

ARTS

The Collective Grace of Soccer

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by [Keith Goetzman](#)



For English philosopher and soccer fan Simon Critchley, the World Cup presented an opportunity to meld his love of the physical and the metaphysical. Critchley has curated a New York art exhibition and sports viewing space—how often do those worlds collide?—called [Men With Balls: The Art of the 2010 World Cup](#).

When visitors to apexart in Lower Manhattan are not watching the real-time clash of nations on giant screens, they can take in high-minded reflections on the game, such as a cut-and-paste fantasy match in which Mexico defeats Brazil 17-0 or a 90-minute meditation on the play of Frenchman Zinedine Zidane that the **New York Times** called "[beautiful and hypnotic](#)."

But even if you can't make it to the gallery any easier than you can make it to Johannesburg, be sure to read [Critchley's wonderful essay](#) on the apexart site. Here is a taste:

The World Cup ... is about ever-shifting floors of memory and the complexity of personal and national identity. But most of all it is about grace. A truly great player, like Pelé, like Johan Cruyff, like Maradona, like Zidane, has grace: an unforced bodily containment and elegance of movement, a kind of discipline where long periods of inactivity can suddenly accelerate and time takes on a different dimension in bursts of controlled power. When someone like Zidane does this alone, the effect is beautiful; when four or five players do this in concert, it is breathtaking (this collective grace has been taken to a new level by the F.C. Barcelona team in the last few years). But grace is also a gift. It is the cultivation of a certain disposition, some call it faith, in the hope that grace will be dispensed.

Image courtesy of apexart.