In both sport and art, outstanding performances don't just happen. The realization of a vision requires planning, training, a support team and a sustained focus on the goal. James Angus's sculptures often begin with a moment of speculation; 'What would it look like if ...?: Their physical realization requires a long investigation of materials and painstaking processes of fabrication. His aim is not illusionism but a glimpse of invisible physical forces that come into play when a speeding car hits a corner or a bicycle circles a velodrome.

For many artists, the most interesting things happen around a sports field rather than on it. David Jolly is struck by the infrastructure that surrounds sport; grandstands, advertising hoardings and communications systems. A large stadium can be a stunning architectural form but more often the spectators find themselves in humble, temporary stands, in marked contrast with the colour and spectacle of the sporting event itself. Jolly focuses on the raw materiality of the sports ground; his paintings are based on photographs of the muddy landscape of Melbourne's Albert Park.

Sporting contests have their highs and their lows. Elvis Richardson uses trophies to highlight the aspiration that drives the competitors; each of them seeks to scale their own private Everest and take the prize. But there is a melancholy undertone to the trophies; if they represent high points, why were they discarded? And while a trophy represents a victory, it also represents a title that must be fought for again next season.

Anne Zahalka's photographs reflect the theatrical character of sport; sometimes a highly orchestrated show biz event, sometimes an anarchic Happening. Zahalka unearths a theatrical thread in Australian sport that ranges from Shakespeare (‘All the world's a stage ..’) to Huizinga (‘Play is not "ordinary" or "real" life’). The striking thing is that Australians have so comfortably and consistently made sport, this unreal and theatrical activity, such a concrete aspect of both daily experience and national consciousness.
Sporting communities are formed around shared aspirations and common experiences. Whether it’s the local oval or a major arena, the sports ground is the focus of community activity. Jon Cattapan explores the physical and psychological spaces of football grounds, large and small. At a grass roots level, sport offers empowerment; the Peanut Farm oval in St Kilda is the venue for football games in a league whose teams come from the streets, missions and welfare agencies of the inner city.

For Josie Kunoth Petyarre and Dinni Kunoth Kemarre, carving and painting stars from AFL and local teams is a process that gives voice to family and community passions. In indigenous communities, sport is a powerful force for social cohesion and a source of pride. Their paintings and sculptures traverse the full geographical and organisational spectrum of Australian sport, ranging from national legends to the local league in Central Australia.

Kate Daw and Stewart Russell present a tribute to Olympian Peter Norman, who supported the civil rights protest of African-American athletes Tommy Smith and John Carlos at the 1968 Mexico City Games. For them, Norman is a winner not because he shared an Olympic podium but because he put a commitment to human rights before his own personal interests. As artists, Daw and Russell are drawn to the visual elements of the incident: uniforms, badges, logos and dramatic gestures captured by newspaper photographers.

Stepping back from the drama of sporting contests, and the rapid pace of a television broadcast, Shaun Gladwell highlights the introspective character of sport. He captures elite competitors as they establish an intense inner focus in the lead-up to an event. The athlete’s warm-up, or psych-up, routine—an interior vision that precedes and shapes action—parallels the creative process of the artist; both must unite vision and action into a moment that is simultaneously visual, physical and psychologically loaded.
Artists are fascinated by the bonds built through sport. Community sport promises human scale, social contact and local meaning. Richard Lewer’s paintings chart his own experience of such communities; the organizing committee of his boxing club, an informal weekly table-tennis competition among fellow artists, and family pilgrimages to rugby games. For Lewer, belonging to the art world (a community in itself and not always an easy one to live in) is based on lessons learned from sport. Training is essential. Competition is tough but can be friendly. Relationships sustain the individual.

Belonging is a social process that can register in appearance as well as in behaviour. Sport, with its emphasis on uniforms and equipment, overtly badges individuals as members of specific communities. Team colours become tribal colours, medals and trophies are emblems of rank. Selina Ou’s photographs of athletes with disabilities show competitors crossing the boundaries that sport can create. High performance is often associated with the idea of bodily perfection but Ou’s subjects emphasize achievement first and foremost. Within the photographs is a challenge to the assumption that exceptional performance is only attained when the athlete conforms to received conventions of ideal form.

The undercurrent of power and violence in sport can’t be ignored. Scott Redford calls sport ‘codified warfare’. The contest is not simply between the opposing teams on the playing field. The battle lines are drawn between those who subscribe to the sporting life and those who do not. In Australia, this division has often been between real men and sissies. Redford reflects on the barely concealed threat in sporting culture: join us or suffer the consequences. He also discovers a melancholic thread in sport beneath the warm glow of the Gold Coast’s endless summer. Surfboards become waterlogged and are declared ‘dead’; their ceremonial destruction a poignant reminder that we can’t remain forever young.
Contemporary experience of sport is shaped by televisual effects: broadcasts, replays and endless media commentary. The shared history of sport and the moving image goes back to the stop-motion sequences of athletes taken by nineteenth-century photographic pioneers. Daniel Crooks explores this heritage in his processed video footage. Crooks slices a video image into columns of pixels which are then spliced and staggered across a screen. In motion, the collaged pixels become lyrical animations. Like an eerie photo finish caught up in a time warp, the video turns an imperceptible moment into an abstract ballet.

Ivan Durrant's paintings of Australian Rules football have the high-key colours of television. Intense colour suggests the overall energy of the experience; not just the vibrant hues of the players' strips but the noise of the crowd and the heated passion of a hard-fought contest. The family resemblance between sport and the entertainment industry has fascinated Durrant since the 1970s. Durrant presents football at multiple removes from the stadium; the paintings are based on photographs shot from television replays. A heated moment is processed and frozen into a painted image; art can seem a distant echo of the real world, while the real world is itself a televised experience.

Increasingly, with athletes under the media spotlight and sporting role models central to social policy, marking out acceptable and unacceptable behaviour is part of the media process. Mark Hilton embeds the story of a sex scandal at the St Kilda football club into a medieval Crusade narrative. Like any Crusade, it's a story of noble ambitions and human frailty. The young knights of the football club stray from the path of righteousness, amidst a flurry of tabloid headlines and media spin. In the aftermath, moral standards are reaffirmed although there's a suspicion that the territory being defended is the club brand rather than the honour of young women.