

FOOTBALL AND ART

Football is not normally synonymous with art and since it only became a sport in the late 19th century this means that Caravaggio or Constable will not have been painting football (though currently on display in London's National Gallery is a work by Joseph Wright dating from 1770 entitled 'two boys fighting over a bladder').

Rumours that the impressionist artists would meet up in Montmartre for a kickaround (with Henri Toulouse-Lautrec always made to play goalie) are sadly unfounded.

Nonetheless a few 20th century artists have shown some interest in the beautiful game. Here are some examples:

Our delve into art begins with this 1913 work by Italian artist **Umberto Boccioni** (1882–1916) entitled "*Dynamism of a Soccer Player*".

Boccioni is classified as a "futurist" artist – which means you need an explanation of what you are looking at. The painting depicts a dematerialized soccer player. The athlete's calf is seen in the centre of the painting, and portions of other body parts can be seen around it (i.e. as if tackled by Roy Keane).

Due to its use of vibrant hues divided into sections, the painting gives the impression that rays of light are illuminating the subject. Furthermore, the painting's use of transparent and opaque overlapping shapes exhibits a Cubist influence. (well, that's what the art book says about it)



If you want to see it, you'll find it in the Museum of Modern Art in New York. (Alternatively, sneeze into a tissue and you could recreate it)

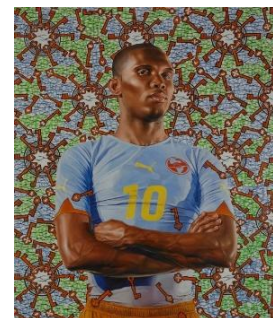


Richard Wynne Nevinson (1889-1946) was a landscape painter who became famous as a World War One artist.

A modernist who was clearly influenced by cubism, he painted *Any Wintry Afternoon in England* in 1930. It captures both the energy of a football match and the grimness of life in an industrial town. The painting is to be found in Manchester Art Gallery.

vivid African designs. His most famous work (to date) is his presidential portrait of Barack Obama. This work, dating from 2010, is of Cameroonian footballer Samuel Eto'o. It is hard to believe that it is a painting, not a photo!

American artist **Kehinde Wiley** combines photo-realistic images of his subjects with



Aleksandr Deineka (1899 -1969) was a Soviet painter, graphic artist and sculptor. He is regarded as one of the most important Russian modernist figurative painters of the first half of the 20th century. Deineka experimented with modernism in his young years, before later becoming one of the cornerstones of Socialist Realism.



His 1924 painted composition 'Football' was described by a critic as "a kind of manifesto of the new association". Funny, as it just looks like lads having a kick around.

Trained as an illustrator, Deineka's day job was as a staff artist for magazines such as "Atheist Labourer", "Red Crop Field" and "Come On" – possibly the most boring selections of magazines ever published.



All through his life Deineka was fascinated by the theme of sport as the cult of a strong and healthy body, hence the description of his work as 'socialist realism'

The Goalkeeper (1934) is in Moscow State Gallery (so you

won't be seeing that soon). However, *Football* is more accessible, being part of the Batliner Collection in Vienna's Albertina Museum.

We stay with Soviet artists for the next picture, "Football Match", painted in 1949 by **Andrei Korotkov** (1902-1988)



A Kiev-based artist Korotkov would no doubt have been aware of the legendary football matches which took place in the city against occupation forces during the Second World War, subsequently the subject of numerous books and films and part of Kiev's heroic war history.

The appeal of sport, according to Korotkov, was that it was democratic, popular, positive, optimistic, lyrical and able to accommodate 'shades of feeling'.

This picture is privately owned, having been sold at auction for £100 000.

Rose Wylie (born 1934) is described as a "rebel artist", producing extremely large paintings on unstretched, unprimed canvas, in a loose, spontaneous style. She painted "Yellow Strip" in 2006 when she was already 72 – you'd have hoped that by that age she'd have mastered drawing.....



Yellow Strip can be seen at the Serpentine Gallery, London.

Probably the best known paintings of football scenes come from **LS Lowry**. Laurence Stephen



Lowry (1897-1976) came from Manchester (Salford, to be precise) and is famous for painting scenes of life in the industrial districts of Northwest England in the mid-20th century. He developed a distinctive style of painting and is best known for his urban landscapes peopled with human figures, often referred to as "matchstick men". His naïve style was not appreciated by art critics during his lifetime, but is sought after today.

This painting, entitled "Going to the Match", depicts matchday at Burnden Park, the former home of Bolton Wanderers. It won a

competition organised by the English FA called "Football and the Fine Arts" in 1953. The painting was sold recently at auction for £6.3 million!

If you want to see it (for free) you should go to the Lowry Centre, Salford (close to Old Trafford).

Several of Lowry's paintings feature football matches being played, most notably "The football match" (1937) where he captures the raucous nature of an amateur game.



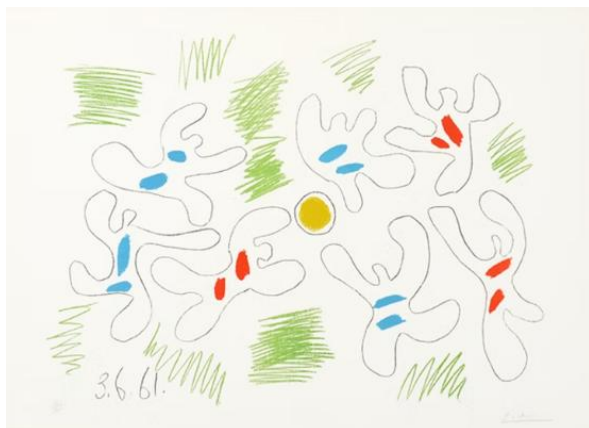
From macho Salford to effeminate France. French post-impressionist painter **Henri Rousseau** (1844-1910) painted in 1908 *Les joueurs de football* ("The Football Players").

Ridiculed during his lifetime by critics, he came to be recognized as a self-taught genius whose works are of high artistic quality.

However, it must be said that the painting does not really capture the game, showing the compest of football matches. (*ed: perhaps the French once did play football in this effeminate style, which would explain why it took them so many years to become successful at the game*).

The most famous artist to have done football art is undoubtedly **Pablo Picasso** (1881-1973). Whilst bullfighting and womanising were favourite sports interests, he did show some interest in football.

His 1961 lithograph 'footballers' does look vaguely like a football match, whilst his 1965 sculpture "Footballeur" certainly captures a person in motion, though not necessarily a footballer.....



Picasso's 'Footballeur' can be seen at the National Football Museum in Manchester, as can the next piece.



You can find many pieces of bad art depicting contemporary footballers. **Michael J. Browne's** 1997 piece *The Art of the Game* is so naff that it is good.

It depicts the victorious Manchester United team of Alex Ferguson as Roman warriors with Sir Alex the emperor and Eric Cantona the chief warrior (bizarrely holding an English flag).

At 3m x 2.5m it is epic in size!

Another Russian/Ukrainian artist with a football-themed painting is **Kazimir Malevich** (1879-1935). Well, I think it is football themed, as the piece, painted in 1915, is called "*Painterly Realism of a Football Player—Color Masses in the 4th Dimension*".

Malevich was a leader of Ukraine avant-garde art and founded a new style

of art called Suprematism. Its aim was to eradicate all references to the natural world (*ed: he's succeeded there!*) and focus instead on the inherent relationships between coloured geometric shapes against the void of a subtly textured white background.

According to the textbook from where I copied the picture this piece "*belongs to his very first group of Suprematist works. The subtitle refers to the mathematical theory of fourth dimensional space, a concept appropriated by many early twentieth-century artists to justify their representation of truths beyond immediate sensory perception*".



In the unlikely event that you wish to see this masterpiece, it is to be found in the Chicago Institute of Art.

One of the most controversial UK artists of the 20th century is **Eric Gill** (1882-1940). A sculptor, typeface and printer, Gill was a member of William Morris' 'Art and Crafts Movement'. A typical example of his style of art is the print "*Cupid Playing Football with the World*" (1929).



Unlike some of the artists featured here the controversy over Gill does not relate to his work – indeed the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* describes Gill as "*the greatest artist-craftsman of the twentieth century*". Rather, Gill the person was an appalling sexual predator, having committed incest, child abuse and bestiality.

Gill is possibly the most extreme example of the question: can one separate the artist from their work?

This picture is to be found in The Ingram Collection of Modern British and Contemporary Art, London (though, given Gill's reputation, it is unlikely to be on public display).

He also created the Gill font – *this is an example* – which you will find in Microsoft Word and you may now wish to boycott after learning about his disgusting sexual preferences.

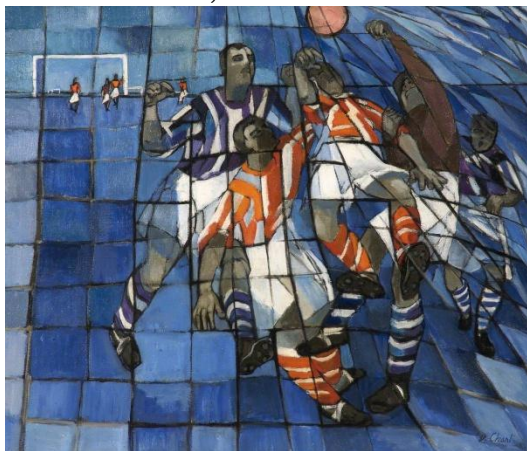
Needless to say **Andy Warhol** (1928-1987) – the man who coined the phrase “15 minutes of fame” but somehow stayed in the limelight for many years despite his lack of talent - found a way to monetise football art, by making this 1977 work of Pele. Art Collector Richard Weisman commissioned the piece as one of ten different athletes.



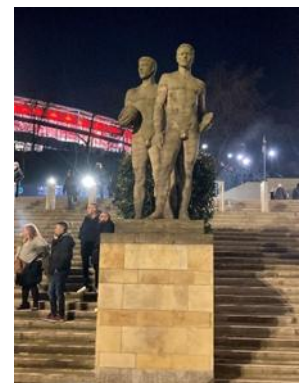
Warhol converted photos of the athletes into silkscreens, transferred the silkscreens onto pre-printed canvases, and added more brushwork on top.

Critics describe his work as ‘*democratic art, since anyone can understand it*’. An alternative perspective is that anyone can do it, for it is rubbish! It looks like the sort of collage that an eight-year old makes in art class in school. But what do I know? This masterful piece of art sold in 2020 for £575 000.

We mentioned earlier that Lowry won the 1953 competition from the FA called ‘Football and the Fine Arts’. Two of the paintings that did not win are ‘*Clapham Common*’ by **Daphne Chart** (left) and , ‘*Saturday Taxpayers*’ (right) by **Gerald Cains**. Both pictures can be found in the National Football Museum, Manchester.



From paintings to sculpture. As football has become more socially acceptable to watch many football grounds have put up statues of former players. (Fulham FC’s now disgraced former owner even put up a statue of Michael Jackson outside of their ground, but that is another story!). Few, if any, can be said to be good art. In contrast, in Leipzig outside the Red Bull Arena one finds several worthy statues of the ‘socialist realism’ style. Made originally in plaster in 1956 for a sports tournament at the stadium they were subsequently copied into limestone between 1956 and 1959 and are credited to several East German sculptors.



A rare piece of modern sculpture with a football theme that is worth mentioning is *Endless Column III* by Hank Willis Thomas (2017).

Inspired by Romanian sculptor Constantin Brâncuși’s “Endless Column” war memorial, Thomas has replicated it using footballs made out of fibreglass and painted with spray paint. (*ed: that looks like an Adidas Telstar ball.....*)

Finally, no conversation about art and football would be complete without the inclusion of Portuguese sculptor ***Emanuel Santos***. For he is the genius who made the legendary bust of Cristiano Ronaldo.

Has there ever been a work of art that better captured the graceful nature of the beautiful game than this?!!



A perfect likeness – if you have cataracts!