% of girls currently playing report having a male coaching staff. A stat that may seem irrelevant to some, but most athletes and I am sure most people in this room can speak to the importance of representation within their role models.

Speaking of representation for young female athletes, only 13% of parents actually encourage their girls to follow sports and sports figures, with the percentage getting drastically lower for female sports figures.

These statistics showcase only a small amount of the various barriers, hurdles and challenges a young female athlete must navigate to even begin playing. And what is more alarming is that these statistics grow more dire for women of colour and from low-income backgrounds. Showcasing the importance of considering intersectionality when talking about the female athlete experience.

Elegantly Violent as a topic

Sport is seen as a space made by and for men, a space for championing masculine traits such as strength, muscularity, and aggression. A notion evidenced by men being encouraged or rather expected to play, while women must justify their desire to participate in any activity based upon aggression, competition, and strength.

A major part of this problem is that there is an ongoing blurring of gender identity and presentation, especially within sport. This idealised binary that to be masculine is to be male, and to be strong, muscular, and powerful makes you masculine, continues to fuel the deficit of girls in sport and of respect female athletes receive.

Furthermore, the policing of this binary has led to too many female athletes—disproportionately female athletes of color—facing gender based scrutiny. Suggesting that when a female athlete dominates, when she reaches the peak of her career, has won countless championships, and has built her body for that purpose, that she couldn't possibly still be female, because to follow with the popular binary I

previously highlighted the alternative is to be female, and to be female is to be feminine, submissive, emotional and quiet.

Elegantly Violent serves as a counterargument to these ideas and understandings of gender and female athletes. To be masculine does not mean to be male, and to be strong and muscular does not mean you have to be masculine. Throughout EV, women, and female athletes confidently embrace all aspects of sport, actively defy the binary, challenge stereotypes, and embody confidence in a way that women are too often told they shouldn't.

Frameworks of Elegantly Violent

As the idea for Elegantly Violent evolved and as I began to research and curate the objects for the show, four clear sections, or rather frameworks of the EV story, came to light. The four frameworks became:

Herstory

- Objects from over 100 years ago that showcase early examples of women in sport, embracing masculinity and/or defying the social norms and gender expectations placed on them.

Compete

- These objects showcase examples of female athletes competing at some of the highest levels of competition, highlighting discourse around uniform, appearance, muscularity, and their actions. This section is also arguably the main part of EV as it also is home to representation of day-to-day athletes, showcasing strength and reclaiming typically male-dominated spaces.

Impactful Identities

- While the focus of this exhibition is on female athletes and gender discourse, this section acknowledges intersectionality, other aspects of a person's identity that

impact their female athlete identity. The identities covered in this section include sexuality, race, and nationhood.

The Spectator

- This section questions you as the spectator. It highlights how these stereotypes and binaries are created or reinforced in our culture and thus how it is the role of all of us as spectators to question our understandings, where they come from, and why they are there.

Herstory

As I previously mentioned, the first section/framework, 'Herstory' highlights earlier and historical examples of female athletes and women competing in sporting activities commonly reserved for men.

Containing four objects, the first three objects are photos showcasing more domestic sporting acts, highlighting differences in presentation while completing the same or similar action.

The object I want to draw your focus to is the one to the right. "Golf for Women, by Genevieve Hecker"

Cover of Golf for women (Artist Once Known, About 1904, Woodcut on paper)

This piece wasn't originally going to be in this exhibition because of its face value, seemingly showcasing it as a very stereotypical portrayal of a woman. The composition of the object plays into the way western audiences read, from left to right, as we are drawn to the top left corner to view her face before following her outstretched arm as she carries what looks like a handkerchief. Furthermore, the way her clothes and hair are blowing in the wind draws the eyes of the viewer smoothly from the left to the right of the object.

The image plays on the wind motif even more when incorporating the text, as the image is broken up by the fluid line before the words.

As you look more closely you can also see another woman swinging a club in the background. So the only woman in action in this object is the woman in the background

creating ideas of leisure and play as opposed to performance and competition, as the emphasis is not on the women playing, rather the woman looking wistfully into the distance.

The reason this object went from being not really considered to becoming one of my favorites is thanks to its context as a cover for the book “Golf for Women” by Genevieve Hecker. Hecker’s book is thought to be one of the first books written on sport with the primary audience being women, and where what she talks about does not include conforming to expectations, but rather defying them. She details the barriers, and attitudes from men she has faced and then provides advice on how to combat them. In her book the reader sees how she balances conformity of the time, with challenging the misogyny thrown her way almost daily.

For context Hecker was by far one of the best female golfers of her time. A two- time women’s US Amateur champion in 1901 and 1902, She was considered both formidable within the women’s category and competitive within the men’s game, a notion unheard of at the time. Her accomplishments saw her inducted into the Connecticut Golf Hall of Fame and the Metropolitan Golf Hall of Fame in 2020. So while a fitting part of the herstory section Hecker’s story creates a fitting transition into the next section/chapter: Compete

Compete

Compete embodies the discourse around masculinity and gender stereotypes in women's sports. The objects in this section highlight women competing in a way that can be most simply described as—well—‘competitive.’ In these objects, the athletes depicted are among many things strong, sweaty, muscular, and powerful, all aspects that tie in with traditional ideas of masculinity.

The five objects in this section highlight different examples and different levels of athleticism, but one that encapsulates EV the most is:

Audrey Resting in Her Corner (Delilah Montoya, 2005, Gelatin Silver Print)

An object drawn from her series “Women Boxers: The New Warriors” here the photographer Delilah Montoya has captured not just an image but a dynamic moment in

time showcasing opposing representations of gender and embodiment of gender expectations. Delilah Montoya completed this project by following a wide variety of women boxers as they competed against others and each other. She sought to showcase female boxers, their strength, tenacity, skill, and aggression. All values which see female athletes in combat sports much more heavily scrutinized regarding their gender. The collection was described as a “Photography collection featuring strong, courageous women taking on a man’s sport.” by Arte Publico Press—The oldest and most accomplished publisher of contemporary and recovered literature by Hispanic creatives and authors.

Looking at this particular image “Audrey Resting in Her Corner” the title itself provides a clear description. We see the boxer—Audrey—resting in her corner of the ring presumably resting in between rounds of a fight.

To look deeper, the viewer's eyes are actually drawn to Audrey thanks to the composition of this image and use of low angles and the triangulation of points of interest. The positioning of Audrey in between the heels of the ring girl and the ropes of the ring draw the viewer's eye to the boxer, helping make her the center of attention, even though she is not the biggest element of the image.

There are people in Montoya’s image I want to highlight. The boxer—Audrey, the woman hanging between the ring ropes seen through the legs of the ring girl, and the ring girl herself. Through these three women we are seeing three completely different representations of women in sport. Audrey as the athlete, and competing in a combat sport is most obviously breaking down stereotypes of gender. However, the woman ring side is also doing this in a much more subtle way. She serves as a representation of the spectator in this image, and is breaking down ideas of sport spectatorship also being a space reserved for men. These two women seem to provide a juxtaposition to the ring girl, helping to fuel the dynamic story being told through this one image. The ring girl—from what we can tell—is partaking in an expected role of a woman in this context, wearing high heels and adhering to the hypersexualized expectations of a ring girl. That being said, I want to acknowledge assumptions that have been made in the viewing of this piece, most notably that the ring girl is a ring girl. To the average viewer of this piece there is opportunity for discussion around the identity of the person in

heels. Are they representing what we have been taught to expect? Are they breaking down any narratives? Are they a girl? Thanks to my research I know that she is a woman, but it is something to consider when viewing pieces like this.

L'eggs Mini Marathon (Tod Papageorge, 1979, Gelatin Silver Print)

Probably one of the most dynamic and active images in EV, L'eggs Mini Marathon is an image of exactly that, taken by the acclaimed documentary photographer—Ted Papageorge—it provides a snapshot into the world and excitement of some of the earliest examples of female only competitive races.

The composition of this object is incredibly dynamic, busy, and the placement of the central figures liken this scene to the Last Supper giving it an almost religious feel to it. In the image you have all of the women rushing to get something to drink before continuing with their race. Each individual woman tells a different story, so I would recommend a fun game for you as you view this piece; look at each woman and imagine what her life looks like—is she a chef? A banker? A stay at home mom? A full-time runner?. In the middle of the piece there seems to be an interesting interaction between three women, as one reaches with her outstretched arm to try and grab a cup, crossing over the body of the woman to her right who is looking at her in what I interpreted as a bit of a judgmental way. Behind these two women is the tall woman looking over their heads staring directly down the barrel of the photographer with a weirdly neutral expression.

But what is a L'eggs Mini Marathon?

In 1972, Fred Lebow—the president of the New York Road Runners Club—was tasked by a women's shaving cream company to create a "Women's marathon". So, with miniskirts being 'all the rage' Lebow founds the 'Mini Marathon' a 10k race exclusively for women, and after a very prompt switch in sponsors it becomes the L'eggs Mini Marathon (L'eggs is a brand of ladies pantyhose).

A marathon series created as a marketing ploy, then went on to provide some of the most competitive sporting opportunities of the time, growing from a singular annual race to a whole race circuit with the final race in New York eventually being televised.

The L'eggs mini marathons are a very early example of how investing in women's sports has benefitted both the athletes competing but also those that are sponsoring and putting the money in. A topic so relevant today as more and more women's sports are having to plead their case for investment with dated excuses such as "nobody watches women's sports" being proven wrong everyday, the NCAA women's Basketball and Softball finals, and the L'eggs mini marathons showcase that in fact "Everyone watches women's sports".

All of the women in this photo are sweaty and competing for the best time, the clothes they are wearing are different person to person with some wearing clothes of a more feminine feel, and others of a more masculine feel. However, the image does not carry the feeling that they care about their image or how they appear, they are there to run and to compete, and that's what they will do.

Impactful Identities

Something that I was very aware of while creating EV was how it was being created with all of my life context and that gender and identity are experienced so differently person to person

Within the three objects in this section, race, nationhood, and sexuality are discussed, notably the impacts they may have on the way female athletes are perceived, and on who may become a female athlete.

I have already very lightly touched on it, but the impact of race is seen most by Black women and other women of color. Black women are significantly more likely to receive gender based accusations and media speculation. Sexuality is another key identity intertwined with the female athlete identity and thus the piece I will be focusing on in this section is:

Dyke Deck (Catherine Opie, about 1997, Playing Cards)

Opie's *Dyke Deck* is a celebration and a source of representation for queer women and queer love of all categories, with the title reclaiming ownership of the homophobic slur used for lesbians—dyke. Opie utilizes the suits to represent different kinds of queer women. Hearts showcase couples, Spades mascs, Diamonds femmes, and Clubs

Jocks. For those that maybe aren't familiar with the terms masc and femme, it is very simple: a masc is a queer woman who presents more masculine, and a femme woman is someone who presents more feminine.

For EV I decided to focus on the suite of Clubs because it features Athletes. Each card is home to an athlete competing in a different sport, ranging from fencing and weightlifting to ballet and lacrosse. Because each suite has 14 cards in it I had to select the ones to go on show, with the ones I chose highlight a diversity of sports, and of athletes.

While there are 9 cards on show there are four that I would like to draw particular attention to: the Ace, 9, 4 and King. The four of clubs showcases a skateboarder, and helps remind us of the presence of street sports, and the 9 is one of the few examples of a female athlete of color I could find in the Hood's collection. The ace showcases an athlete completely shirtless highlighting the fluidity of gender and sexuality on show in this deck of cards, but also within the LGBTQIA+ community. The final card is the king. One of the most feminine presenting athletes of the jock category is given the most masculine of cards—the king, the epitome of power and masculinity. Here it seems that Opie is drawing attention to the diversity of sports participation and presentation, as often it is sports that are deemed more feminine that are seen as least competitive, lacking in skill or strength, when actually that is just the stereotypes associated with femininity being arbitrarily placed onto those sports.

While the sports depicted in each card are important, the emphasis is on the intersection of their identities as queer women in sport that tell the real story. Historically, women's sport, notably sports that are gendered masculine, have been a safe space for queer women, with a large proportion of players identifying as queer to some degree. A reason for this stems from the ties of masculinity and sport. For queer women, they already have embraced masculinity to an extent, and thus it is not a big jump to deal with masculinity associated with sport, and embrace it. Women's sport as a non-conforming space became a space for the non-conforming.

The Spectator

I think this is the section I had the most fun with, dealing with more abstract pieces. In this section it is the viewer, you that is targeted and asked to reflect, you become a part of the exhibition. The pieces in this section also have a heavy focus on the body and the female body, with all of the faces of women covered either by a gorilla mask or antlered animal.

While this section has two pieces, one by the Guerilla Girls which draws on gender stereotypes and imbalances within society at large and then another piece showcasing seemingly camouflaged female bodybuilders. This is the piece I want to focus on

The Competition (Marnie Weber, 1998, Photomontage)

Weber's piece is by far the most captivating and visually unusual object within EV. From a distance it looks like a hot arid landscape with animals scattered around the rock formations, but as you move closer you see it is the bodies of female bodybuilders, and again under further examination you notice that they are wearing the heads of various antlered animals. Once you have come to terms with the left side of the image, the next confusing piece of the puzzle is found in the crowd full of bunnies and rabbits watching the bodybuilders as they pose and showcase their bodies and muscles.

Weber's use of color, with the bodybuilders camouflaging into the deep reds and oranges of the warm rich earth and stone, requires the viewer to actively look for each athlete. A search that will take you to all corners of the object, and see you look for the sculpted bodies within the sculpted scenery.

The first question I get asked when people see this is Why the animal heads? Well, Weber uses this as a deliberate form of iconography in this work, stating in a previous interview

In order to find the most emotional impact from my character, even if it's in a collage, I still put a mask on the character because it signifies a dramatic emotional moment for me."

Competition is emotional, a common phrase used when a game, bout, race is close is "who wants it more?" a phrase steeped in emotion, who isn't just physically strong enough, but rather whose will power is greater?

The choice of animal also speaks to this idea of competition, strength and power with antlered animals used as a celtic symbol of nobility and strength. This then creates a comparison between the spectators of this object– the bunnies—as those are animals more often associated with femininity.

This piece, while fun to explore and digest, speaks very heavily to the role of the spectator or viewer in sport. It is the spectator that applies their biases, who scrutinizes everything they see based on these known binaries that then reinforces them. Through covering the faces of these athletes we are left with only the body with which to pass judgment on.

Thus this piece invites you to reflect on the expectations and stereotypes that you might bring to the way you view this piece. She confuses you with the montage style of the object, but also in the narratives she creates and asks you to reflect on.

Throw like a girl

As I am nearing the end of my presentation I want to bring us back to this phrase and ask you to think about it again, what does it mean to throw like a girl. Is it a good thing? Bad thing? Neutral maybe? What more can be done to shine the light on female athletes. To allow them equal pay, equal play and to just have access to sport in a way that isn't filled with scrutiny of their bodies, personalities, and gender.

This is where I want to highlight the last piece.

Ashley Tappin (Anderson & Low (Jonathan and Edwin), Negative 1999, print 2005)

When creating this exhibit this is the first piece I found and the first piece that I decided I wanted to use. That is because for me this piece—while it showcases a female athlete—is the only piece that seems genderless.

Here in a more candid and raw moment, Anderson & Low highlight the toll of performance sport. Here, Ashley is simply an athlete with ice bags saran wrapped to her body for recovery—a somewhat universal experience of athletes regardless of gender. In this moment the priority is not presenting a gendered way to fit expectations, rather sports performance and recovery take precedence, subverting expectations of the female image.

The light composition moving from dark to light and the use of the plain background reinforces this idea of solitude and reflectivity, which is a common feeling regardless of sport, team or individual.

Upon talking to the photographers Anderson and Low they detailed how while they were in their residency at the Chula Vista USA olympic training center, they would see Ashley walking around the facility with these ice bags on whenever she wasn't in the pool. They noted how she couldn't have cared less for the way it looked but rather it was what allowed her to compete at the level she did for as long as she did, so she wore them. And it worked.

Ashley's success saw her be inducted into the Greater NOLA sports hall of fame in 2022 and is also featured in the University of Arizona hall of fame.

Outside of her six NCAA championships, 20 Louisiana HS championships and 6 HS state records her accolades include:

3 pan american games gold medals, 4 swimming world cup golds and 5 silvers. At the swimming world championships she won a full set (1, gold, silver and bronze) and was a 3x olympic champion, with her first championship coming before she even turned 18. This image of Ashley truly showcases EV and some of what it means to be a female athlete.

End comments

The last aspects of the exhibition I wish to highlight are the parts that sometimes go unnoticed, the name, wall color, and frame choices. The wall color Bavarian Forest Green is paired with the Cherry wood of the frames for two distinct reasons. The first, to simulate or create a space reminiscent of a masculine study or library—continuing to play on the themes of masculinity and gender discourse. The other reason is the most important to me, the green and wood serve as an ode to all female athletes of the Big Green here at Dartmouth, who represent the lone pine with strength, dedication, and grace.

Finally the name. Elegantly Violent is the most personal reference or rather dedication of them all. Elegantly Violent is derived from the phrase Elegant Violence, an alternative name for rugby, and a name that has been used by the Dartmouth Women's rugby team

(DWR) pretty much ever since its inception in the Spring of 1978. It is the women and people of DWR that I dedicate this the most to, they are who inspired this exhibition and who inspire me everyday. They are strong, powerful, kind individuals, but most importantly a place where I found family over 3000 miles away from home

Thank you for listening, I will now be taking questions if you have any.