

**Related Events:**

All events are free and open to the public.

**Artist's reception:**

Sunday March 20, 3 - 5 pm

**Talk with the Artist:**

Sunday, May 22, 3 - 5 pm

**About the Artist:**

Betsy Odom completed her MFA in Sculpture at Yale University School of Art in 2007 and has been the recipient of numerous awards and grants. She has been involved in group exhibitions across the US since 2001, and has been the subject of solo exhibitions at venues such as Lawndale Art Center in Houston, Texas, Galveston Arts Center, in Galveston, Texas and an upcoming show at ThreeWalls in Chicago opening May 6, 2011. Betsy is an adjunct professor at Columbia College Chicago.

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## Hyde Park **ARTCENTER**

5020 South Cornell Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60615 773.324.5520 [www.hydeparkart.org](http://www.hydeparkart.org)

The Hyde Park Art Center is a not-for-profit organization that presents innovative exhibitions, primarily work by Chicago-area artists, and educational programs in the visual arts for children and adults of diverse backgrounds. The Center is funded in part by 3Arts, Alphawood Foundation; a City Arts III grant from the City of Chicago's Department of Cultural Affairs and the Illinois Arts Council; Harper Court Arts Council; The Lloyd A. Fry Foundation; The Leo S. Guthman Fund; The Irving Harris Foundation; Illinois Arts Council, a state agency; JPMorgan Chase Foundation; The Mayer & Morris Kaplan Family Foundation; The MacArthur Foundation; The MacArthur Fund for Arts and Culture at Prince; The Orbit Fund; Polk Bros. Foundation; The Clinton Family Fund; The Wallace Foundation; and the generosity of its members and friends.

Betsy Odom:

*Sis Boom Bah*

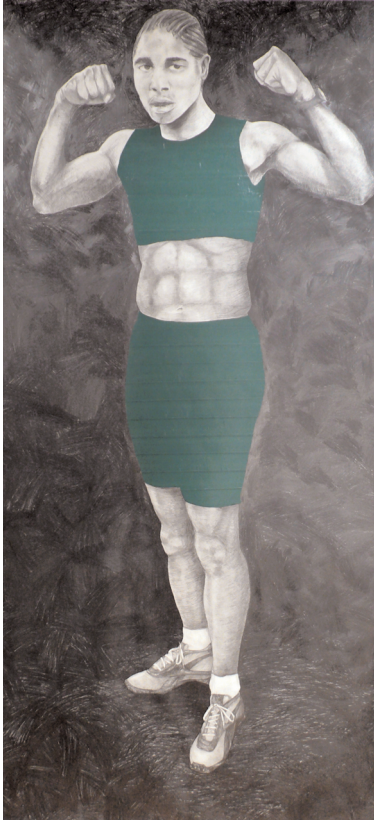


*Double Whistle*

2009

silver, felt

6 x 2 1/2 x 2 1/2 inches



*Un-titled (for Caster)*, 2010, pencil, tape on paper, 93 x 48 inches

Sports and sexuality are inextricably linked in American culture in a manner that demonstrates stereotypically masculine rather than feminine traits, such as aggressive, strong, or muscular. If Venus and Mars were to collide in the gym, the result would look like the works on view in *Sis Boom Bah*. The recent sculptures and drawing by emerging artist Betsy Odom feature a broad range of sports equipment and paraphernalia with a gender twist that will never let you look at a badminton racquet (here titled *Fertility Racquet*) the same way again. The anatomically evocative objects bring a disarming adolescent humor to the work and elicit complex questions about the behaviors and actions that are acceptable for women on the court, but are taboo in everyday social situations.

Several of the artworks make reference to the Bulldogs, based on the women's softball team the artist briefly joined when she first moved to Chicago in 2008. Playing with the stereotype that softball is a lesbian sport, Odom created a series of retro-looking team flags that set the tone for *Sis Boom Bah*. One enthusiastically states "Go Bitches", undermining the insulting nature of the curse word and another depicts

the artist's portrait in cartoon profile as the head of the bulldog mascot. The culture of athletic teams inspired Odom to make an ongoing body of work of dozens of objects that subvert assumptions of gender identity as experienced through the familiar world of sports.

I In my most recent work I have focused a lens on the pathos of sport, particularly-although not exclusively-as it pertains to women's athletics. I exaggerate the stylized and fetishized aesthetics of athletic equipment, with its inherent relationship to the body and to culture. But I also look at sport as a symbol of desire and longing, both for human connection and for the fantasy of physical greatness. I am not a particularly talented athlete, but I often long for an understanding of the peculiar and private world of women's athletics. In works like Bulldog 6 (headgear), a pink handmade karate helmet, or Bulldog 30 (Shoulder Pads), a set of ornate shoulder pads which bridge a space between protective gear and a mysterious dapper ritual, I have tried to create a way for viewers to explore and indulge in these fantasies.

- Betsy Odom

Southern culture, women's athletics, queer lifestyles, car enthusiasts, hobbyists, fantasy, or camp - according to the artist, these aspects of her life

experience and interests particularly influence her artwork. Events from popular contemporary culture also weave in and out of the artwork and anchor the objects in reality. The keystone piece in this exhibition is *Un-titled (for Caster)*, a seven-foot drawing of South African Caster Semenya, the eighteen-year-old Women's World Champion runner who was ordered by the International Association of Athletics Federation to take a gender test in 2009 due to her masculine appearance and deep voice. Odom boldly depicts Semenya as a larger-than-life force in a victor's pose while duct tape fills in - or holds down - her sexual body parts. The idea of the hermaphrodite carries over to the rest of the objects on view as Odom's forms evoke both male and female physical attributes.

To understand Odom's sculptures, look to the material for clues. Cork, wood, clay and leather have the matte quality of skin and draw a direct connection to the body. Her emphasis on tactility through her materials allows the artwork to extend beyond the body and become an uncanny body itself. Odom primarily uses craft materials and techniques to create objects that address difficult issues of gender and derail the pejorative notion of craft. By comfortably shifting between the traditionally masculine and feminine forms craft such as leather tooling and whittling to sewing and molding, the composite style of her artwork is consistent with the gender hybridity addressed in the objects she produces.

The sculptural forms are well-rendered and life-like, having been modeled on the artist's own body measurements because they originate from her desire to wear them. The shapes Odom carves, tools and builds come alive with alluring detail. For example, the delicate strip of garter belt lace that accents the wooden knee brace in Bulldog 7 turns protective gear into kinky lingerie and something you might want to try on too. The found textiles in Odom's work, including the striped part of a tube sock or the waistband of men's briefs, humorously suggest the body in a gross and trashy fashion. Odom's style of combining sexualized details with recognizable forms creates a gendered object that stirs up a compelling mixture of attraction and repulsion in the viewer. Who knew sporting goods could be so playful (and naughty) in their own right? The artwork presented in *Sis Boom Bah* successfully balance a comical and direct tone as a subversive tactic to address the stereotypes we hold of queer culture.

Allison Peters Quinn  
Director of Exhibitions



*Emmylou*, 2009, wood, plastic, feathers, fabric, auto paint, 34 x 5 x 3 inches