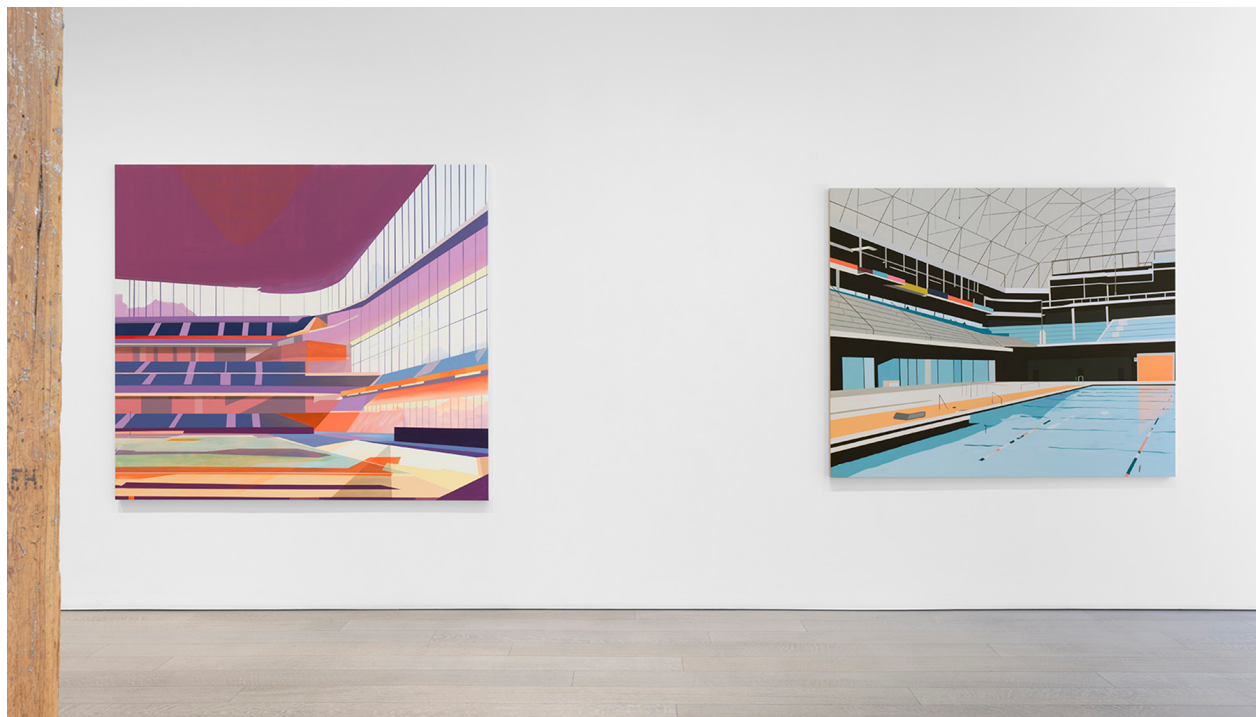


TUSSLE

Brian Alfred “Plus Ultra”: Suspended in Anticipation

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New York, NY: Miles McEnery Gallery, "Brian Alfred: Plus Ultra," 25 June - 14 August 2026.
Courtesy the artist and Miles McEnery Gallery, New York.

Brian Alfred's works have always had an air of anticipation around them. They carry with them an excitement and an energy captured within a place or a subject. The works in his newest exhibition titled "Plus Ultra" at Miles McEnery Gallery carry that excitement as well. This exhibition is well timed, given the Knicks recent championship win and the World Cup happening locally, New York is definitely electric, and sports are definitely bringing many together with a much needed sense of hope and community. Alfred centers the show on sports imagery as a mode to explore its interpersonal, aesthetic, and emotional role inherent to competition and fandom. He depicts many well known players that greet you in the front room as well as the stadiums we may find ourselves traversing. He gives us many subjects that we know well and gravitate towards.

The empty stadiums, athlete portraits, jubilant celebrations, and moments of anticipation within his canvases are distilled into his signature graphic language of abstract forms and bold fields of color. Where the layers are exciting, the colors bounce off each other, and the newest addition of more transparent layers such as seen in the confetti in the piece titled *Victory*, Alfred pulls us into the scene. The resulting compositions within the paintings evoke a peculiar tension between stillness and excitement, with both the presence of figures and the implication of them. Alfred is drawing equally from Pop art and Japanese ukiyo-e prints in both style and presence.

I greatly enjoyed each piece, as I passed by them I could imagine faint echoes of cheers celebrating a goal, or audiences showing their distaste for a botched penalty call. Though many of his compositions are devoid of figures, Alfred makes the space electric and allows viewers to feel their own thrills of the game within each piece as if figures were present. As a longtime player and co-founder of Triboro United Soccer Club, a non-profit youth soccer club based in Brooklyn and Queens that provides over 25% of players with scholarships to play soccer, Alfred is deeply familiar with the culture, energy, and rituals of the game. Each painting reflects that knowledge and Alfred expertly builds up space and complex compositions where color and light permeate over each other, which allow for many wonderful intricacies. Such as in the piece titled *Indoor*, where rays of light graze the field just enough to set the atmosphere.

The essay accompanying the exhibition was pretty spot on and left me with a deeper experience of the work. In the essay, cultural writer Samantha Chen observes, “Alfred’s works omit and omit again, only to circle back to this sense of perpetual anticipation. We are repeatedly brought into scenes on the cusp of something - empty stadiums waiting for gameplay, confetti that hangs midair, crowds that churn restlessly - and asked to consider what it means to stay at the threshold forever. Here, hope springs eternal; everything is possible, and one cannot lose a game that has yet to begin. Alfred insists there is meaning to be found in the sustained, attentive act of moving continuously towards something, to returning to the threshold as practice.” This quote is very poignant and settles with the work immensely well. With painting, Alfred plays with time, and with his scenes, he suspends it further.



Stadium Approach, 2025, Acrylic on canvas, 72 x 82 1/2 inches.
Courtesy the artist and Miles McEnery Gallery, New York.

With his layering and taping methods, Alfred makes the canvas a conduit of time. Besides the images upon them which often depict an approach or the beginning of something, the layers of acrylic paint also allow us to feel the passage of the moment. The quick drying element of the acrylic aside, Alfred pulls everything into a slower motion. Like that of an Ozu film, Alfred gives us an opportunity to slow down to feel as time passes, as if we were alongside him, watching the layers build upon each other. We get to watch as the moments build. Simple shapes become objects or light, stark edges become structure, and the looser, flowing shapes become never ending movement within the pieces.

Transparencies layered over each other, or colors built upon each other as edges vibrate against each other, Alfred constructs space, gives it dimension, and activates it without crowding it. He makes us feel the anticipation of what is next. Focusing on what is to come, building the excitement and anticipation allows Alfred to also capture the excitement of the sports he depicts. Especially in the work titled, *Stadium Approach*, Alfred has us waiting in a line of cars, traversing in the dark, as if we woke up at the break of dawn to begin our journey. With a looming, swirling landscape stoically behind our destination, it is as if he is sending us on a quest. He allows us time to get to the empty stadiums, to fill the empty seats.

Omitting is also a strength to this work. Whether it is the portraits of well known sports figures or the empty courts, arenas or seats, Alfred is economical with his details. Focused on color, shape, and flow, he builds up forms without the need for excessive details or multitudes of color values. Instead the work evokes the prints and pop art mentioned earlier, but also becomes iconic in a way. The images become familiar and well known, and we feel we know them well, as stars like Shohei Ohtani or Victor Wembanyama are immediately recognizable. This focus on the essence of the image continues to add to the allure of the sports world. Avid fans study teams. They argue about stats, and when the home team wins a championship in five games- people often take to the streets in a riotous celebration. The elation of the spectacle of sports brings everyone together. Hope and community become important anchors.

Alfred’s works also elicit the focus of community and build the importance of the team. Crowds waving flags, such as in the work titled *Green Chant* is one of the few works that display figures, but it also lets the spectators blend together into layers of color and shapes. All cheering for one purpose- their team. The work shares a joy in celebration and carries with it a hopeful air. This was immensely evident in the opening, where visitors were welcomed to play a round of ping pong on a table designed by Alfred, or have a drink where the can carried Alfred’s art upon it. Here the work envelopes everyone in an overall experience, one where viewers can look at the paintings, but also join in a game or even a conversation. Here Brian Alfred has created a space both inside and outside of his paintings where people can come together.

This exhibition is active and energetic. Once you step inside, you will become an active participant. As if you were stepping into a sporting event, you get the opportunity to feel the anticipation and apprehension of something to come. While Alfred doesn’t outright depict what is ahead, he definitely depicts the build up. He draws us into the work, into the game, and later into the celebrations. The energy is indeed electric, even next level- and “Plus Ultra,” is definitely a fitting title.