



# Game on!

SARAH FEELEY previews a new exhibition at Exeter's Centre For Contemporary Art And The Natural World

**W**hat do a Hungarian thermal bath full of chess-playing semi-clad men, a lady accessorising a burqa with boxing gloves, a 'dukes-up' bloke in a pinny and a gun-wielding feather-hatted manga fan have in common? Answer: they all appear in a new exhibition at the Centre For Contemporary Art And The Natural World as part of the second half of its programme Games People Play.

Games People Play explores what games can tell us about human nature. This second part focuses on contemporary photography and video by 16 important artists from 12 countries who use sporting imagery to make wider comments on life today.

In this free-of-charge exhibition, which is now on at the CCANW in Exeter's Haldon Forest Park and runs until 10 February 2013, we see artists exploring the entire range of human emotions in sport, from confidence to anxiety, triumph to despair, plus ideas of territorial control, attachment to a team, the cult of fitness and youth and winning prizes.

And also featured is the new generation

of video games which eschew wasteful escapism to address real social and environmental challenges.

In the video *Cosplayers*, Chinese artist Cao Fei follows a group of young people stepping out of their cyber community and into everyday life as they appear in various public activities wearing full Cosplay costume. Cosplay, short for 'costume play', is a type of performance art in which participants dress up to represent a specific character from sources such as manga comics, films or virtual games.

## Abandoning reality

These young people abandon reality in favour of simulated virtual environments and use their surreal fantasy game characters to provoke a new aesthetic sense in the public, a theme that is echoed in Bristol-based artist Martin Parr's photograph of a vibrantly-feathered gun-toting teenage Cosplayer (pictured left).

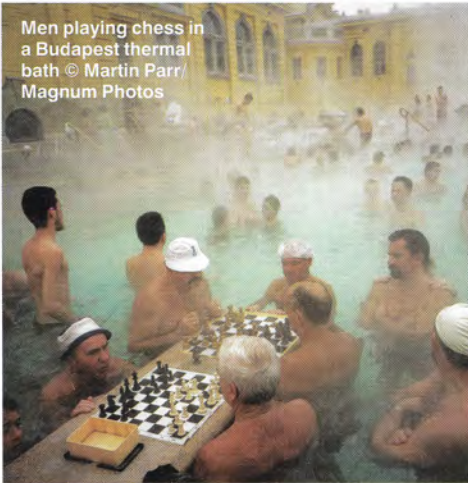
Some artists in the exhibition subvert the iconography of war games, such as Joseph DeLappe who entered the US army's recruiting game using an avatar (a graphic representation of oneself) to



A Japanese Cosplayer  
© Martin Parr/Magnum Photos.  
Top, an aproned man recreates  
an Ali pose © Stefan Banz

“ARTISTS USE SPORTS IMAGERY TO MAKE WIDER COMMENTS ON LIFE TODAY”

Men playing chess in a Budapest thermal bath © Martin Parr/ Magnum Photos



highlight those killed in the conflict, and Harun Farocki who juxtaposes real-life war exercises with virtual re-enactments to examine the politics and violence of war.

Boxing in particular seems to hold a special fascination, especially for some female artists. Neisha Tavakolian's powerful photograph of an Iranian singer in an empty street wearing boxing gloves comments on the powerlessness of women in Iraq, banned from performing because of Islamic laws. The Swiss artist Stephan Banz's photography also uses boxing – he asked hundreds of people to imitate famous poses by the boxer Muhammad Ali, engaging them in another form of role-playing.

These days, it's estimated that people on this planet spend more than three billion hours a week playing games, and one survey found that 183 million of us around the world spend an average of 13 hours a week gaming. We're fast becoming a society in which a substantial portion of our population devotes its greatest effort to playing games.

The question that some are now asking is how can we turn the obvious power of games from wasteful escapism to something that tackles real social and environmental challenges? **BA**

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An Iranian singer in boxing gloves © Newsha Tavakolian



This image and above from the video *Cosplayers* by Cao Fei

