

Flash Art

Sarah Ortmeyer

Bodega / New York

Images of David Beckham's intense face looked out from the façade of the building in Sarah Ortmeyer's solo show "Koko II" at Bodega. The soccer celebrity appeared in collectible Panini soccer stickers for years. Here, a spread deck of oversize (and perpetually handsome) Beckham visages adorned the gallery's interior walls using the same set of blown-up Panini pics. Like school portraits viewed chronologically, the cards document the athlete's development as a rising soccer star, from pubescence to adulthood. Ortmeyer dwells on Beckham's appearance, fame and success. These collectable Panini stickers subscribe to the cult of celebrity, and fans continue to collect and trade these prized ephemera of idolization.

The artist pairs the portraits with clusters of black and white emu, ostrich, rhea, and other bird eggs strewn about the gallery floor like fragile soccer balls waiting to be kicked or tripped over. As symbols of birth, the eggs nod at Beckham's nascent celebrity and burgeoning career. The eggs further exude a sense of potential or anticipation before hatching. But Beckham's success is not tenuous. Perhaps it is the viewer's or collector's ego that is fragile in comparison to the worshipped Beckham.

Ortmeyer's most successful works unite celebrity portraiture with the visual culture of sports. Her 2014 portrait collection of female chess world champions reveal eerily sexualized portraits of young champions posing like pin-ups beside pawns, rooks and knights. Although this overt sexualization is absent in the Beckham Panini portraits, Beckham's sexual desirability is still apparent in his role beyond the field as an underwear model whose face — and body — graces billboards and magazines. Ortmeyer's Panini stickers simply mark the origin of the endless proliferation of this face, this body, this narrative of fame and infinite celebrity.

by Simone Krug