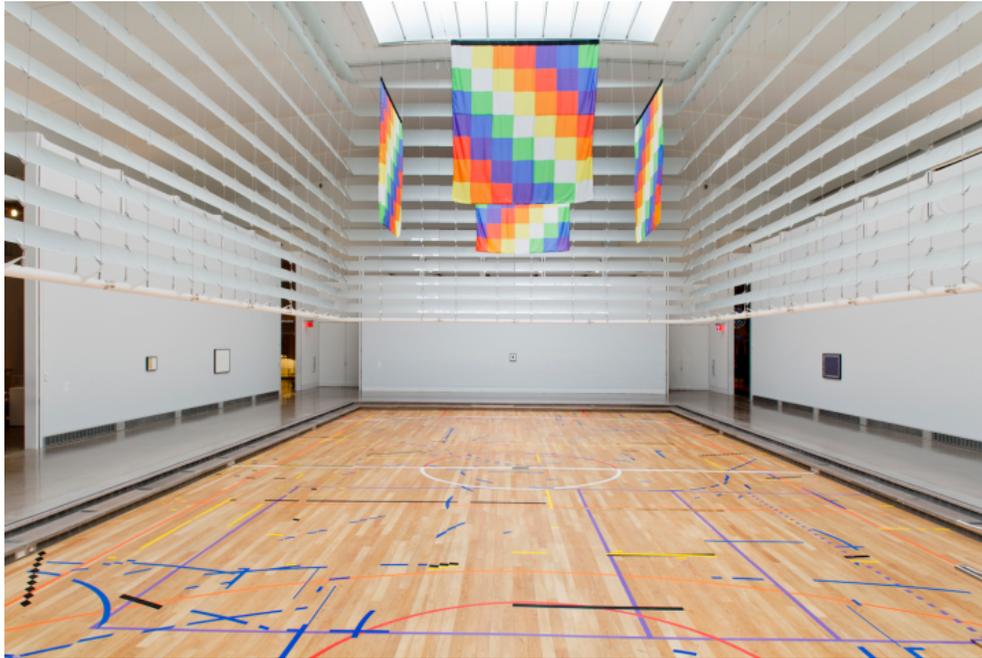


Ronny Quevedo's Field of Play

At the Queens Museum, the artist has applied colored pieces of vinyl tape to the atrium floor in the shapes of athletic field boundary lines.

by Louis Bury July 8, 2017



Ronny Quevedo, "no hay medio tiempo / there is no halftime" (2017), installation view (courtesy Queens Museum photo by Hai Zhang)

In his classic 1938 study of play in human culture, *Homo Ludens*, Dutch anthropologist Johan Huizinga draws a parallel between playing fields and ceremonial sites. "Formally speaking," he contends, "there is no distinction whatever between marking out a space for a sacred purpose and marking it out for purposes of sheer play." For both types of space, physical "separation from ordinary life" marks a zone with its own specialized rules and logic. Abstracted from the content of their internal activities, "the turf, the tennis-court, the chessboard and pavement hopscotch cannot formally be distinguished from the temple or the magic circle." The formal congruence between these two types of space suggests the possibility that play may serve a ritualistic function and that ritual, however serious it seems, may itself contain play elements.

At the Queens Museum, Ronny Quevedo's site-specific installation, *no hay medio tiempo/ there is no halftime*, is an ingenious and touching artistic exploration of Huizinga's formalist thesis. For the work, Quevedo applied colored pieces of vinyl tape to the museum's atrium floor in the shapes of athletic field boundary lines. Near the floor's halfway line sits a grey soccer ball made out of concrete and chalk; because visitors are allowed to walk on the tape-covered floor, faint patches of chalk dust have dispersed across its surface. The wall text describes the work as a "floor drawing," but it could just as easily be described as a sculpture or a covert work of relational aesthetics.

However you choose to classify it, no hay medio tiempo has been wonderfully conceived. In Quevedo's paper works, examples of which hang on the surrounding museum walls, he deforms bird's-eye view diagrams of athletic fields, soccer fields in particular, into evocative constellations of line and color that verge on abstraction. The decision to shift his diagram practice from wall to floor, and to expand its scale and vary its medium proves a masterstroke: marked with sports boundary lines, heraldic Andean flags of Quevedo's 2017 wayqe pana/ brother sister hanging overhead, the atrium's sunken hardwood floor looks like a dead ringer for a gymnasium floor, right down to its many scuff marks.

Quevedo's patterns differ from those of a typical gymnasium floor, though, in their excess. The gold, blue, black, yellow, orange, white, purple, and red vinyl stripes overlaid upon each other form a colorful palimpsest of sports field boundary lines. Depending where you look, you can spot such shapes as a center circle, a free throw line, a sideline, and a three-point arc. And there are numerous dotted lines and line fragments whose original sporting function remains indeterminate. Sports field boundary lines may demarcate an orderly space with its own internal logic and rules, but Quevedo's artistic diagrams scramble such rectilinear certainty into a mish-mash of competing gestural directives.

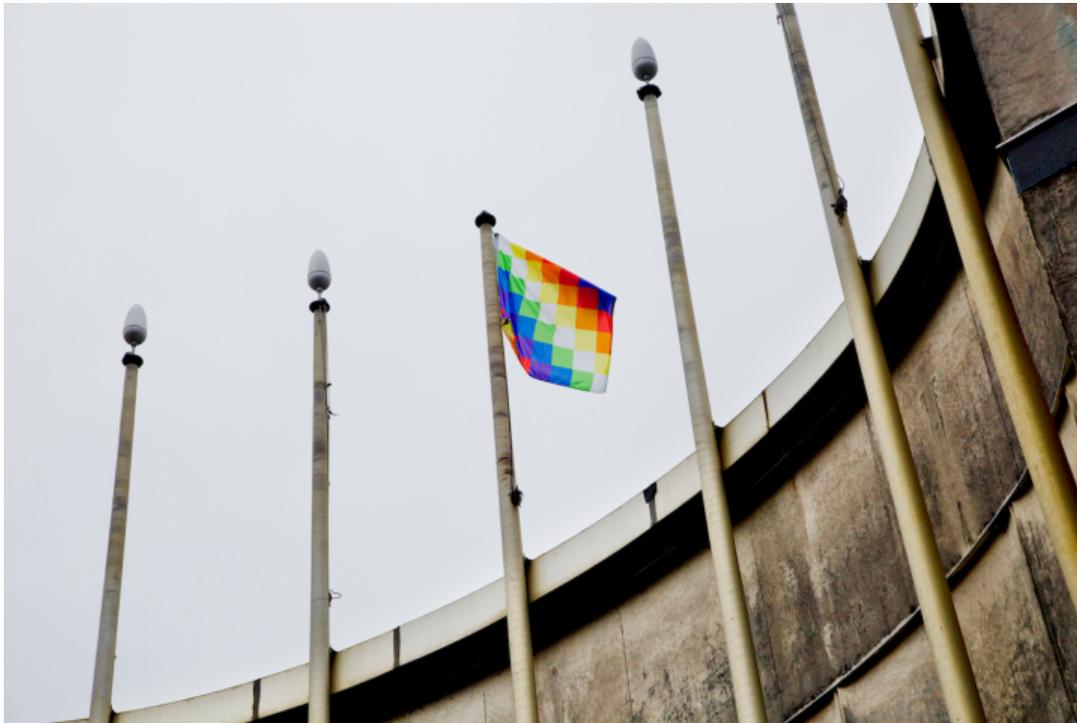


Ronny Quevedo, "no hay medio tiempo / there is no halftime" (2017), installation view (courtesy Queens Museum, photo by Argenis Apolinario)

This jumble of crisscrossed lines also evokes objects such as migration maps and dance-step diagrams. If the lines were dance instructions, though, the dance would be so involved it would be nearly impossible to follow. Indeed, the profusion of embossed arrows in Quevedo's 2016 print "The Main Event (Nomadic Structures)," which recall the football coach's X and O diagram and the soccer statistician's Opta passing chart, draws out the formal connection between complex choreography and athletes' on-field movements.

Divorced from a competitive telos and abstracted into lines and vectors of movement, sport has all the features of ritualistic ballet.

This formal congruence between dance and sport still doesn't explain why Quevedo renders most of his diagrams in a maximalist aesthetic. Plenty of precursors, such as Robert Irwin's subtlest site-specific installations and Bruce Nauman's 1967-8 *Dance or Exercises on the Perimeter of a Square (Square Dance)*, demarcate exhibition space through an economy of gesture. But when Quevedo attempts stark minimalism, as in the half-gold half-white soccer field of his 2017 paper work *oro-blanco*, something feels missing. Perhaps this absence only appears conspicuous because the rest of the exhibit conditions viewers to expect an energetic, almost zany, intricacy from the diagrams.



Ronny Quevedo, "wayqe pana/brother sister" (2017) (courtesy Queens Museum, photo by Hai Zhang)

But it's not just the contrast with the rest of Quevedo's work that makes *oro-blanco* feel strange. It's that the diagrams, as swirl with line and color, are more in accord with his sympathies as an artist. The lines and arrows and dots and shapes that populate them represent the traces of the players who once trod their fields with pleasure and passion, whereas an empty field diagram, while perhaps a purer aesthetic of minimalism, comes off as anodyne and sterile. It's the difference in feel between a soccer field in a local park, grass worn down in patches, and a manicured professional field. The latter may appear immaculate, imposing even, but the former has been lived-in and loved.

These considerations clearly matter to Quevedo because the not-so-secret key to the exhibition is that his late father — like Quevedo, an Ecuadorian immigrant — was a professional soccer player. Several wall texts provide this background information but the visuals tell the full story. On the far end of the atrium, centered all by itself on a massive, room-wide wall, is a framed newspaper clipping of Quevedo's father playing soccer at night. From across the room, the tiny framed clipping feels like a pinprick of light on your heart. In an exhibition quietly concerned with matters of presence and absence, the poignant, moonlit image could not have been better placed. It shows that Quevedo's intricate artistic abstractions constitute a form of play that is equally a form of sacrament.