

**groundswell**  
community mural project

**20 ANNUAL ART 10-29-08**  
**08 AUCTION BENEFIT 7-10PM**

Tickets & Info? Call 718.254.9782 or [CLICK HERE](#) for [groundswellmural.org](#)



Menu

- Subscribe
- Shop
- B/D Apparel

- Gallery Guide
- Events
- Links

- Anthology
- About
- Home

Mailing List

 

[Join](#) [Remove](#)

Contents

- Interview: Katherine Sherwood
- Exhibition Preview: Shaun Leonardo @ LACMA
- Exhibition Review: Jorge Pardo @ Maloney Fine Art
- Interview: Larissa Bates
- Interview: Huma Bhabha
- Interview: Olivier Blanckart
- Interview: Jimmy Joe Roche
- Interview: Aids 3d
- Interview: Bjorn Veno
- Interview: Michael Berryhill

Exhibition Preview: Shaun Leonardo @ LACMA



Exhibition Preview:  
**Shaun Leonardo @ LACMA**  
by Sasha Lee



As part of LACMA’s Contemporary Projects 11, Hard Targets— Sports and Masculinity, an exhibit exploring the complexities of masculinity and sport in contemporary culture, artist Shaun Leonardo will showcase a broad array of stunning new works.

In a private event before the exhibition’s opening to the public on October 9th, Leonardo will present a theatrical spectacle entitled, “Bull In The Ring.” In keeping with his previous performative explorations into male gender identity within the context of athleticism, Leonardo will re-enact a drill he used to participate in during his ten years of playing American football, as an arena to explore conceptions of male gender identity, sexuality and popular culture.

The practice itself entails a group of ten players encircling one lone man, and rotating one by one, charging the middle man unexpectedly. The experience is comparable to being jumped by a gang- with attacks coming from any angle, and with little hope of defending yourself. Leonardo noted, “The radius is only ten yards. Even if you are quick enough to see the oncoming player,

Advertisement



Advertisement





#### Affiliates

Something  
in the  
Universe



AHF



you're lucky if you get a few steps forward and are able to hit back with some of your own force to defend yourself against the oncoming player at all." In a move that can only be described as brave, Leonardo and his gallery, Rhys Mendes Gallery, has hired a team of semi-pro football players- some with stats of 6'9, 295 lbs- to tackle him in the entirely unscripted drill. In preparation for the event, Shaun went back to his old New York football team and has spent the last eight months in training. The resultant work should be a sensational, adrenaline-rush experience for both the artist and the spectators, with any end in sight, including injury.

"Though the tactic was supposedly designed to increase awareness and alertness, often times the guy in the center gets so frightened, it really becomes a practice that functions in an opposite manner from its purpose....It's really designed to prove a person's toughness in a vicious manner, or isolate the weak. There's a part in the drill where if the middle man moves aside to dodge the oncoming player, people will snicker and scream 'Ole,' as if he is a matador, meekly evading the bull rather than taking it on head first," says Leonardo.

So why subject yourself to this kind of brutality? Leonardo sees the drill as a beautiful metaphor for the process of gendering and shaping the male identity. "Isolating male individuals is pervasive in the work force, in the military, fatherhood... the idea is that you become part of a group, but to encompass a true sense of manhood



you must also prove your own authority.” In a larger sense, the practice also seems true of the American isolationist tendency to place emphasis on an individual above the group.

Leonardo’s interest in the particular drill is rooted in a direct personal narrative—when he was in high school, he performed the drill and survived nearly every member of the team’s attack—until the very last player completely destroyed him, flipping him horizontal in the air. In some ways, Leonardo’s gravitation towards the exercise is also a nostalgic way to re-enact the past. “In many ways I’m really excited to suit up, to see how it feels to be on the field again... Ideally I want to survive to the very end, as I did before.”

By engaging in a fight that is at once both fictive and actual, detested and fondly remembered, Leonardo highlights the sport as a kind of spectacle of hypermasculinity, and examines his own tenuous and complicated relationship to his own gender identity. Leonardo notes, “Inherently in all my work I tell people half of it is critique, half of it is desire... but there is a certain nerve in my body that is looking forward to it in every single way. “

Shaun Leonardo received his M.F.A in Painting at the San Francisco Art Institute. He is currently represented by Rhys Mendes Gallery.

To view more of Shaun Leonardo's work, go to:

[Shaun Leonardo](#)

Or visit: [RHYS Gallery](#)

Image Credits:

Images from a series of works of Shaun Leonardo and the RHYS Gallery, Los Angeles

Portrait of El C. - Black and white print in artist's frame, 54 x 48 in., 2007. Photos by Morten Smidt

Portrait of a Luchador - stills from video projection, 10 min. loop, 2004

Weigh-In (performance still) 2007 Rubell Family Collection, Miami

Self-portrait Fight (promotion images) - duotone prints, 8 x 10 in., 2007





Self-Portrait Fight (performance still)2008  
Scope Miami

Portrait of El C. - C-print in artist's frame,  
54 x 48 in., 2007. Photos by Mariana Bersten

[Permalink](#) | [Discussion \(0\)](#) | [Post a Comment](#)

**There are no comments**  
[Post a Comment](#)

[Post a Comment](#)

