

# FORT GANSEVOORT

The Village Voice

## Shorts and Skins: Hands Up and Hands On in Two Trenchant Shows

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**Longo's Hands Up** COURTESY THE ARTIST AND METRO PICTURES, NEW YORK

After his buzzer-beating three-pointer crushed North Carolina in this year's March Madness finale, Villanova's Kris Jenkins lofted his arms and exclaimed, "We're just trying to be legendary!" He'll get his wish — the ball's long arc and the erupting crowd will be replayed until the end of American civilization.

Artist Hank Willis Thomas and gallerist Adam Shopkorn have gathered 44 works by 28 artists that shunt the madness of sports along the third rail of American race relations. In a five-foot-high photograph by Thomas, one black man attempts to block the shot of another who is driving toward a noose instead of a basketball hoop. Created in 2011, *And One* (the phrase alludes to the free throw a player gets when fouled while scoring) is an elusive read. With the competitors melding into a single figure reminiscent of da Vinci's Vitruvian Man, the viewer is left to wonder whether a bucket will beat the oppressor at his own game, or if this battle is an acknowledgement that even athletic stardom is no



talisman against racism.

Nearby, David Hammons's photograph *Money Tree* (1992) jukes the viewer: What at first seems to be an old basketball rim might, on closer inspection, be a bicycle tire wedged into the bark of a forked trunk. Whether this baffling object was simply found or was set up by Hammons, the mood of long-shot promises unfulfilled is unmistakable.

South African artist Robin Rhodes's sixteen-panel photographic series, *Four Plays* (2012-'13), combines graffiti with frantic courtside strategizing. Repeatedly chalking a basketball on a broad wall, Rhodes mimics the angular paths of bounce-passes and the zigzags of the give-and-go. Ghosts of previous geometries can be seen under the bright diagrams, while curlicues of razor wire dangling from the top of the wall and rubble on the ground imply that games are always subject to authority — not only from referees but maybe from wardens or border patrols as well.

Robert Longo's huge (roughly eight by twelve feet) charcoal drawing *Full-Scale Study for Five Rams* (*Ferguson, Hands Up: November 30, 2014*) (2015) depicts the five St. Louis Rams players who raised their hands in a "don't shoot" gesture to protest the police killing of Michael Brown. The charcoal smudges and blurs channel the dispute between dueling spokesmen over whether the Rams organization ever issued an apology to local law enforcement and evoke the fog surrounding the facts of the unarmed teenager's death, which led to a federal crackdown on the corrupt Ferguson Police Department.

In 1967 Emory Douglas became the Black Panthers' minister of culture, illustrating and designing the party's newspaper. In 1972 he mixed satire with outrage in *Olympics*, his prescient cartoon poster of a black sprinter raising his arms as he crosses the finish line, thrusting them up again when he gets his medal, and finally, for a third time, when he's threatened by shotgun-wielding police back home. The piece (presented in an ink-jet print here) echoed the moment four years earlier in Mexico City when Tommie Smith and John Carlos raised their black-gloved fists while receiving the gold and bronze medals for the 200-meter dash. The International Olympic Committee (led by former



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Nazi sympathizer Avery Brundage) threatened to suspend the entire U.S. track squad for the pair’s violation of the supposedly apolitical spirit of the Olympics, and the USOC sent the champions packing. Decades later, Carlos brought the whole issue full circle by telling the Associated Press that the Rams players could “raise their hands in support of whatever their emotions are, they have the right to do that.” Then he added, “I don’t think anyone got injured or shot by expressing emotions.”





**Gallagher's Copper John** COURTESY LINDA GALLAGHER/BLACK BALL PROJECTS

In his 2013 photograph *San Francisco*, Ted Partin had an attractive woman wearing only panties kneel before a mirror set on the floor, like Narcissus at his pool. But she is not selfie-obsessed — her reflected eyes stare directly at us, framed by the drape of her long red hair, which is twinned by a tawny curtain in the background. Although she's cropped at the waist by the photo — a deceptively quiet composition of dynamic triangles and curves — we see her entire body, the reflection stacking her torso below tattooed thighs like a misaligned puzzle.



Flesh also takes center stage in Linda Gallagher's 2015 painting *John With Palms* — the naked man may be masturbating, but drippy leaves obscure the action. Dispensing with head and legs to concentrate on the model's chest and nether region, Gallagher delivers a witty reversal on the concept of the male gaze.

Partin and Gallagher are married to each other, their different mediums converging on similar themes. Gallagher's pencil drawing of a lean male's trunk with tucked penis is hung next to Partin's photo of a flat-chested young woman, both figures cropped near throat and angled knees. Nearby, Gallagher doubles down on the androgyny with a typically deft drawing of a slim feminine torso sporting a strap-on dildo.

One series of Partin's photos is so dark that the female subjects emerge unexpectedly, shades from shadows. This sense of murky attraction continues in another of Gallagher's nimble sketches, the pencil contours of flanks supplemented with scaly copper leaf to define an erect penis. A third material listed is "Acid Rain," presumably the small brown stains on the sheet.

These crops and corruptions of the human body give rise to compelling formal beauty even as the flesh sends our thoughts beyond what's depicted, as Jake Barnes laments in *The Sun Also Rises*: "I could picture it. I have a rotten habit of picturing the bedroom scenes of my friends."

**'March Madness'**



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**'Family Viewing': Linda Gallagher & Ted Partin**

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