

“Diamonds Are Forever: Artists and Writers on Baseball.” A traveling exhibit at the Chicago Cultural Center, 78 E. Washington Street, through September, 1989.

The exhibit, organized by the New York State Museum and the Smithsonian Institute under corporate sponsorship of the American Express Company, is in the latter stages of a national tour. The production consists of a diversified assemblage of paintings, photos, lithographs, and sculptures interspersed with literary quotations and accompanied by classic videos, such as Abbott and Costello’s “Who’s On First,” and John Fogarty’s recording, “Centerfield.”

The whole is an impressive catalog that examines Americans’ fascination with baseball and the place of the game in American culture. Portraits of American heroes Tom Seaver, or anti-heroes such as Pete Rose by Andy Warhol, and their climactic moments like the oil painting of Willie Mays’ World Series catch by Ron Cohen, Harvey Dinnerstein’s oil on canvas of “The Wide Swing” of Joe DiMaggio, and “Play Ball,” a 1982 collage by Michael Langenstein are all captured by the giants of the American art world, as well as lesser known talents in a variety of mediums, including oils, pastels, acrylics and abstracts. Even equipment is treated as “spare and sensual objects.”

Photographs examine cityscapes, stadiums, and action shots, including sequential evidence of a Gaylord Perry spitball. Other works portray minor league and sandlot games, while some provide political messages.

The curators draw from a host of literary works. The inevitable quotations from Bernard Malamud’s *The Natural*, Roger Angell’s *Five Seasons*, and *The Summer Game*, Philip Roth’s *My Baseball Years*, and *Portnoy’s Complaint* are joined by those of Carl Sandburg, John Updike, Thomas Wolfe, and Edna Ferber, who effectively paints (in words) the love-hate relationship between Boston fans and Ted Williams. The vast majority of works address post-1950 themes, and any historical perspective beyond that particular time frame is limited to the literary excerpts.

If we look to artists and writers to portray our culture, as the presentation contends, then this exhibit provides ample evidence of the drama, grace and emotion of baseball. The game has proven to be of enduring interest to diverse groups and, as the literary pieces demonstrate, it holds deeply emotional meanings.

The display has yet to appear (as of October, 1989) at the Oakland Museum and the New York Public Library. For those unable to experience the fascinating display in person, a 168 page full color reproduction is available from Chronicle Books for \$35 hardbound and \$18.95 in paper.

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