

PRESSBOOK

Paul PFEIFFER

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At Paul Pfeiffer's video installation, it hurts to watch

Review by David A.M. Goldberg Special to the Star-Advertiser

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COURTESY HONOLULU MUSEUM OF ART

The decor in the "Caryatids" installation at the Honolulu Museum of Art is designed to emulate that of an Apple store



COURTESY HONOLULU MUSEUM OF ART

Museum visitors viewed videos at the exhibition's opening reception



COURTESY HONOLULU MUSEUM OF ART

Fighter Ricky Hatton boxes in a video monitor created by Paul Pfeiffer

If you feel you've wandered into an Apple store when you visit "Caryatids," Paul Pfeiffer's video installation at the Honolulu Museum



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of Art, that was the artist's intent. Atop a single large table made of birch and built to the precise specifications of Apple's retail space designs, sit six small monitors in colored custom housings that evoke a hybrid of German minimalism, Japanese portable electronic cuteness and the original iMac computers.

Viewed from a distance, the screens flicker with motion, and it takes only a moment to recognize the videos as scenes from boxing matches. Except something significant is missing: one of the two fighters. Ricky Hatton, Marcos Maidana, Antonio Margarito, Shane Mosley, Manny Pacquiao and Brandon Rios each occupy their own 5-inch LCD, struggling mightily against invisible opponents, deleted by Pfeiffer using Adobe After Effects.

"CARYATIDS"

A video installation by Paul Pfeiffer

>> **Where:** Honolulu Museum of Art, 900 S. Beretania St.

>> **When:** 10 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays, 1-5 p.m. Sundays, closed Mondays.
Through Sept. 11.

>> **Admission:** \$10 general admission; free to those age 17 and younger

>> **Info:** 532-8700, honolulumuseum.org

Hatton's sequence is a series of collapses to the mat; Maidana leans back after receiving punishing hits to the face; Pacquiao clearly tries to evade his opponent but nevertheless catches brutal shots that shake his entire torso. Mosley almost appears to be hitting himself, while Rios — with the Virgin Mary tattooed on his back — and Margarito seem to stoically withstand rains of crosses and jabs.



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In each case we see the terrible results of these impacts, often in that specific tempo of analysis and voyeurism that is the slow-motion replay. Shadows flicker across the boxers' bodies, their muscles knotted in anticipation and effort, the flesh in their arms rippling as the enemy's blow glides along a path that leads from outstretched glove to jaw. The fighters' faces are strained, twisted into putty as invisible forces of impact are relayed from chin to ear to whiplashed hair. In some cases a referee looks on as if studying a brutal form of self-abuse.

Presented in silence, these are haunting images that at first glance remind us of exactly how brutal boxing, the "sweet science," really is. Each loop is short, driving home the first of Pfeiffer's many points: These men tolerate this degree of violence as we watch. Beyond a critique of violence-as-entertainment, "Caryatids" also throws some jabs at electronic consumerism.

Pfeiffer, a Honolulu-born artist who lives in New York, could have easily shown these sequences as large-scale projections in a darkened room, but there is something powerful about having to lean in to study the images. Packaged as they are in terms of 21st-century personalization, convenience and accessibility, in that intimate moment of close inspection, one's entire body feels committed to the study of violence.

Those who have never questioned, or merely marveled at, Hollywood's ability to generate impossible images might be more engaged by the boxers themselves than by the technology, possibly even recognizing the fights that Pfeiffer sampled and being jolted by the work's ability to seize and disrupt the familiar.



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Others might have an eye trained to recognize the artifacts of video trickery, and for them Pfeiffer has left indicators that mark the points where one boxer was digitally erased by copying empty regions from other points in the video. The results are subtle smudges of moving pixels and ghostly boundary lines that are not unlike a painter's brushstrokes, a sculptor's fingerprints or musical overtones — as much an integral part of the work as the symbolism of the rival boxer's absence.

Pfeiffer's act of digital erasure pushes boxing's notions of fame and heroism toward the mystical as these men are battered by powers they cannot see. He removes causes to emphasize effects, thereby presenting a handful of philosophical problems or Zen puzzles, something the title of the installation points to.

A caryatid is a Greek architectural column in a human, usually female, shape, supporting a structure on its head. Seeing each of these boxers alone and clearly suffering violence invokes the question of what exactly they are "holding up." What causes their pain, and what does our celebration of it support? Beyond the utterly mesmerizing physics of collision and the cinematic elegance that emerges from decelerated combat, Pfeiffer liberates such questions for consideration, in an environment inspired by the familiarity of fetishized retail. He conveys this with no small amount of precisely delivered and bloody irony.