

Title: Standing out from the crowd: imaging supporters through sculpture

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Whilst the tradition of erecting figurative sculptures of athletes is both an ancient and modern phenomenon, the portrayal of sports fans in such monuments has only begun in the last 25 years, and despite numbering over 20 examples in US baseball alone, is as yet unexplored. This paper investigates examples from Baseball and English Soccer, asking how fandom is portrayed, how the image itself and its sites of reception and seeing reflect the aims of statue organisers, and to what extent the foregrounded narratives bear resemblance to either the historical or modern reality of being a supporter.

English soccer's first such statue is the 'Statue to the Fans', erected at Sunderland AFC in 2002. It features a celebratory, cross-generational, period-attired family group comprising a grandfather, mother, boy and girl. Sunderland referenced their tradition of passionate support when erecting the statue, claiming that it established fans as having 'pride of place' in the stadium. However the image does not reference the historical bedrock of their support, but instead heralds the club's vision of a modern, family-oriented supporter base.

For baseball we focus upon two 'fan' statues that represent the two principal types in existence. The first, that of Brooks Robinson and two children seeking his autograph, is sited at York Revolution, Pennsylvania. It depicts fans as an adjunct to a specific heroic figure. As well as highlighting the club's link to a successful player, the young fans evoke nostalgia for the innocence of childhood hero-worship and an era in which players were perceived as accessible, grounded and located. By doing so, it hopes to promote those attributes within the modern game. Yet conversely this statue reasserts the hierarchy of player and club, and the fan as an unchallenging subject of both.

Michael Snow's *The Audience*, at the Toronto Blue Jays ballpark, represents the fan-only genre. Through the caricatured facial profiles and its location high up on the stadium walls, it mirrors the medieval gargoyles that adorn cathedrals. *The Audience* advertises baseball through human spectacle, positing the crowd as a theatre of the grotesque, with the collective fan body forming a carnival scene that is entertaining yet partisan, frightening yet alluring. The elevated position has the crowd looking down as masters and judges of the gladiators below, emphasising their collective power.

Brooks Robinson and the *Statue to the Fans*, though from different sports, have common threads. Each portrays fandom as a childlike behaviour within a wholesome family environment, accessible and gender diverse. Both plant the seed of the club's preferred supporter profile into the concourse, acting as promotional tools for encouraging and reassuring a specific supporter demographic, yet ignore large segments of the fanbase, and critical elements of the supporter experience. They are both idealized caricatures of the individual *fan*; sentimental images diametrically opposed to the entity of the *fans* as a collective, as portrayed by *The Audience*. This representation of spectacle is both a more effective advertisement for and tribute to the history of fandom, albeit one that makes the stadium appealing as a dark tourism destination.