

Fantasy Prize

Gary Katiya and Liam Murray

Pop Gun,

293 23rd St. #2

Brooklyn, NY

April 24th, 2025

Painting is not unlike sports insofar as it involves play within a highly delimited field. In fact, both activities fall under the definition of a game offered by Bernard Herbert Suits in *The grasshopper*, as “a voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles.”¹ More specifically, Suits argues that to play a game is to attempt to achieve a goal by way of certain means permitted by specific rules. Such rules effectively prohibit the use of more efficient means, and are accepted just because they make possible the game.

We might love games for the same reason we love art. In setting up a field of rules, games and art “[postulate] a special, self-contained sphere removed from the context of profane existence.”² Games and art thus offer us a much needed break from instrumental rationality: that calculation and employment of the most efficient means for achieving a specific goal. In a historical moment in which all fields of human activity are governed by such a rational calculus,³ both games and art are an ecstatic waste of time.⁴

Gary Katiya's six paintings in the exhibition are monuments to devotion, seriality, and expenditure. Each of them depicts a helmet-wearing pirate—the logo of the Oakland Raiders—the professional American football team that famously left its hometown, relocating after the 2019 season to Las Vegas. The repeated imaging of the logo in oils—certainly one of the least efficient ways to reproduce an image—engenders all kinds of formal experiments ranging from the integration of a German-language lamentation of unrequited love to a tender exploration of the monochrome. The logo becomes for Katiya both a transitional object and a field upon which the artist demonstrates through repetition his dedication to the medium and its unique constraints.

Liam Murray's contribution to the show is Artist Fantasy League (AFL), a relational hell that maps the fantasy sports structure onto the art world. In AFL, forty artists self-reported their weekly ‘performance’ to Murray, who acted as commissioner, calculating ‘fantasy points’ corresponding to real-world activities at the end of each week. Eight teams composed of six artists each competed in the league, which began March 9th, 2025 and will run through the end of the exhibition. Documentation of the game has been photocopied and placed in a series of three-ring binders, an homage to the late Mel Bochner's *Working Drawings and Other Visible Things on Paper Not Necessarily Meant to be Viewed as Art*.

AFL was inspired by the DIY community that has formed around Pop Gun. And while the game parodies and estranges us from the violently abstract, quantitative metrics by which artists are evaluated, AFL also explores in an earnest way what Murray thinks of as the emancipatory motion immanent in fantasy sports, the transformation of competition into teamwork.

¹ Bernard Suits, *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), 55.

² Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 14.

³ Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015).

⁴ Georges Bataille, “The Notion of Expenditure,” in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, ed. and trans. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 116–129.

Liam Murray (b. 2001) is a transdisciplinary artist and researcher. They graduated from Wesleyan University and attended the Skowhegan School for Painting & Sculpture in 2023.