

INTRODUCTION

Football meets art in this major new exhibition of brand-new works made in collaboration between legendary footballers and contemporary artists.

Football City, Art United, is an ambitious group exhibition for Manchester International Festival 2025, presenting brand-new artworks created by 11 legendary footballers and 11 contemporary artists. Together, they explore what happens when two worlds known for flair and imagination – both on the pitch and the studio – come together.

Inspired by the boundary-pushing creativity of the trequartista – football’s visionary playmaker – each artist-footballer duo has produced a new work for this unique show. Expect sound installations, play arenas, paintings, drawings, animation, sculpture, film and genre-defying collaborations.

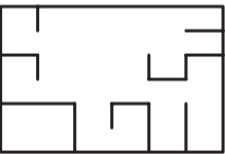
Conceived by World Cup and Champions League winner **Juan Mata**, curator and Serpentine Galleries Artistic Director **Hans Ulrich Obrist**, and curator, writer and filmmaker **Josh Willdigg**, the project invites its creative teams to step into one another’s fields and ask: *what can art and football learn from each other?*

Both playful and progressive, *Football City, Art United*, expands the worlds of art and football and the cultural contributions both make to our daily lives.

VIDEOS

Alongside the artworks, a series of video portraits document the creative journey of each pairing, revealing a truly global project – from São Paulo to Los Angeles to Paris. These videos introduce each of the 11 new commissions and their collaborative spirit, offering insights and behind-the-scenes snapshots of the encounters, exchanges and processes that shaped each project.

The collaborative process at the heart of *Football City, Art United*, started with bringing together the personalities and desires of each pairing of artists and footballers. The videos showcase diverse ways of working together as well as the range of forms of creative expression in the exhibition. Shown as research logs, they give the opportunity to experience the project from the artists’ and footballers’ own voice.



PHILIPPE PARRENO & MARCO PEREGO & ZOE SALDAÑA

Philippe Parreno and **Marco Perego** collaborate on a video game project titled *Forget the Ball and Keep Playing* inviting guest performers worldwide to sketch floor plans of the homes and neighbourhoods where they grew up. These sketches form a collective, fragmented archive from which seemingly incoherent words and narratives emerge. Video game players navigate these spaces through unexpected sequences of words, experiencing them as echoes of previously played worlds.

As the project grows, contributions from different guests around the world will enrich this fragmented archive, enabling gamers to journey through layers of memory and imagination. In Manchester, Parreno and Perego feature the personal geography of **Zoe Saldaña**.



PAUL PFEIFFER & EDGAR DAVIDS

Crowds and Power is a sound installation by American artist **Paul Pfeiffer** and former Dutch footballer and photographic artist **Edgar Davids**. The tunnel marks the entry point into the exhibition – a passage where sound, vibration and light transport you into the world between the locker room and the pitch.

The sound is drawn from a mix of recordings from the player’s point of view – from the roar of the fans to different football songs and chants. The installation takes inspiration from iconic stadiums like San Siro (Milan) as well as the sound of cinematic battle scenes like the *Lord of the Rings* to explore the anticipation and adrenaline-rush of stepping onto the pitch, as well as the mental and emotional journey of individual football players.

Pfeiffer’s practice explores systems of spectacle, celebrity and society. He works with images to reveal themes like adoration, objectification and myth-making embedded in mass media. In collaboration with Davids, this work explores the world of the tunnel and the perspective of the player, while centering the crowd as a protagonist in its own right. It puts the viewer into a space where identity, nationhood, freedom and creativity are performed and reimaged.



BÁRBARA SÁNCHEZ-KANE & JORGE CAMPOS

Meet *Brody* – a flamboyant mascot designed by Mexican artist and fashion designer **Bárbara Sánchez-Kane** and inspired by legendary goalkeeper **Jorge Campos**. Drawing from Campos’ acrobatic playing style, self-designed neon kits, and off-field passion for surfing, *Brody* is both a tribute to and a celebration of the irreverent spirit and visual flamboyance of 1990s Mexican football.

Brody is clad in bold geometric patterns and bright colours reflecting Campos’ persona and blending sport with irreverence and humour. Designed by Sánchez-Kane, who is known for playfully challenging traditional ideas of masculinity, *Brody* becomes a kind of ceremonial figure – full of contradictions, excess and a sense of camp.

With *Brody*, Sánchez-Kane extends his existing practice at the intersection of fashion, performance and sculpture. Every detail, from his oversized jerseys to good-luck charms, goalkeeper gloves to Acapulco huaraches, becomes part of a visual spell – echoing the way Campos transformed the football pitch into a stage of self-expression. Like Campos himself – a player who broke conventions by switching from goalkeeper to striker mid-game – *Brody* is a shapeshifter, a trickster and a living emblem of defiant style.

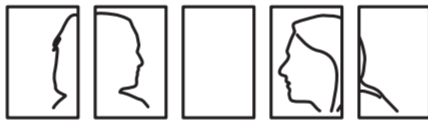


RYAN GANDER & ERIC CANTONA

Privileges of Hindsight is a collaborative project by British conceptual artist **Ryan Gander** and French footballer, actor and cultural icon **Eric Cantona**. Playfully exploring the effects of fame, *Privileges of Hindsight* is made up of three artworks spread across the exhibition.

An automated spotlight randomly selects and follows visitors, casting them in the isolating glare of celebrity. At set intervals, speakers play *Le Temps Passe*, a haunting song written by Cantona and performed by Lady Sir, with lyrics meditating on the passing of time. Finally, a reproduction of the ticket from Cantona’s final Premier League appearance for Manchester United at Old Trafford in 1997 are handed at random to 500 visitors for them to keep by invigilators throughout the course of the exhibition – each inscribed with a poem written by Cantona, turning football memorabilia into personal talismans.

The pairing of Gander and Cantona is no coincidence. Gander’s work explores systems of value, visibility and attention, while Cantona – revered, provocative and enigmatic – embodies the paradoxes of fame. Together, they invite us to think about what remains when the crowd moves on – and who we are when no one is watching. *Privileges of Hindsight* explores attention as currency and both the gallery and the football pitch as theatres of visibility. What happens when you can’t escape the limelight?



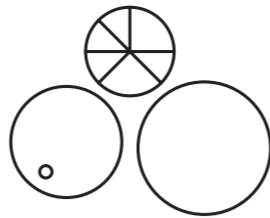
SUZANNE LACY & VIVIANNE MIEDEMA & ALI RILEY

What do women (footballers) want? This is the question at the heart of a new five-channel film by pioneering American artist **Suzanne Lacy**, developed in collaboration with two icons of the game: Manchester City and Netherlands forward **Vivianne Miedema** and Angel City Football Club and New Zealand captain **Ali Riley**. Together, they lead a bold inquiry into how women footballers impact society’s attitudes toward women – and how cultural perceptions and practices shape the way we see players and the sport itself.

Active since the early 1970s, Suzanne Lacy is a leading figure in socially engaged art. Her groundbreaking performances, installations and videos have addressed issues ranging from sexual violence and incarceration to ageing and labour. In 1991, she coined the term ‘New Genre Public Art’ to define an activist form of art that plays out in public space and comes from direct conversations with communities.

Taking a question-driven approach, she filmed conversations with professional players and grassroots women’s teams in Manchester and Los Angeles. The film interrogates the very architecture of the sport: who is it built for? Who is excluded? And what might it look like if reimaged entirely from the ground up by women?

Rather than offering answers or utopian alternatives, the film creates space for players to collectively reflect on their lived experiences – from workplace dynamics to relationships with fans – and the complicated visibility of women’s football within a male-dominated industry. The work reframes football as a powerful tool for rethinking how gender operates in public life.



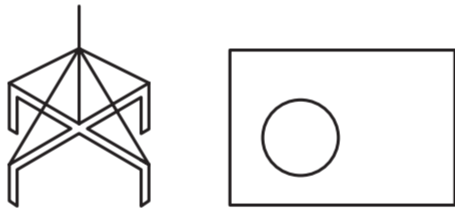
STEFANO BOERI & EDUARDO TERRAZAS & SANDRO MAZZOLA

Visionary architect and urbanist **Stefano Boeri** and legendary footballer **Sandro Mazzola** invite visitors to break the so-called rules of being in an art gallery and play. Multifaceted Mexican artist and architect **Eduardo Terrazas** has joined the collaboration, designing a new work for the floor of the installation.

At the heart of the exhibition, *The Playmaker* transforms the gallery into a dynamic playground, with a constellation of pods, tunnels and holes inspired by Mazzola’s most iconic moves, with a newly designed floor vinyl by Eduardo Terrazas. Visitors are invited to take their shot and re-enact Mazzola’s career-defining goals or invent new ones – passing, shooting and weaving through the space as they choose.

Drawing on the inventiveness and determination that defined Mazzola’s style, the work pays homage to a football legacy that began with his father Valentino Mazzola and helped shape the figure of the Trequartista – the creative playmaker and the modern false 9. More than a tribute, this playable artwork celebrates spontaneity, taking part and sharing an experience.

Stefano Boeri Architetti’s practice sees architecture as a space for social connection. Among the studio’s recent projects, the *Stadio-Bosco* (Forest Stadium) for Milan’s San Siro district is a visionary proposal integrating nature and sport to create a sustainable urban landmark. Sandro Mazzola, a legendary figure in Italian football, is celebrated for his exceptional skills and contributions to the sport, particularly during his time with Inter Milan and the Italian national team. Their collaboration in *The Playmaker* fuses architectural innovation with football heritage, inviting visitors to engage with art and sport in a playful and immersive environment. Expect laughter, shouts and dynamic movements.



ALVARO BARRINGTON & RAÍ

A green felt banner stretches between goalposts high in the gallery space, and a painting celebrates the dynamism of football and its rituals, highlighting the pitch and all its shades. Created by London-based artist **Alvaro Barrington** and Brazilian footballer **Raí**, who is known for his long-standing commitment to social justice and collective empowerment, *Raí* and *The Field (after Raí)* capture the spirit of a game that belongs as much to the streets as to the stadium. The two artworks reimagine both art and football as a place for creativity, allowing the pitch to take new and unexpected forms.

Barrington’s work often begins with personal memories and grows into a collective vocabulary, blending paint, textiles and found materials to create spaces of gathering and resilience. Like a neighbourhood basketball court or a local football match, his work has an energy of people coming together. Similarly, Raí’s work with the Gol de Letra Foundation, which he co-founded to support youth in Brazil through education and sport, shows football as more than entertainment – and as a tool for solidarity, dreaming and building futures together.

Both believe football is ‘pop’ because it belongs to anyone with a passion for it. Their piece becomes a celebration and a proposal – a visual statement of what football can do.



KEIKEN & ELLA TOONE

London- and Berlin-based artist collective **Keiken** have collaborated with England and Manchester United footballer **Ella Toone** to create a multi-sensory installation that explores her life both on and off the pitch. The work registers Toone’s reflections on fate, connection, routine and the importance of introspection during transitions in life.

At the heart of this intimate installation is a large-scale, hanging mask, inspired by Toone’s spirit animal, the Shetland pony. A touching coincidence connects this symbol to one of her father’s favourite songs: *Sweet Caroline* by Neil Diamond, which was originally inspired by Jackie Kennedy’s pet Shetland pony, Macaroni. Toone’s father passed away earlier this year, and his memory is gently woven into the work. The song, softly hummed within the soundscape, becomes an emotional thread – a tribute, memory and bond that endures beyond loss. Visitors are invited to step onto a podium and wear the mask, entering Toone’s world and experiencing her perspective, through a combination of spatial immersion and sound.

More than a portrait, *The Divine Puppeteer* reveals football as a web of interconnections – personal, societal and spiritual – offering a new way of understanding it as an emotional and collective experience.

Keiken’s artistic practice is guided by the ‘Invisible Thread Theory’ – a concept that imagines all beings and objects as connected by invisible threads charged with emotional, spiritual and social meaning. These strings represent the ever-changing yet enduring ties between people, places, and experiences. Using tools like digital technology, gaming, XR (Extended Reality) and performance, Keiken build speculative worlds that explore the nature and future of consciousness. The collective’s name, Keiken, means experience in Japanese, highlighting their focus on emotion, embodiment and relationships.

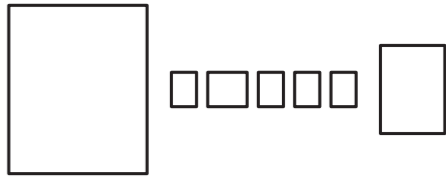


CHIKYUU NO OSAKANA PONCHAN & SHINJI KAGAWA

Renowned Japanese manga artist **Chikyuu no Osakana Ponchan** and iconic playmaker and former Manchester United player **Shinji Kagawa** collaborate on a manga that tells Kagawa’s story – and more. The manga – or Japanese comic book – blends real moments from Kagawa’s life and career with moments of fantasy and shared history, exploring the mythology of the beautiful game.

Intangibles – Running Through Time explores transformation and the creative forces that shape both art and sport. At its core is the idea of the ‘intangibles’ – all those moments that defy logic, individuals who overcome the odds, as well as the moments that are impossible to describe. What are the limits of statistics? What cannot be captured by data, tactics or analysis?

The manga explores these questions through a poetic lens, with characters who seem to tap into a deeper current or state of flow where ordinary moments become charged with meaning. These intangibles are not measurable, but they are unforgettable – a sudden turn, a look, a pause before the strike. They ripple through our memories like dreams we didn’t know we shared. *Intangibles – Running Through Time* invites readers to consider football as a realm where anything is possible. It’s an archive of immeasurable moments, told through the eyes of an artist and an athlete, united in their pursuit of sharing what cannot be explained, only felt.



ROSE WYLIE & LOTTE WUBBEN-MOY

British artist **Rose Wylie** and England and Arsenal footballer **Lotte Wubben-Moy** team up in a creative relay between the football pitch and the studio, transforming everyday snapshots into vibrant paintings and drawings. What began as an image diary – Wubben-Moy’s behind-the-scenes photos from training, match days and daily life – becomes, in Wylie’s hands, a series of sharp, playful reinterpretations.

Known for her distinctive visual language that reimagines pop culture and daily life, Wylie focuses on details others might miss – a pair of legs in mid-stride, a contorted pose or the thoughts that go behind planning each move on the pitch. The result gives an insight into a footballer’s daily life through the eyes of a painter. Both intimate and revealing, the collaboration opens up the artistic process to new forms of storytelling.

This isn’t the first time Wylie has turned her attention to women’s football. Alongside her many drawings of footballers, taken from Match of the Day or newspaper cuttings, including Thierry Henry, Peter Crouch and Wayne Rooney, in 2019 she drew *Woman Footballer*, a coloured pencil and collage on paper showing a woman footballer in motion. *Woman Footballer* can be seen in even larger form as a series of billboards on Water Street during *Football City, Art United*, as a dedication to the on-going support and visibility of women’s football.

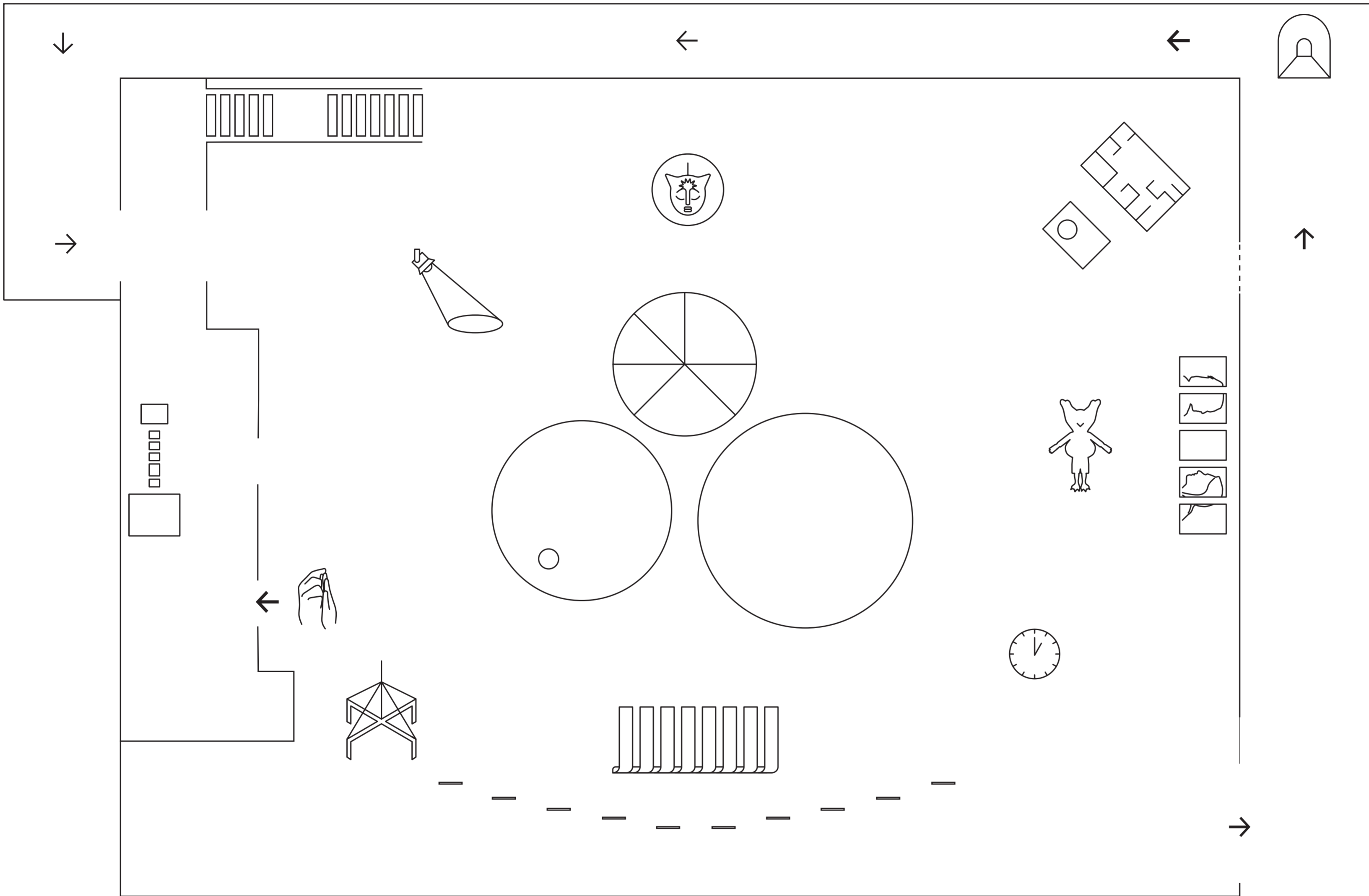


JILL MULLEADY & DIEGO MARADONA

Jill Mulleady draws on her personal memory of meeting **Diego Maradona** in Buenos Aires, where she grew up, to create a layered, dreamlike installation that resonates with one of football’s most controversial and mythologised moments – ‘La Mano de Dios’ (the Hand of God). Scored during the 1986 World Cup quarter-final between Argentina and England, Maradona’s infamous goal became a national symbol, loaded with political and emotional meaning in the wake of the Malvinas/Falklands War.

Mulleady’s installation features a holographic illusion of Maradona singing Rodrigo’s iconic homage, *La Mano de Dios*, alongside a painting that depicts a portrait of the football player in her signature dreamlike pictorial style. To create the holographic effect, Mulleady began by mimicking the movements of Maradona. Her performance was then processed in postproduction, transforming it into a digital recreation of Maradona’s body. This fusion of movement and technology has created a captivating tribute, capturing both a memory and a portrait of the legendary player as he exists in the popular unconscious.

Mulleady’s paintings often feature ghostlike figures and spaces, charged with a sense of unease, timelessness and emotional intensity. In this piece, Maradona is seen not only as a historical figure but as a presence that continues to haunt the present. Using an early optical illusion method known as the ‘Pepper’s Ghost’ technique, Maradona’s apparition blurs the line between what is real and tangible and what is an image or memory. By referencing early photographic methods, Mulleady highlights how memories are shaped and how powerful images can be.



EXHIBITION MAP

FOOTBALL CITY ART UNITED

Curated and produced by **Caterina Avataneo**,
Abigail Hellam, **Juan Mata**, **Hans Ulrich Obrist**,
Holly Shuttleworth, **Josh Willdigg** and **Martha Wilson**.

Production Manager **Andy Downie**
Lighting Designer **Prema Mehta**
Video Editors **Finn Browning & Ben Malloy**

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