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November 9, 2011 Written by [Thea Costantino](#)

[Horse Play](#)



Anna Nazzari, Arc de Triomphe, carved western cedar and electronic components, 2010.
Photograph: Bo Wong

Anna Nazzari's exhibition [Horse Play](#) at [Turner Galleries](#) presents the losing game, and the dogged impulse to try again, as an inescapable aspect of the human condition. With a nod to the absurdist existentialism of Albert Camus, Nazzari's games, which are impossible to win, allude to the futile quest for meaning in an inherently meaningless world. For Nazzari, this nightmarish scenario provides the ground to stage an acerbic investigation of gender revolt, in which the desire to transcend the restrictive gender roles set out within patriarchal culture is repeatedly thwarted by the fact that the game is rigged.

Nazzari's objects are exquisitely and painstakingly rendered, with concealed mechanisms, delicate marquetry and handmade timber frames. Nazzari's labor-intensive 'amusements' seduce the viewer with the polished aesthetics of the gentleman's club, enticing us to play, to throw caution to the wind.



Anna Nazzari, *Toute Le Monde Gagne* (detail), wooden roulette table carved from maple, cherry, nyotah, jarrah, pine, wood burned drawings and gold leaf, 2010. Photograph: Bo Wong

Toute le Monde Gagne is a roulette table variegated with rich woods and accents of gold leaf. Instead of numbers, each segment of the wheel is alternately marked by a pyrographic rendering of a man and a woman in 18th century attire, except for zero, which is blank. However the player bets in this gendered game, chance dictates that the ball will land on one or the other of the elaborately costumed figures representing opposing poles of the masculine/feminine divide. The tantalizing allure of the blank slate calls to us, but the wheel is engineered to frustrate this desire.

Arc de Triomphe is a coin-operated horseracing game with three contenders on the track, each a miniature Joan of Arc, that archetypal gender warrior, exultant on her horse, shining with gold leaf, banner held high. Reminiscent of a Gothic altarpiece, this game is likewise fixed: upon depositing one's coin, the horses creak forward, approaching the finish line, only to reverse back to their starting positions.



Anna Nazzari, *Night Mare*, jarrah, meranti, maple, cedar, oak, silicon horses, ball, 2011.
Photograph: Bo Wong

Night Mare, a table top ten pin bowling game with rearing horses in the place of pins, references folkloric traditions which have located a demonic sexuality within the body of the female animal, which, ostensibly, also lies dormant in the human female, at her most susceptible while dreaming. Nazzari utilizes the iconic character of the horse and the nightmare in this game, in which glowing mares taunt the player from the end of the table to pitch a ball at them. If the contestant's aim is true, they are in for a disappointment: the mares stay in place, eerily wobbling.

Despite their pessimistic outcomes, Nazzari's games are nevertheless a delightful experience. They remind us that, while winning might be impossible, the joy, and the potential for play, is in the game itself.

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