

**Francis Alÿs**

# **Ricochets**

# Introduction

With a career spanning four decades, Francis Alÿs (born 1959, Antwerp, Belgium) has forged a unique and radical practice ranging from painting and drawing to film and animation. Trained as an architect and urbanist in Belgium and Italy, Alÿs became interested in the civic role of the urban environment. He moved to Mexico City in 1986 where the rapidly transforming city and the consequent changes to social dynamics in the late 1980s inspired him to become a visual artist.

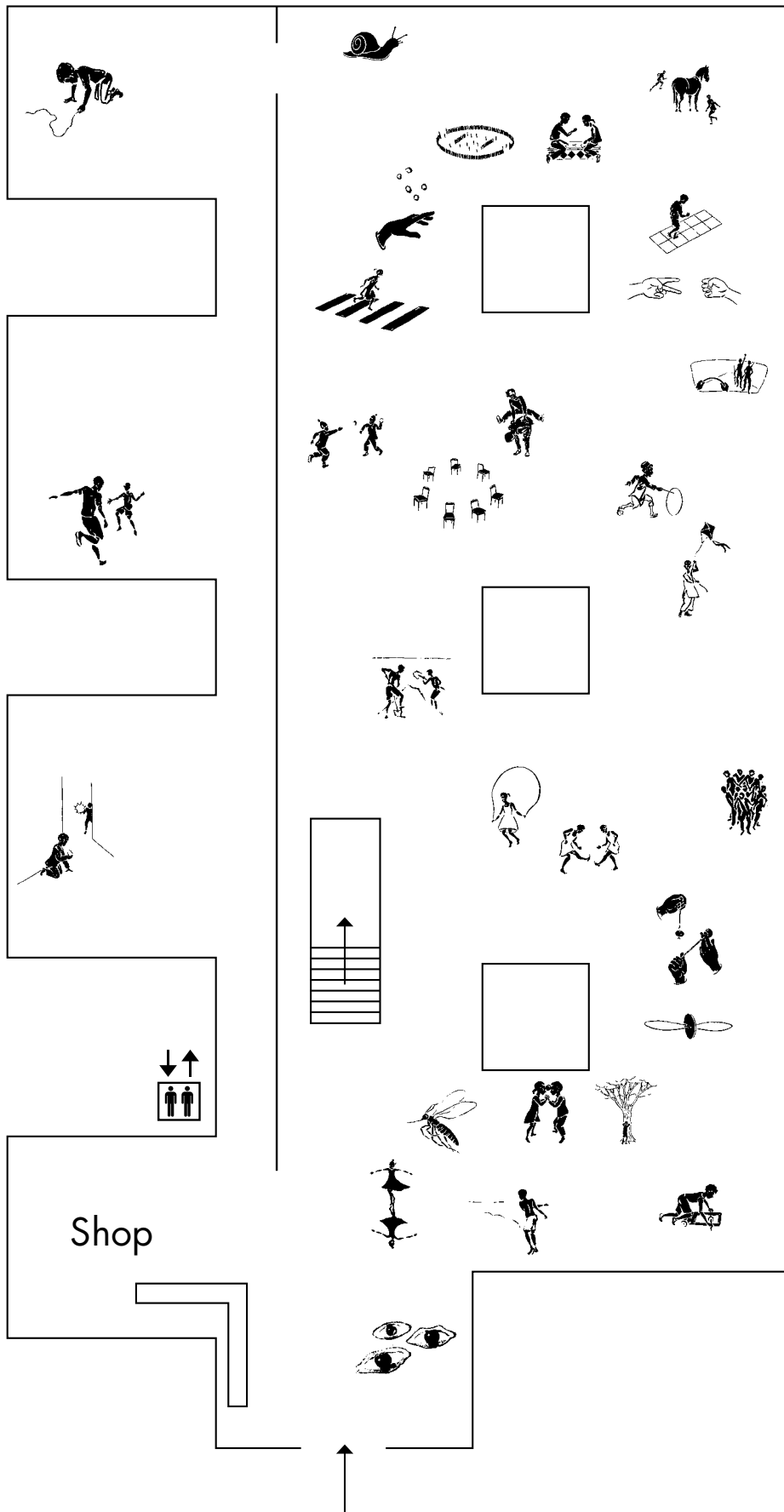
Action is at the centre of Alÿs's practice. He was the protagonist of most of his interventions in the 1990s, using his own body because it was immediately available. *Children's Games* (1999–present) marks a clear shift: his agency was expanded and redistributed as children became the subjects. Taking its title from one of the earliest films in the series – *Children's Game #2: Ricochets* (2007) – the exhibition emerges from the changing nature of participation in his practice, reflecting possibilities of collective consciousness and bodily agency.

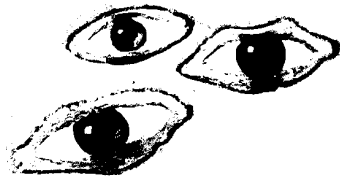
Complementing the expansive universe of *Children's Games*, the exhibition premieres a new series of animation works, building on Alÿs's interest in play through a focused exploration of hand games. Play is integrated and encouraged in the gallery through two dedicated playrooms. On the occasion of the exhibition, sixty children from Prior Weston Primary School, Richard Cloudesley School and St Luke's CE Primary School – walking distance from

the Barbican – took part in a year-long art and learning programme developed in close dialogue with the artist's long-time collaborator Rafael Ortega. This resulted in a playroom soundtrack, an illustrated activity sheet, and newly commissioned *Children's Games* – the first filmed in the UK.

The games played by these children reflect a unique transhistorical legacy of play in and around the Barbican. Razed to the ground during Second World War, this area saw the earliest adventure playgrounds emerge from the rubble, activated by children through play. This site-specific history resonates with Alÿs's documentation of children's creative resilience in conflict zones. The exhibition pays tribute to their lives and stories, highlighting the precarity and urgency of play.

# Lower Gallery





A painting of eyes is presented at the entrance of the exhibition as a prelude to the film installation *Children's Games*. The eyes form a tapestry of coloured irises painted in various shades of brown, blue and green. Alÿs applied gold leaf to the painting's background, creating a mirror-like surface that reflects the viewer amongst the sharply delineated eyes.

The work is inspired by a 2016 photograph of Yazidi children taken by the artist in a Sharya refugee camp in Iraq. The children's eyes face the camera straight-on, returning our gaze. Between 2016 and 2020, Alÿs travelled to Iraq on multiple occasions, making a series of works, which began with his time embedded with Kurdish Peshmerga forces near Mosul. As the Islamic State advanced in occupied territories, the offensive in Mosul caused the local population to relocate, forcing them to flee from villages near the front line to refugee camps. In a 2016 diary entry, the artist wrote, "How can one make sense of terror to a child? How can one integrate the un-acceptable? Can a human tragedy be testified to by way of a fictional work?"

Shown for the first time, this work is the result of multiple studies Alÿs developed over the years while filming children's games across the world. Presented together, the painted eyes of Yazidi children implicate us in an act of collective consciousness. The children's eyes are upon us.

*Untitled, 2016*

Oil and gold leaf on canvas, 29 × 22.5 × 1.6 cm

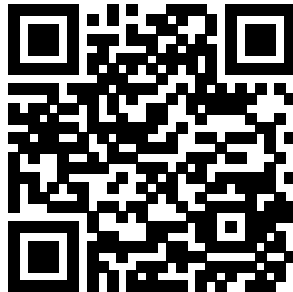
# Children's Games

Individual Children's Games texts written by Lorna Scott Fox

For the past two decades Alijs has travelled to over 15 countries around the world to film children's games – from 'musical chairs' in Mexico to 'leapfrog' in Iraq, 'jump rope' in Hong Kong and '1, 2, 3, Freeze!' in London. Staged in dialogue with an expansive selection of paintings, this immersive multi-screen installation presents the most comprehensive survey of the *Children's Games* to date. Recording the universality and ingenuity of play, the series foregrounds social interactions which are in decline due to rapid urbanisation, the erosion of communities and the prevalence of digital entertainment.

Each film records lived experiences of play in different contexts and environments around the world, including Nepal, Belgium, Morocco, and Cuba. The artist often travels to games' locations by invitation, responding to specific contexts such as the war in Afghanistan for dOCUMENTA (13), Kassel, Germany (2012) or extractive processes and environmental issues for the 7th edition of the Lubumbashi Biennale, Democratic Republic of the Congo (2022). In London, three local schools have participated in new films connecting the immediate Barbican community with the global constellation of voices documented in the *Children's Games*.

All films from the *Children's Games* series are public domain and can be watched and downloaded for free at [francisalys.com/category/childrens-games/](http://francisalys.com/category/childrens-games/)

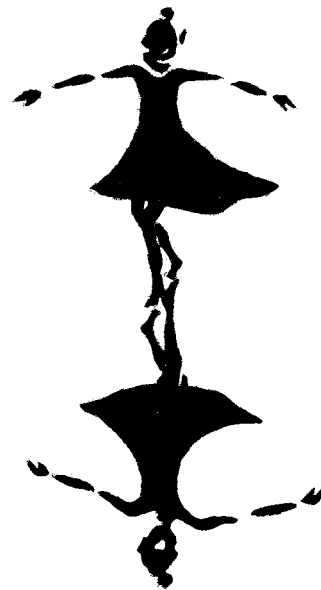


*Children's Games* (1999–present)  
Multi-screen film installation, duration variable



# Kujunkuluka

Many of us played this as kids, spinning on the spot until collapsing. In a group there's a competitive element, each tries to be the last one still upright; but it's only, always, about inner sensation. A crazy, soaring dizziness, a drugless altered state, glimpsed in the unseeing inwardness of some eyes that remain half-open. Arms outstretch like wings, amplifying and balancing the whirl of abandon. To the soft beat of unconsciously synchronised steps, the camera moves down to capture long shadows, like images of the disembodiment being felt: ghostly rotations among the sand stones bare feet don't feel.



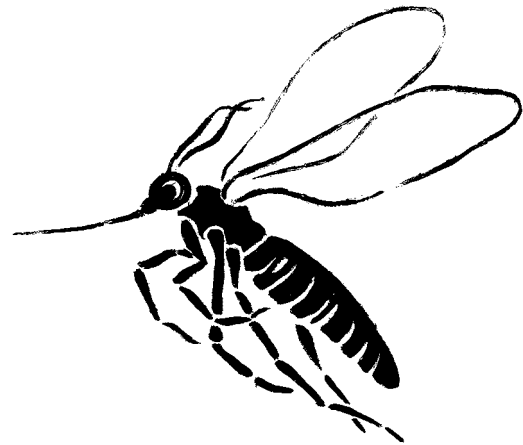
*Children's Game #36: Kujunkuluka*

Tabacongo, D.R. Congo, 2022; 5:24 min

In collaboration with Julien Devaux, Félix Blume, Kajila Ntambu, Douglas Masamuna and Picha Collective

# Imbu

Though mosquitoes have almost as many sensory auditory cells as we do, their hearing is for the sole purpose of finding a mate. Individual males (more wingbeats per second, higher frequency) and females (slower, lower) adjust their flight tones until a pleasing harmony is achieved. These boys have found a pitch irresistible to one sex – hopefully females, for malaria is growing in the D.R.C., and only pregnant females bite. Eros and Thanatos for the mosquitoes; for the boys, a small but satisfying cull of the horrible hordes.



*Children's Game #30: Imbu*  
Tabacongo, D.R. Congo, 2021; 4:58 min  
In collaboration with Rafael Ortega, Julien Devaux,  
Félix Blume and Picha Collective

# Appelsindans

Each couple tries to save an orange from gravity. When it falls, the pair is eliminated. This exercise in collaboration involves intimacy: faces are only an orange apart. It involves embraces, though not loving so much as keeping the partner in tension. Pacifying their natural energy with an eerie, giggly humming, the children shuffle like old marrieds at a tea dance, united and separated by a scandalous orange globe. Eyes sockets and cheekbones prove useless against roundness; even the winning couple's triumph is short-lived.



*Children's Game #34: Appelsindans*  
Copenhagen, Denmark, 2022; 4:06 min  
In collaboration with Rafael Ortega, Julien Devaux,  
and Copenhagen Contemporary

# 1, 2, 3, Freeze!

*Grandma's Footsteps* in Britain, *Red light, green light* in North America, *Thunder, weather, lightning* in Austria, *One, two, three, ciggy forty-three* in Argentina, *Frozen* in Mexico, *Statues* in Greece – all refer to a game of stealth and balance popular around the world. While some versions rely on turning around at unpredictable intervals, these London kids play it with the regularly timed cry of “*One, two, three, freeze!*”. The caller takes her time assessing everyone’s immobility, which ensures further wobbles. But she can only expel the most unstable, and the forwards progress won’t be stopped.



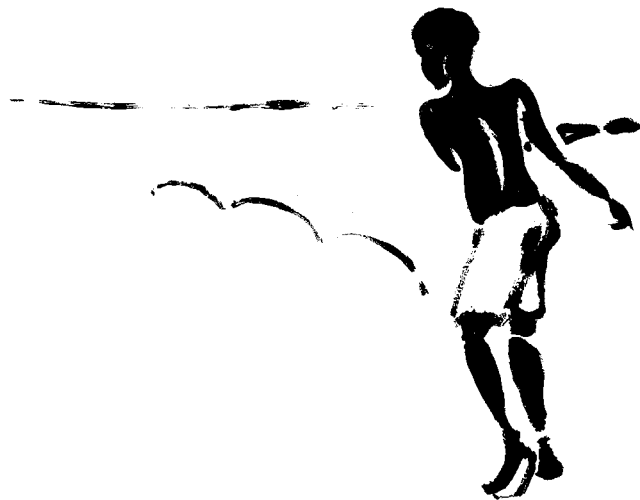
*Children's Game #45: 1, 2, 3, Freeze!*

London, United Kingdom, 2024; 6:00 min

In collaboration with Rafael Ortega, Julien Devaux, Félix Blume, Eduardo Pulh, St Luke's CE Primary School and Barbican

# Ricochets

The bay is peaceful, framed by low hills in the distance. Three boys stand thigh-deep in the brown water, trousers rolled up. The biggest, on the left, is proficient in the art of stone-skimming: sending flat pebbles spinning over the water in such a way that they bounce off the surface as many times as possible before sinking. The middle boy feeds him stones from a stockpile inside his t-shirt, while the smallest looks on laughing. The skimmer throws quickly, intently, without thinking, without assessing his stone. Some stones sink at the second bounce; some skip a long way. It's all the same to him, he must keep throwing.



*Children's Game #2: Ricochets*

Tangier, Morocco, 2007; 4:43 min

In collaboration with Rafael Ortega and Julien Devaux

# Chivichanas

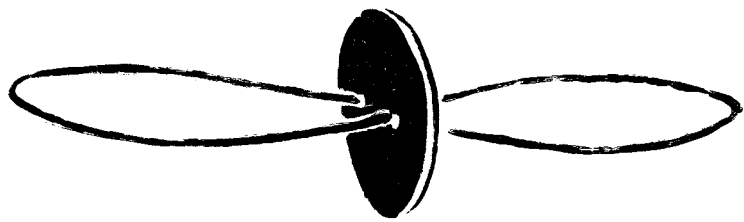
Cuban children have always built *chivichanas* for racing, using any wood to hand and ball bearings for wheels. During the hardship of the early 1990s, rural communities realised the potential of the toy and adapted it for personal and cargo transport, but in the streets of Havana it's all about speed. Health and safety be damned, as up to five kids pile on and clatter downhill and around sharp corners at breakneck speed, steering the front wheel with an ingenious tiller. The film is a thunderous sound piece, too, with exhilarating moments of full immersion.



*Children's Game #40: Chivichanas*  
La Habana, Cuba, 2023; 4:43 min  
In collaboration with Julien Devaux and Félix Blume

# Chapitas

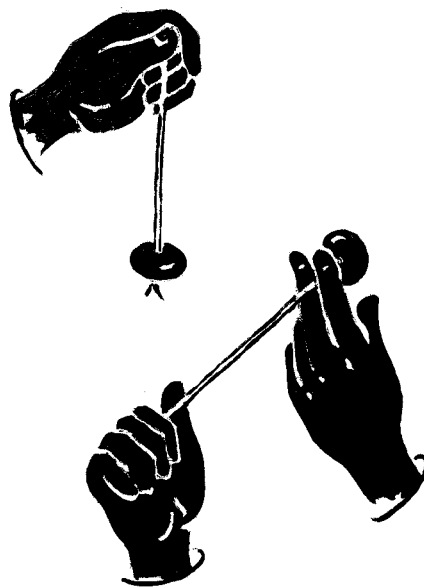
Ordinary bottle tops, once flattened, threaded and tensed for spinning, become as sharp as gladiator swords. It's edge against thrumming edge as the jousters try to slice their opponent's string by means of feints, angles, and jabs. The players fight in such close proximity that the emotion of each move is magnified in their faces, as if to compensate for the necessary restraint of thrusts and parries – take that, oh no, how about this, oops close one... gotcha!



*Children's Game #41: Chapitas*  
La Habana, Cuba, 2023; 3:53 min  
In collaboration with Julien Devaux and Félix Blume

# Conkers

First recorded in the Isle of Wight in 1848, conkers was commonly played in the UK until it was banned from most schools in the early 2000s. Players alternate after three goes at exploding the opponent's horse chestnut with their own. Points are assigned not to the handler but to the individual conker, as if it were a talented champion, like a racehorse; high scorers are often taken home and cared for. From the player, unerring aim rather than force is expected – we feel the frustration every time the target swings mockingly away. The fun part is when both strings get entangled, and the first player to shout “snag!” wins an extra turn.



*Children's Game #46: Conkers*

London, United Kingdom, 2024; 3:08 min

In collaboration with Rafael Ortega, Mariano Franco,  
Eduardo Pulh, Félix Blume



# Kluddermor

Children getting into a frightful mess that only parents could sort out: this familiar scenario plays out subversively, for the rescuing “Mother” is just a child. A circle turns into a knot as the kids entangle themselves, still clutching, ever more twistedly, the same hands. Once paralyzed, the group cries chorally for “Mother” and she appears. With remarkable engineering flair, ‘Mother’ figures out how to unknot the knot without breaking the links of hands, shoving arms over heads and directing legs under and over. Suddenly, like a disentangled string of Christmas lights, the chain becomes circular again.



*Children's Game #35: Kluddermor*  
Copenhagen, Denmark, 2022; 4:56 min  
In collaboration with Rafael Ortega, Julien Devaux,  
and Copenhagen Contemporary

# Nzango

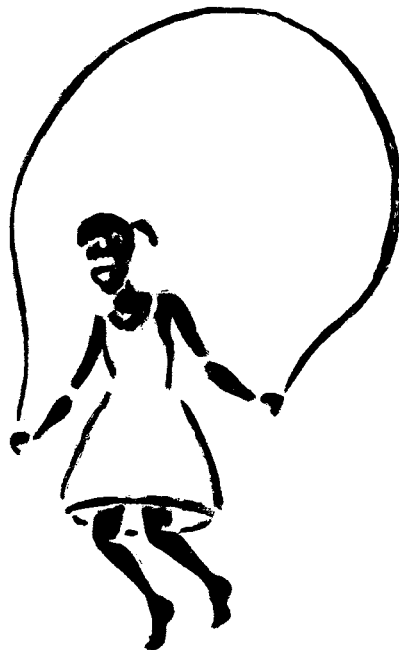
Born in the recent past in school playgrounds and now a national sport, Nzango is a female-only game. The aim is to imitate, or more mysteriously, anticipate, the leg movements of the facing player. The pace is set by both teams singing and clapping in unison, faster and faster. Local variants thrive, ignoring the official rules. This, the girls' own invention, involves "minus" and "times" signs, the first a mirror image – A's right leg, B's left leg – the second a crossed diagonal. And yet all the outsider perceives is a series of lightning confrontations, as pairs, then other formations, hop and kick ecstatically, advance and retreat according to an inapprehensible logic, telepathically improvised, perhaps. What geometry rules the final blur of legs?



*Children's Game #28: Nzango*  
Tabacongo, D.R. Congo, 2021; 5:41 min  
In collaboration with Rafael Ortega, Julien Devaux,  
Félix Blume and Picha Collective

# Jump Rope

Stark though it is, the roof terrace with its low ochre-red wall and washed turquoise abstract seems the nearest thing to a garden among the forbidding cliffs of mass housing that rear up all around. Like bold tendrils of organic life, three young girls appear with jump ropes and show off some individual fancy licks, before switching to a stately coordination mode. Their bright white ropes make squiggles in the air like waved sparklers at night, while wrists and feet maintain a rock-steady beat. The joy of skilled movement, of pure synchrony, illuminates their faces.



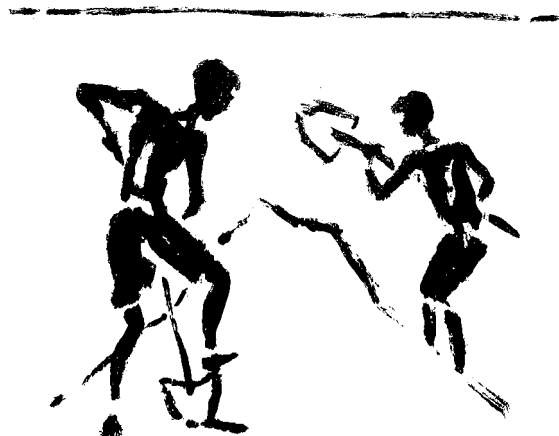
*Children's Game #22: Jump Rope*

Hong Kong, 2020; 5:28 min

In collaboration with Rafael Ortega, Julien Devaux,  
Félix Blume and Tai Kwun Contemporary

# Sandcastles

The castle must be positioned just far enough from the sea to be completed before the tide reaches it. As the moat is dug by busy spades, the vacated sand forms a growing pile in the middle. Sea water starts to rise into the moat from below. As the waves break gently, closer and closer, the children dig faster to fortify the outer rampart with sodden sand. Even as the defences are being flooded, they work on shaping and firming the castle with hands and feet. The tide soon overwhelms the mini world and smooths the whole thing flat, leaving the children standing ankle-deep in ebb and flow.



*Children's Game #6: Sandcastles*  
Knokke-Le-Zoute, Belgium, 2009; 6:04 min  
In collaboration with Julien Devaux,  
Cristian Manzutto, and Félix Blume

# Papalote

A 10-year-old boy in a pink *salwar kameez* stands near a dune-coloured wall under a powder-blue sky. He frowns and gesticulates, conversing in stops and starts with the heavens or at least with the gusting wind because you don't see his kite at first, and the string is so fine you can't see that either. What you see is a body interacting with unknown forces, pulling to the left, the right, up, down, quick, over to the left again, and so on. Here is not only the body of the boy but the body of the world in deft mutual mimesis, amounting to "the mastery of non-mastery" which is the greatest game of all: a guide, a goal, a strategy – all in one – for dealing with man's domination of nature (including human nature). Afghan kite fighters often attach small blades to their kite strings, or coat them with ground glass and glue, the better to down their opponents'. Under the Taliban, kite-flying was banned.



*Children's Game #10: Papalote*  
Balkh, Afghanistan, 2011; 4:13 min  
In collaboration with Elena Pardo, Félix Blume,  
and Ajmal Maiwandi

# Stick and Wheels

On a wide, gravelly mountain road, earth-coloured dwellings in the background, small boys scamper behind tyres of different thickness and circumference, beating them onwards with a stick. A donkey brays in sympathy. The thin, flexible tyres of bicycles are the hardest to keep upright, especially when performing turns (slowing and tilting the rubber hoop without loss of momentum) before racing back, sometimes in competition with another, cheered on by their companions, towards the starting line.



*Children's Game #7: Stick and Wheels*  
Bamiyan, Afghanistan, 2010; 5:22 min  
In collaboration with Natalia Almada

# Parol

First we drive past harrowing scenes of missile and bullet damage, into an area that's still intact. At a crossroads not far from the frontline, three boys in fatigues, with wooden guns, act out a grown-up duty: to uncover Russian spies. The drivers, both soldiers and civilians, are cheered by the children's playful solidarity. Cars are flagged down, IDs requested, trunks inspected. A password is demanded: *Palyanitsya*, the name of a traditional Ukrainian bread, and a word that Russians can't pronounce right. As it happens, bread also is the universal symbol of life.



*Children's Game #39: Parol*  
Region of Kharkiv, Ukraine, 2023; 8:02 min  
In collaboration with Hanna Tsyba, Olga Papash,  
Julien Devaux and Félix Blume

# Piedra, Papel o Tijera

This ancient Chinese game is played between two people, who in unison say “rock, paper, scissors” before “throwing” one of the three figures at each other: closed fist or flat hand or two fingers in a V shape. Rock blunts scissors, scissors cut paper, paper enfolds rock. Each round is win, lose or – if both players choose the same “tool” – draw. We see not hands but a shadow-play of hands against a pale background, as the two antagonists display the tremendous skill that kids alone can muster in what seems impossibly fast motion. “Conceptual art,” you say, the kind you could watch for hours, the hands as synecdoche not of the body but of two bodies in a rhythmic frenzy of elegant interaction and dissolution.

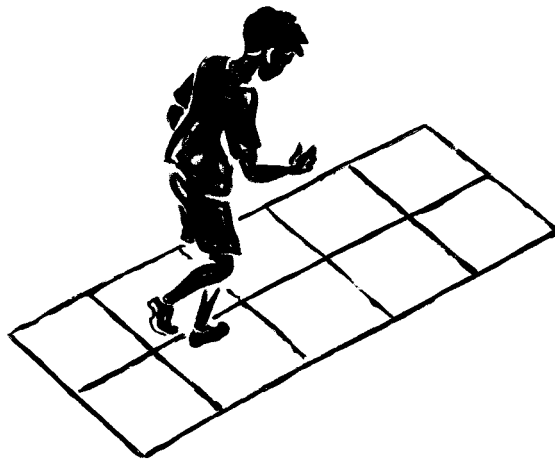


*Children's Game #14: Piedra, papel o tijera*  
Mexico City, Mexico, 2013; 2:51 min  
In collaboration with Julien Devaux and Félix Blume



# Hopscotch

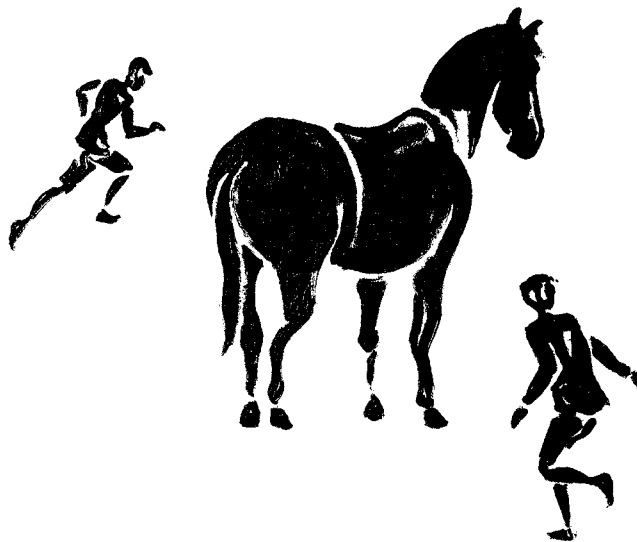
Outside a stark tent city, this version of the game involves a grid of squares, two across by six long, marked by lines gouged into the arid ground. The player tosses a stone into the grid and starts hopping up one side of it to where the stone lies, careful to land only once in each square or station. When the stone is reached it must be kicked or nudged back down the other side to the start line, still hopping on the same foot. The test is difficult, and few succeed. For as the closing subtitles tell us: "In ancient cultures hopscotch symbolizes the progress of the soul from Earth to Heaven. The player hops between Worlds to escape Hell and reach Heaven, from which he will return to Earth reborn and redeemed."



*Children's Game #16: Hopscotch*  
Sharya Refugee Camp, Iraq, 2016; 4:02 min  
In collaboration with Julien Devaux, Félix Blume  
and Ruya Foundation

# Contagio

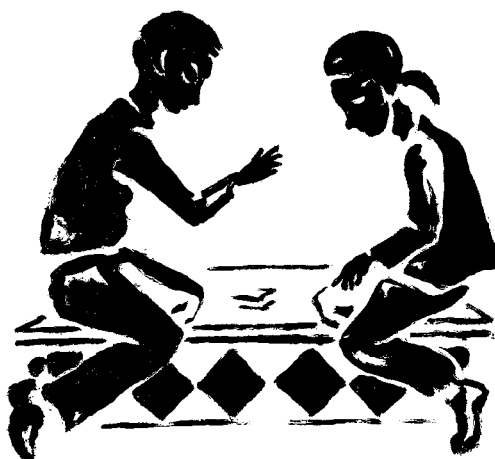
An update of tag, the scariest of kids' games. Instead of the touched person being "frozen," they are contaminated and activated as viral transmitters. Boys and girls sport face coverings, any colour but red, the colour of contagion, worn by the first It. On catching someone the tagger shouts "Contagio!" and the victim echoes, "Contagiado!" Infected! while changing into a red mask (already glimpsed peeping from pockets, in fatalistic preparedness) to become It. The last child standing cries "Survivor!" In August 2021, 43 Mexican minors officially died of Covid; the true figure would be much higher. Tag was always about the menace of other people, but Contagio is brutally literal.



*Children's Game #25: Contagio*  
Malinalco, Mexico, 2021; 5:30 min  
In collaboration with Julien Devaux, Elena Pardo,  
Félix Blume and Imaginalco

# Ellsakat

Neither indoors nor out, but on the doorstep, where you might play a quick game while waiting for someone. Girl and boy pile up candy wrappers, face down; elsewhere, for the game is widespread, it could be cards, tokens, any flimsy object with a front and a back. A lightning round of scissors-paper-rock decides who slaps first. The aim is to make the colourful, “right” sides appear, and these wrappers can be claimed, yet are soon back in play. The siblings have identical profiles, and sometimes positions, like one person playing in a mirror. When the door opens and the someone appears, they rush off into their day.



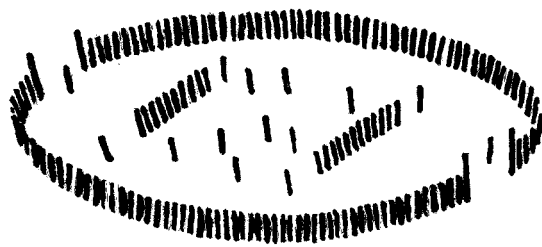
*Children's Game #38: Ellsakat*

Azilal, Morocco, 2023; 4:54 min

In collaboration with Ivan Boccara, Julien Devaux,  
and Félix Blume

# Rubi

With all the charm of flick soccer, Subbuteo, pinball, and other miniature passions, this is played on a small circle of stubby broken-off sticks like a frontier fort buried in the sand, enclosing two facing, immobile teams also made of little sticks. Resembling two giants crouched over cavernous goals, the competitors take quickfire turns thumbing a marble, careful not to touch anything else. The successful marble shoots in from the side or arcs with precision through the air. For a penalty, it is balanced on top of the defending palisade. Close-ups on fans, rapt faces and dusty feet, bare or in the moulded sandals that protect knees as often as feet. The ring of attention is bisected by a chicken scooting straight through people, the exact centre of the arena, people, and out, as if performing a dare.



*Children's Game #27: Rubi*

Tabacongo, D.R. Congo, 2021; 6:17 min

In collaboration with Julien Devaux, Félix Blume  
and Picha Collective

# Slakken

Snail racing is a game of unequal chances, especially when your snails are not trained champions, but randomly plucked off a wall; individual temperaments and moods count as in any sport. They are supposed to radiate out towards a circular finishing line, but one mollusc is stubbornly introverted, while another may be heartsick: its sponsor speculates that "it needs love, it hasn't eaten much." Several think it's more fun to climb over each other. Little girls' nails echo the bright blobs of paint on shells. The children's choral twittering resolves into "Allez! Allez!" It's a photo finish. Suddenly rain sheets down and the kids stampede, almost causing a tragedy. The racing colours wash off like smoke glowing in water.



*Children's Game #31: Slakken*  
Pajottenland, Belgium, 2021; 5:01 min  
In collaboration with Julien Devaux and Félix Blume

# Knucklebones

Knucklebones, or jacks, has existed for more than 2000 years and was first played with the astralagus bones of a sheep. This version – played with stones by two girls seated on the landing of a concrete stairway, people’s legs and occasional monkeys passing by – is close to the Korean Gonggi, with no separate ball. The turn begins by throwing a stone in the air and performing certain actions with the four others before catching it again. Later all are tossed up and received, at least some, on the back of the same hand. Pick-ups are sometimes between splayed fingers. The film blurs the logic of any sequence, dwelling on the leaping, clattering stones, and the agility of dusty hands.



*Children's Game #18: Knucklebones*  
Kathmandu, Nepal, 2017; 6:08 min  
In collaboration with Julien Devaux, Félix Blume,  
and the Kathmandu International Art Festival

# Step on a Crack

A sprite in a blue pinafore, plimsolls, and white facemask flits through Hong Kong, enclosed in a quicksilver bubble of magic. Streets become the dull, slow backdrop to her vividness. Oblivious to storefronts and curious stares, seeing only the yellow lines and the cracks in the pavement, she snakes and two-steps around seams and lines without loss of élan, chanting spells that shade into vague sounds. "Step on a line, break the devil's spine, Step on a crack, break the devil's back, Step in a ditch, your mother's nose will itch, But if you step in between, everything will be keen!" By igniting her route with meaning, she briefly wrests public space from the commercial values this city lives by.



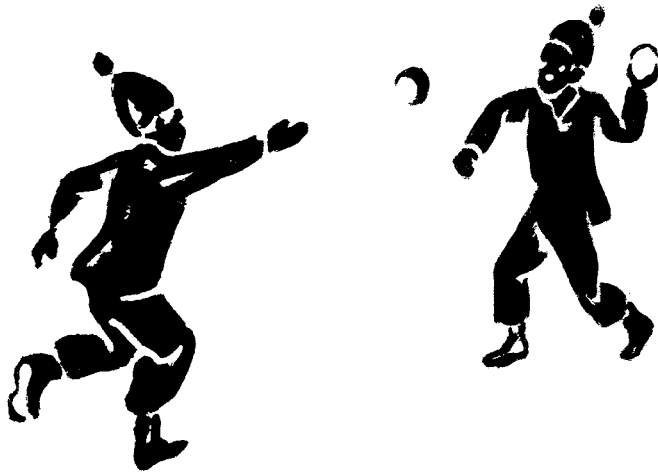
*Children's Game #23: Step on a Crack*

Hong Kong, 2020; 4:57 min

In collaboration with Rafael Ortega, Julien Devaux,  
Félix Blume and Tai Kwun Contemporary

# Schneespiele

The most basic sense of fun improvises on chance gifts of the environment. Snow-fun is too immediate to need rules, either. One game suggests another. First a chaotic battle sequence, with snowballers spied on from behind tree trunks, a little hill to be conquered; then everyone unites to slide down a bigger slope, in squealing collective release. Finally, a massive snowball that is implored to roll downhill. Snow, so protean and malleable, so resistant in bulk; so soon to vanish.



*Children's Game #33: Schneespiele*  
Engelberg, Switzerland, 2022; 5:26 min  
In collaboration with Julien Devaux and Félix Blume



# Leapfrog

*Leapfrog* in English, *saute-mouton* in French, *haasje over* in Dutch, *kabbadi* in Hindi, *bockspringen* in German. Frogs, sheep, hares, dogs, and deer are all exuberant jumpers; Mexico provides an exception with the resigned, earthbound donkey of *el burro*. Rules vary around the world, but generally stage an idealistically reversible game of domination: everyone is both leaper and leaped, and the last become first. The players here are not all wearing their usual clothes, for these are screen tests for the film *Sandlines*, in which kids act out a century of Iraqi history. We glimpse, without knowing, Mr. English and Mr. French, Saddam Hussein, a Kurd, an Arab shepherd... The main contribution of such costumes is the challenge of keeping one's hat on while being leapfrogged. Anarchy is always just a tumble away. One girl even tries to vault back *up* the line – a new variant that could catch on.



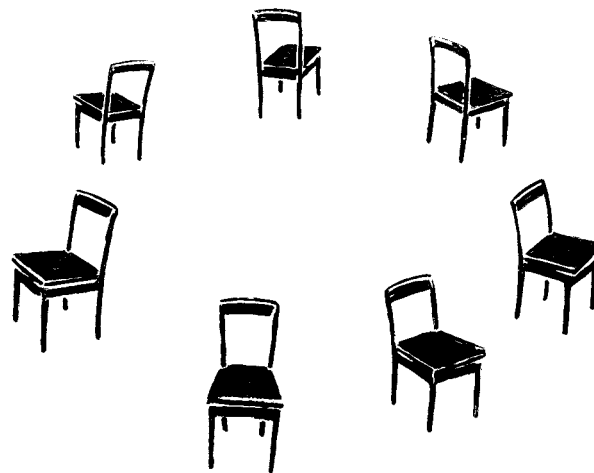
*Children's Game #20: Leapfrog*

Nerkzlia, Iraq, 2018; 5:53 min

In collaboration with Ivan Boccara, Julien Devaux,  
Félix Blume and Ruya Foundation

# Musical Chairs

The game is filmed from above in a single take, emphasizing the inexorable process of subtraction. Six children place five chairs in a row, facing in alternate directions. When the music starts, the players skip one behind the other around the chairs. When the music stops, everyone scrambles to occupy the nearest chair and one person is left standing. The loser carries a chair away, stomping out of shot to the left. The music starts again, and so it goes on until the winner claims the last chair. Then there is only an empty space.



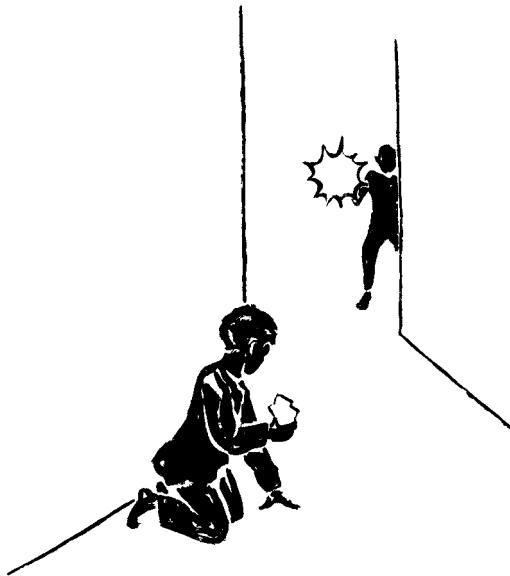
*Children's Game #12: Musical Chairs*

Oaxaca, Mexico, 2012; 5:05 min

In collaboration with Elena Pardo and Félix Blume

# Espejos

Boys stampede through the shells of small geometric homes, fancy boxes falling to bits in a dry-grass wasteland like futuristic ruins. The players flatten themselves behind walls, peer cautiously with half an eye from glassless windows. Each boy holds a piece of broken mirror and aims at the enemy with the light refracted by the sun. They can't resist making shooting noises, though these burning bullets are flashes from millions of miles away. Wandering dots of brilliance seek bodies out. Once a player is blinded by the light, he slumps and dies.



*Children's Game #15: Espejos*

Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, 2013; 4:53 min

In collaboration with Alejandro Morales, Julien Devaux  
and Felix Blume

# Haram Football

A street in golden evening light, lined with burnt-out cars and wrecked buildings. A dozen boys, between 8 and 16 years old, greet one another cheerfully. The East Bank of Mosul was liberated days ago; football is no longer *haram*, forbidden. The ball is lobbed into play. Except there is no ball. Re-enacting the trick they perfected under the rule of Islamic State, here is the beautiful game as mysterious dance: dribbles and dodges, leaps and headers, a display of fluid grace and unusual harmony: there's no arguing over the whereabouts of the ball or whether it scored, was saved, or rolled into the bomb crater over there. Was football *haram* because it resembles a religion? This seems even truer where the ball is as invisible as any god and as real in its effects on human action. The ritual is interrupted by profane time, as a burst of gunfire scatters the players and the street is left holding its breath.



*Children's Game #19: Haram Football*

Mosul, Iraq, 2017; 9:11 min

In collaboration with Julien Devaux, Félix Blume  
and Ruya Foundation

# Chalk

Shot in black and white in homage to Helen Levitt, the pioneering photographer of children chalking the streets of Harlem in the late 1930s, this film records individual acts of creation by children from two schools local to the Barbican Centre in London, including students with physical and neurological diversities. Marco goes for horseshoe-shaped patterns, before expressing his self in a spontaneous spatter; Jean-Luc builds oneiric form upon form; Charlyn's creatures emerge in clear, expansive lines. For Ayesha and James, the chalk is not just a drawing tool but also a curious object for fingers to explore, like they do with the texture of asphalt or the powderiness of their marks. Sensation and imagination imbue every scratch of white on black these children make.



## *Children's Game #47: Chalk*

London, United Kingdom, 2024; 15:17 min

In collaboration with Rafael Ortega, Julien Devaux,  
Félix Blume, Eduardo Pulh, Prior Weston Primary School,  
Richard Cloudesley School and Barbican

# Paintings

Spanning three decades of the artist's career, this group of small paintings is presented in dialogue with the *Children's Games* film installation. Illuminated by sharp beams of light, each work is a window revealing a place in time that punctuates the dark cinematic playground of the *Children's Games*. Alÿs's distinctive signature as a painter is to use oil on canvas mounted on small, solid wood panels only slightly larger than postcards. Painted between 1990 and 2024, these intimate works are titled after the cities Alÿs travelled to, recording scenes witnessed by the artist in the public space.

The eye is drawn to the figures – mostly children – at the heart of the canvases, portrayed both in groups and alone. Luscious landscapes and pared down urban compositions appear deceptively serene as world events unfold within these miniature scenes, often capturing the resilience of everyday life in zones of conflict or social unrest. "What does it mean to make art while Nimrud and Palmyra are being destroyed?," the artist writes. "What could a Belgian artist based in Mexico say about the situation in Afghanistan?" Between 2010 and 2014, Alÿs travelled extensively in Afghanistan, witnessing the aftermath of Taliban rule, which had curtailed the simple freedoms of childhood.

From the narco-violence in Mexico, to the COVID-19 pandemic, the paintings are directly inspired by drawings and sketches from Alÿs's notebooks, depicting the geopolitical contexts of the places he travelled to. The artist bears witness through his drawings, and paintings; they are "an attempt to coincide with the moment I am living," he writes.

*Veracruz, MX, 1990*  
Oil on canvas  
16.1 × 22 × 1.6 cm

*Jerusalem, Feb, 2003*  
Oil on wood  
13 × 18 × 1.6 cm

*Havana, Cuba, 1994*  
Oil and encaustic on wood  
10.5 × 14 × 1.6 cm

*Yazd, Iran, 2006*  
Oil on wood  
14 × 19 × 1.6 cm

*Manaus, Brazil, 1995*  
Oil on canvas  
11.5 × 15 × 1.6 cm

*Gibraltar, 2008*  
Oil on canvas  
16 × 21 × 1.6 cm

*Chiapas, Mexico, 1995*  
Oil on canvas  
12.9 × 18 × 1.7 cm

*Bamiyan, Afghanistan, 2010*  
Oil on canvas  
12.5 × 17.5 × 1.6 cm

*Burma, June, 1997*  
Oil on canvas  
10.1 × 15.1 × 1.6 cm

*Untitled (Pierrot), 2010*  
Oil and collage on canvas  
13 × 18.1 × 1.5 cm

*Shanghai, June, 1997*  
Oil on wood  
11 × 16.5 × 1.6 cm

*Afghanistan, 2012*  
Oil on canvas and collage  
13 × 18 × 1.6 cm

*Shanghai, China, 1997*  
Oil on canvas  
14.5 × 19 × 1.6 cm

*Kabul, Afghanistan, 2012*  
Oil on canvas  
13 × 18 × 1.6 cm

*Ciudad Juarez-MX, 2013*  
Oil on canvas  
16 × 21 × 1.6 cm

*Shariya Refugee Camp, Iraq, 2016*  
Oil on canvas  
13.3 × 18.3 × 1.6 cm

*Baghdad, 2016*  
Oil on canvas  
13.1 × 18.1 × 1.6 cm

*Mosul, Iraq, 2017*  
Oil on canvas  
13 × 18 × 1.6 cm

*Hamman-al-Alil, Iraq, 2018*  
Diptych. Top: Graphite  
on canvas, Bottom: Oil on  
canvas  
Each 14 × 18.5 × 1.6 cm

*Coyoacan, Mexico, 2019*  
Oil on canvas  
13 × 18 × 1.6 cm

*Lubumbashi, D.R.Congo, 2021*  
Oil on canvas  
10 × 15 × 1.6m

*Haut-Katanga, D.R. Congo, 2021*  
Oil on canvas  
17 × 21 × 1.6 cm

*Montréal, Canada, 2023*  
Oil and graphite on canvas  
12.3 × 17.8 × 1.6 cm

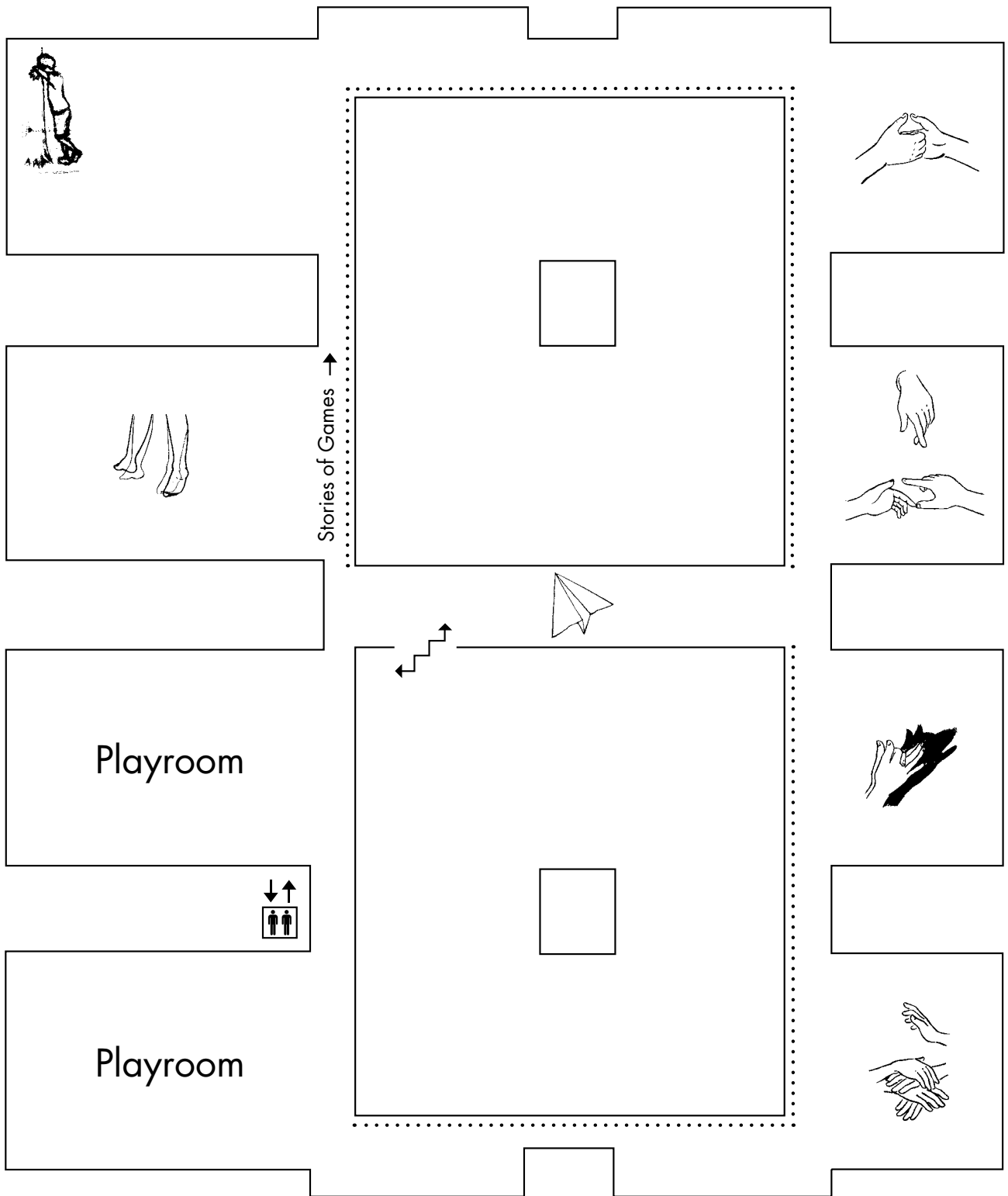
*Kharkiv, Ukraine, 2023*  
Oil and encaustic on wood  
14 × 18.8 × 1.6 cm

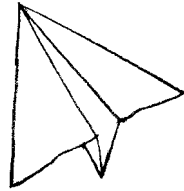
*Kyiv, Ukraine, 2024*  
Oil on canvas  
16 × 20.8 × 1.6 cm

*Untitled, 2024*  
Oil and encaustic on canvas  
21 × 16 × 1.6 cm



# Upper Gallery





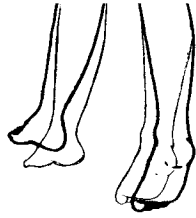
*Siren* was made during Alÿs's time in the Kyiv and Kharkiv regions of Ukraine following the Russian military invasion that began on 24 February 2022. Filmed in May 2023 it captures the precarity and urgency of games in contexts of conflict and war, centring the resilience of children's voices. The melody of the siren carries in it both a lament and a song of resistance. Looking straight into the camera, some children are resolute, determined, fierce, their voices resounding and harmonious; others hum and giggle while trying to sustain a note; still others take pauses and deep breaths. Polya, downcast, emits a short, trembling whine, then falters and runs offscreen. In the final shot, a white paper plane is cast off the roof of a building, plummeting through the air past charred buildings. As it drifts down it appears to transform from plane to white dove, landing soundlessly on the ground.

"Imitating sirens," a subtitle tells us at the end, "is part of the 'Air Raid Alert' game played by Ukrainian children today." The game itself begins with children mimicking the sirens, after which they build a shelter with pillows and cardboard boxes. They then take their dolls and toys into hiding and cover the shelter with rubble, launching a counterattack of paper grenades until all enemies are destroyed.

### *Siren*

Ukraine, May 2023; 5:36 min

In collaboration with Hanna Tsyba, Olga Papash,  
Eugene Moroz, Julien Devaux and Félix Blume



Emerging from the many bodies, voices and faces captured in the *Children's Games*, we are met with a pair of swinging feet. Drawn, then animated in black-and-white, they swing from some unknown place – a branch, a tree-house, a swing, the edge of a bed or the side of a pool – to the soundtrack of a crooning lullaby. Walking feet recur in Alÿs's practice. His *paseos* or strolls have wandered the streets of urban capitals including Mexico City, São Paulo, Havana, Paris, Stockholm, while his interest in parades and processions has manifested in large-scale performative gatherings like *The Modern Procession* (2002), in which replicas of the iconic works in MoMA's collection were walked from Manhattan to its new building in Queens.

But these feet are not in procession or on their way; they are nowhere bound, subverting the bipedalism of adulthood by languidly swinging in place. They may be at play, winding down to sleep, or simply wasting time: here is a game with no rules, a simple, looping gesture, activating a wandering of the mind and signalling a different experience of time, a new mode of attention.

*Untitled*, 2024

In collaboration with Esteban Azuela and Diego Solano



In contrast with the chorus of eyes in the painting greeting us downstairs, here is a boy turned away, covering his face against a tree trunk. What game is this? The others have dispersed, or perhaps lie hiding as the boy prepares for a game of Hide and Seek. The proliferation of players in the *Children's Games* has given way to the single figure, an individual who might be one of many but appears before us starkly alone. The mysterious forest could be the realm of the artist's childhood, one he recounts as made up of games often played on his own in the Flemish countryside. Unlike the small paintings dispersed through the lower gallery – windows into everyday scenes situated in time and place – we are transported to a nameless, timeless, dream-like setting.

We find ourselves in an allegorical landscape or a forest of dreams, evoking the sparsely populated, metaphysical paintings by the surrealist Giorgio di Chirico, an influence on Alÿs's painterly language. Or perhaps peering into the illustration of a fairy tale or fable: as Alÿs reminds us, "Just as the highly rational societies of the Renaissance felt the need to create Utopias, we of our times must create fables." The boy might be a player counting to ten; with his gaze withheld – or turned inwards – he might also be a sentinel, oracle or seeker, prompting us to look with all our senses and conjure new fables.

*Untitled (corner painting), 2024*

Oil and encaustic on canvas, 21 × 16 × 2 cm



Expanding Alÿs's interest in play, this new series of animations shown for the first time, is in dialogue with the *Children's Games*. In the latter, the body is contextualised in both space and time, engaged in plural and collective acts of play. Meanwhile in these hand games, the body has been fragmented and the hand isolated, prioritising a direct and intimate experience of quiet, tactile exchanges. The bright, colourful scenes of the *Children's Games* films – referencing the vivid multitudes of Pieter Brueghel the Elder's painting *Children's Games* (1560), which Alÿs saw as a child in Belgium – have been replaced by soft, black-and-white line animations.

The haptic subject of the hand playing games is echoed by the manually laborious process of animation: each work is composed of hundreds of individual line drawings to achieve the hand in motion. In one room, hands walk. In another, they stack as though in a slower, pared-down version of the animation's filmic counterpart, *Children's Games #21: Hand Stack* (2019). Elsewhere, thumbs swivel and dodge in a game of thumb war, and make wolves, birds and rabbits in a game of shadow play. Echoing the display of previous animation works, this series is shown as a round projection: a vignette playfully mimicking the shape of the eye, while focusing attention on games led by the hand. The animations loop continuously, replaying a series of gestures that reveal a vocabulary of games premised on nothing more than the hand and its rhythms.

*Thumb War, 2023–2024*  
In collaboration with Emilio Rivera

*Finger Walk, 2024; Manos Caminando, 2023*

*Hand Stack, 2019–2024*  
In collaboration with Emilio Rivera

*Ombres Chinoises, 2024*  
In collaboration with Esteban Azuela and Diego Solano

# Playrooms

Two playrooms invite you to perform your own games within Alÿs's universe of play. Developed by the Barbican team in dialogue with Alÿs's long-time collaborator Rafael Ortega, these rooms deploy the key components of moving image: light, shadow and sound. Inspired by the hand shadows in Alÿs's animation series of hand games, the first room encourages you to cast shadows and play with shapes and scale. In the second room, you are invited to find new paths in the space on low stools on wheels, and prompted to interpret performative actions read out by children. These playful instructions were conceived by 60 children, as part of a series of workshops in a year-long art and learning programme developed by the Barbican and led by Ortega and educator Lucy Pook with three local schools: Prior Weston Primary School, Richard Cloudesley School and St Luke's CE Primary School.

In these spaces you might make a bird with your hands, become a giant in the light, sing your favourite colour, or spin your way around the room: the rules of the game are in your hands.



Le Lapin.

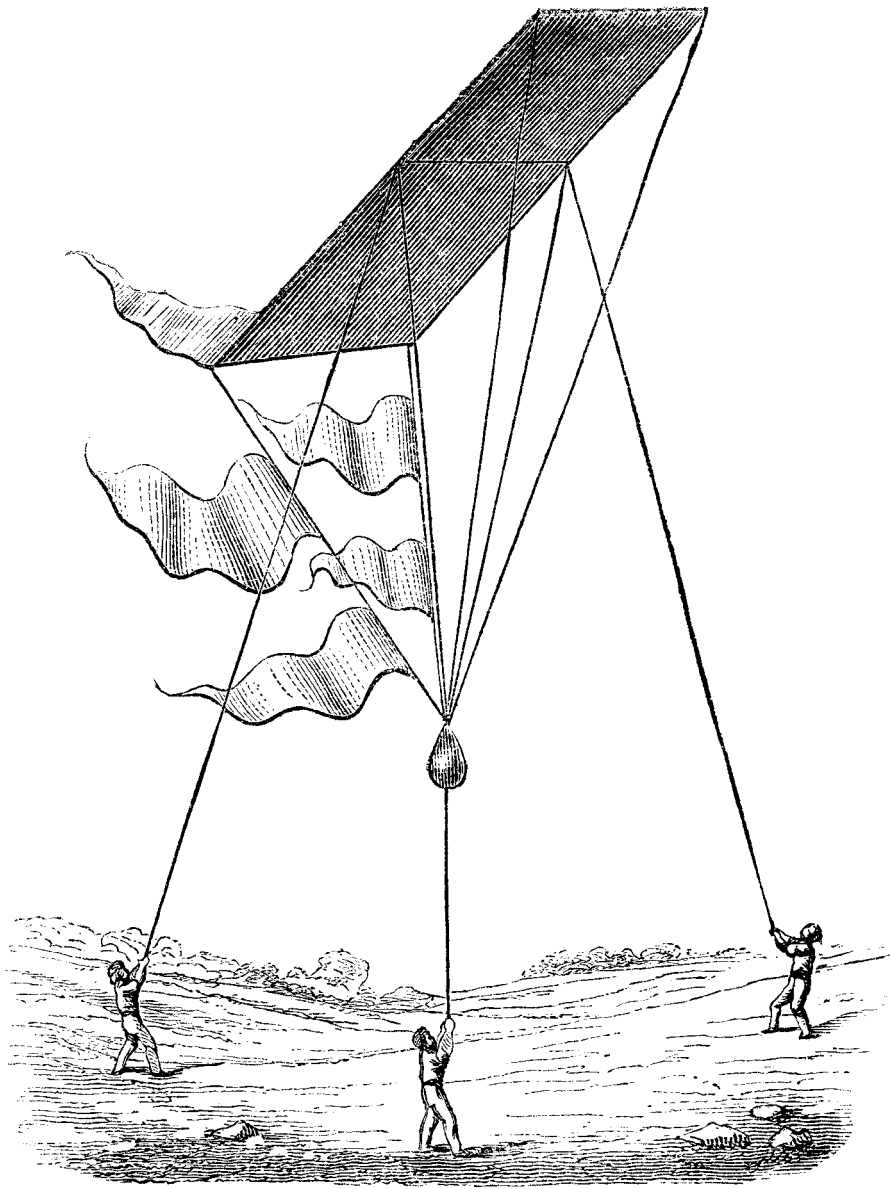
The Rabbit, Le Magasin Pittoresque. Illustration, 1861.



# Stories of Games

A constellation of source material on children's games loops around the banister of the upper gallery. The games in *Allys's Children's Games* series were the starting point for an expanded archive of play, made up of a transhistorical sequence of images that reflect the circulation and transnational influences that have shaped and transformed the structure and appeal of games across social and geographical contexts. Rather than attempt to chart an encyclopaedic, chronological survey, the images are organised in fluid groupings. These both demonstrate the diversity and vastness of depictions of games, and the fragmentary nature of archives in compiling, preserving and providing access to global stories of play.

Spontaneous or rehearsed, collective or solitary, passed down through generations or imagined anew, the games represented in this selection transmit the vitality of a stone skipping on water, or of voices ricocheting off each other in an open space.



A new type of kite being flown in South Africa, Le Magasin Pittoresque. Vintage etching, circa mid-19th century.

# Explore

## Catalogue

### Available from the Barbican shop

The exhibition is accompanied by a richly illustrated catalogue edited by Florence Ostende, published by Prestel, with graphic design by Mark El-khatib. It explores Alÿs's influential works in dialogue with his critically acclaimed *Children's Games* films (1999–present). Revealing new perspectives on his prolific career, a series of essays by Helena Chávez Mac Gregor, Carla Faesler, Cuauhtémoc Medina, Florence Ostende and Inês Geraldês Cardoso explore the artist's studio practice and influences across art history, philosophy and literature.

## Private View: Francis Alÿs

### Watch on [www.nowness.com](http://www.nowness.com)

A short film made in partnership with NOWNESS explores *Children's Games* and the new films commissioned by the Barbican and filmed in the City of London for *Ricochets*.

## Activity Sheet

### Free copies at the Gallery

Delve into this resource, made with children from three schools local to the Barbican – Richard Cloudesley, Prior Weston, and St Luke's – to find out more about the artist, ideas and themes of the exhibition while engaging in playful activities as you explore the works on show.

## **Tristan Garcia: Keynote Lecture**

**Thu 27 Jun, 7pm – Frobisher Auditorium 2**

A keynote lecture by celebrated philosopher and writer Tristan Garcia explores the multifaceted nature of childhood in art, philosophy and cultural history through the prism of children's drawings.

## **Recreations: Three Films on Children's Play**

**Thu 8 Aug, 6:30pm – Cinema 2**

A trio of films captures glimpses of childhood: from 1970s Tehran in Abbas Kiarostami's *The Bread and the Alley*; to a wintry, mid-1960s Amsterdam in *Beppie* by Dutch documentary filmmaker Johan van der Keuken; ending with Claire Simon's *Récréations*, a portrait of her daughter through games in a 1990s Parisian schoolyard.

## **Curator Tours**

**Thu 4 Jul, 6:30pm by Curator Florence Ostende – Gallery**

**Thu 18 Jul, 6:30pm by Assistant Curator Inês Geraldes Cardoso – Gallery**

Join a curatorial guided tour highlighting key works and introducing the themes of the exhibition.

## **Family Day**

**Sat 6 July, 11-2pm – Conservatory**

Bring friends and family together to explore Alÿs's works and ideas. Take part in a series of creative workshops for all ages and get making, crafting and playing! Includes free entry to the exhibition.

## **Our Street**

### **1-23 August, 10am-6pm – The Curve**

Step into Our Street, an imaginary neighbourhood full of games and activities. The whole family can join in with the fun: take part in workshops and street parties during the day before it becomes an evening zone for serious gamers on 8, 15 and 22 August.

## **Play Pack**

### **Free copies (limited) at The Curve and online**

Inspired by Alÿs and the idea that 'play is everywhere', this resource includes playful activities for the body and mind, to be enjoyed indoors and out. Made in collaboration with artists, community groups and designers, it celebrates diverse cultures and explores connections between generations through games.

## **School Workshops**

### **2, 9 and 16 July – Art Gallery**

Bring your class (Key Stage 2+) to experience this new exhibition exploring children's games, and take part in a workshop, free of charge. Aimed at Primary and SEN/D groups, but all welcome. Places are limited. Email [schools@barbican.org.uk](mailto:schools@barbican.org.uk) to book.

## **School Visits**

Free entry to the exhibition for students up to Year 9. A discounted booking rate of £3 per student is available for older students in formal education groups of 10 or more, up to age 19. Book for a school or college group via [groups@barbican.org.uk](mailto:groups@barbican.org.uk) or our online form.

## **Pay What You Can**

Every Monday (10am–12pm) and Thursday (5–8pm)

Select the ticket price you can pay and enjoy the exhibition.

# **Francis Alÿs: Ricochets**

27 June — 1 September  
2024

*Curator*

Florence Ostende

*Assistant Curator*

Inês Geraldês Cardoso

*Exhibition Organiser*

Rita Duarte

*Artistic Collaborator*

Rafael Ortega

*Production Manager*

Maarten van den Bos

*Creative Collaboration*

Josie Dick and Carmen

Okome

*Graphic Design*

Mark El-khatib

*Children's Games texts*

Lorna Scott Fox

The exhibition is curated by Barbican, London and organised with Serralves Foundation – Museum of Contemporary Art, Porto.

Generously supported by the John S Cohen Foundation, the Delegation of Flanders (Embassy of Belgium) and the Company of Arts Scholars Charitable Trust.

All works are courtesy of the artist. Unless otherwise stated, all images are © Francis Alÿs

## **Join as a Member today**

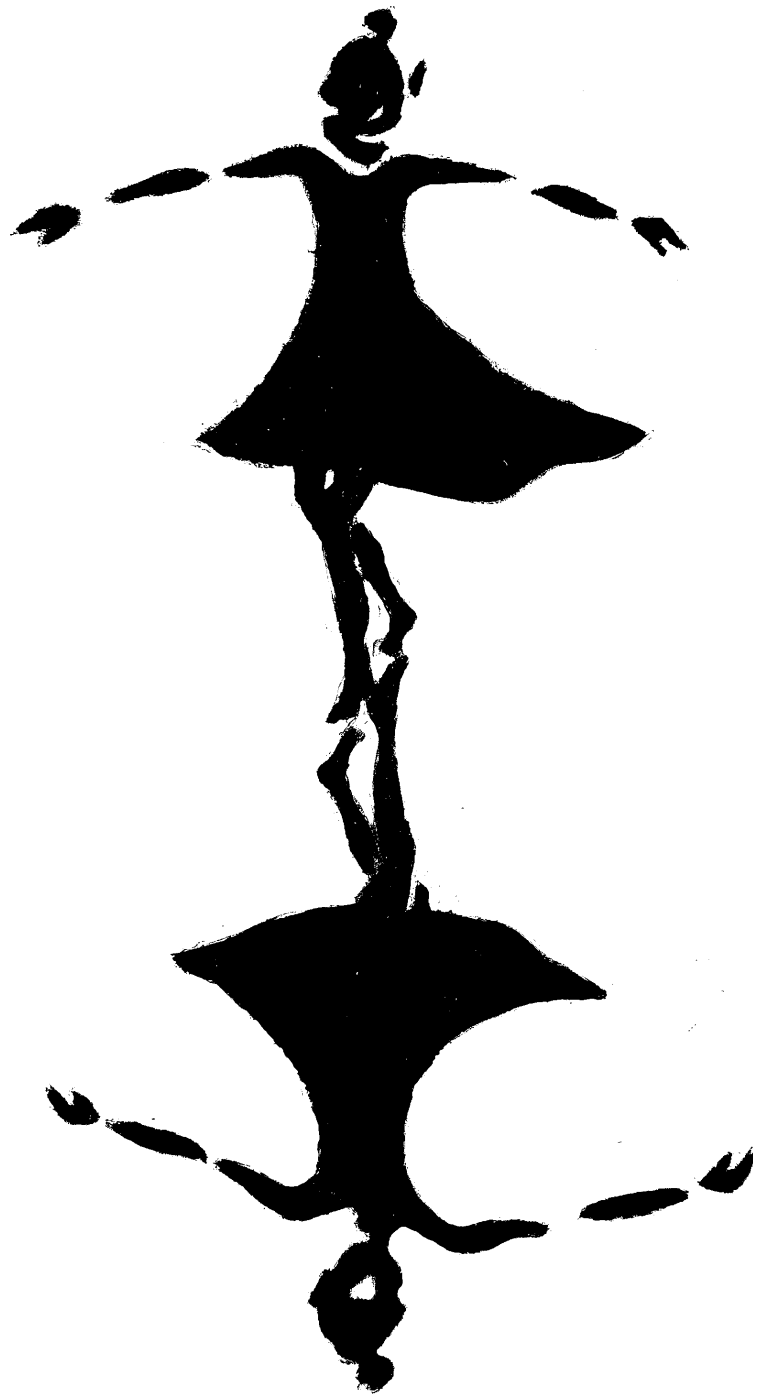
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# **Stories of Games**

# Stories of Games

A constellation of source material on children's games loops around the banister of the upper gallery. The games in Alijs's *Children's Games series* were the starting point for an expanded archive of play, made up of a transhistorical sequence of images that reflect the circulation and transnational influences that have shaped and transformed the structure and appeal of games across social and geographical contexts. Rather than attempt to chart an encyclopaedic, chronological survey, the images are organised in thematic groupings. These both demonstrate the diversity and vastness of depictions of games, and the fragmentary nature of archives in compiling, preserving and providing access to a global story of play.

This tablet from Nippur in Mesopotamia – present day southeastern Iraq – is known as one of the earliest accounts of games in history. Dated between 1500 to 1000 BC, it is referred to as the “Games Text”. The cuneiform writing describes traditions and activities most likely to be found in Babylon in relation to the cult of Ishtar, the goddess of love, war, and fertility. The first section is dedicated to boys and young men – it outlines the physical activities of the players such as skipping ropes, hiding, running around and wrestling, while the second is devoted to more domestic games played by girls and young women.



Mesopotamian cuneiform tablet known as the Games Text, 1500–1000 BC. Iraq, Clay.

1. My city Babylon, the mountain of obsidian:
2. In its midst emerged,  
playing, the player, and the *anzalīlu*-entertainer;
3. the skipping rope, *its fatigue*, and 'daughters';
4. 'son', running around and *straw-(and)-ditch*;
5. '(my-)harrowed(-field)!', '(a)bukkatu-rush!' and '(my-)millet!'
6. *jubilation, sixty-(and)-two*, and *the oath-taker*;
7. the rogue one, the proud one, and the acrobat;
8. (showing) arrogance, showing-oneself-superior-in-strength, and making-fires;
9. *blowing-at-each-other*, boasting, and (games with) knots/strings;
10. taunting, (making-a-)claim, and mockery;
11. *(crying-a-)lamentation*, (telling-a-)saying, and *(reciting-a-)šergida*;
12. submerging, hiding, and *buru-buru*;
13. wrestling, running, and stick-heaping;
14. At the command of the one who strikes the lead, he (i.e. the winner) completes (his) dances!



Children's Games, 1560.  
Pieter Bruegel, The Netherlands. Oil on panel.



One Hundred Boys, 17th Century Edo Period (1615–1868).  
Kano Einō, Japan. Pair of six-panel folding screens; ink,  
colour, gold on paper.



One Hundred Boys, 17th Century Edo Period (1615–1868).  
Kano Einō, Japan. Pair of six-panel folding screens; ink,  
colour, gold on paper.

# City

As sites of gathering, villages, towns and cities have also historically been sites for play. Festive dates and seasonal celebrations are often occasions for staging well-loved games and activities in town squares and city centres. But many more games unfold in informal, spontaneous and frequently inter-generational gatherings, where otherwise sanitised and regulated public space is claimed by communities as ludic space: one where knowledge, affect and humour are transmitted and released through acts and stories of play.



Children's Games, 16th century. Martin van Cleve the Elder (1527–1581), Belgium. Oil on oak panel.



Kinderen buiten spelend met verschillende speeltuigen (Children have fun with different games), date unknown. Hendrik Numan (1746–1788), The Netherlands. Engraving.



Boys playing outside a church, date unknown. Artist unknown. Oil on canvas.



Civettino (little owl game), date unknown. Giovanni di Ser Giovanni (1406–1480), Italy. Oil on wood.



Horseshoe Playing, 1939. Allan Rohan Crite, United States of America. Oil on canvas.



There was a town where everything was forbidden. Now, since the only thing that wasn't forbidden was the game tip-cat, the town's subjects used to assemble on meadows behind the town and spend the day there playing tip-cat.

One day the constables saw that there was no longer any reason why everything should be forbidden and they sent messengers to inform their subjects that they could do whatever they wanted.

"Hear ye, hear ye," they announced, "nothing is forbidden anymore."

The people went on playing tip-cat.

"Understand?" the messengers insisted. "You are free to do what you want."

"Good," replied the subjects. "We're playing tip-cat."

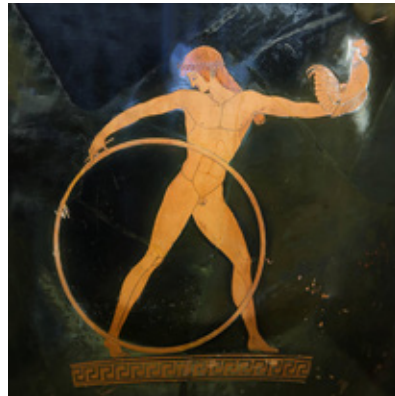
— Italo Calvino, *Numbers in the Dark and Other Stories*

# Hoop/Wheels

Wood and metal hoops, makeshift wheels, old tires: the ancient game of hoop rolling is documented widely in African, Asian, European and American societies. In one variant a hoop is rolled for as long as possible by a stick, or tricks are played while in motion. Another version of the game takes on the nature of target-shooting with a spear through the spinning O – or, as with an Inuit variety, through multiple rolling hoops – said to pre-date the introduction of the bow and arrow. In 19th century Europe, spokes and bells were added for effect and in Africa the game has been linked to hunting and initiation rituals. The circular movement of the hoop echoes its worldwide circulation, owed to the simplicity of its kinetic structure and its rich, symbolic possibilities.



A boy playing with hoops depicted in the Great Palace of Constantinople, 6th century. Turkey. Mosaic.



Ganymede with hoop and rooster, c. 500–490 BC. Artist unknown, Greece. Attic red-figure krater.



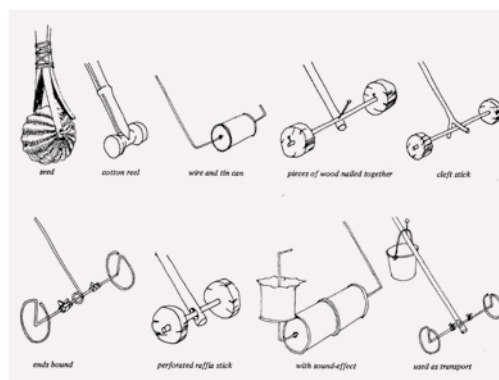
The three ages of man: a couple embrace, children play with hoops and toys, and an old couple eat at a table, 1652. Paul Fürst, Germany. Engraving.



Children's Games (detail), 1560. Pieter Bruegel, The Netherlands. Oil on panel.



Tire Jumping In Front Of My Window (detail), 1936–47. Allan Rohan Crite, United States of America. Oil on canvasboard.



Push-along toy illustrations, date unknown. Artist unknown, Ivory Coast. Drawings.



Les quatre âges de la vie: l'enfance  
(The four ages of life: childhood), c. 1730–35.  
Nicolas Lancret, France. Oil on canvas.

# Horses and Swing

The humble stick transforms fluidly from an accessory in hoop rolling, to the main prop in games such as tip-cat or pretend horse-riding. In the former (also known as cat and dog, pussy, or piggy), a small stick is hit with a larger stick by a batter whose opponent deliberates on the number of hops required to reach the small stick. In the latter, children become knights, soldiers, warriors and messengers, as in the Persian Kurisht; or enact an inversion of the social order by parodying the *daimyô* – large landholding magnates – as in a rendering by Haronobu Suzuki. From stick and horse to log and see-saw: an otherwise lifeless timber structure becomes a kinetic game animated by the dynamism of its players. Elsewhere bodies are made into weights, pendulums, swings and links, whirling around in ancient games like round-about or ring-around-the-rosie.



Tip-cat, 1744. From *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book for the Amusement of Little Master Tommy and Pretty Miss Polly with Two Letters from Jack the Giant Killer*. Artist unknown, England. Woodcut.



Kurisht, in which short and long sticks are used as if on hobby-horses, 1468. From *Miftāh al-Fuzalā* (Key of the Learned), multilingual illustrated Persian dictionary. Muhammad Dā'ūd Shādiyābādi, Iran. Opaque watercolour.



Children playing in a room, 1582. From *The Fifth Treatise, Splendor Solis*. Salomon Trismosin, Germany. Illuminated manuscript.



Child playing at a parody of the daimyô, 1767.  
Haronobu Suzuki, Japan. Nishike-e woodblock print.



Gänna, date unknown. Artist unknown, Ethiopia.  
Painting on parchment.



The Seesaw, 1791–92. Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes,  
Spain. Oil on canvas.





Daiora h Vrachionios (Swing game depicting two adolescent girls playing on a see-saw), between c. 470–c. 460 BC. Artist unknown, Greece. Attic red-figure krater.



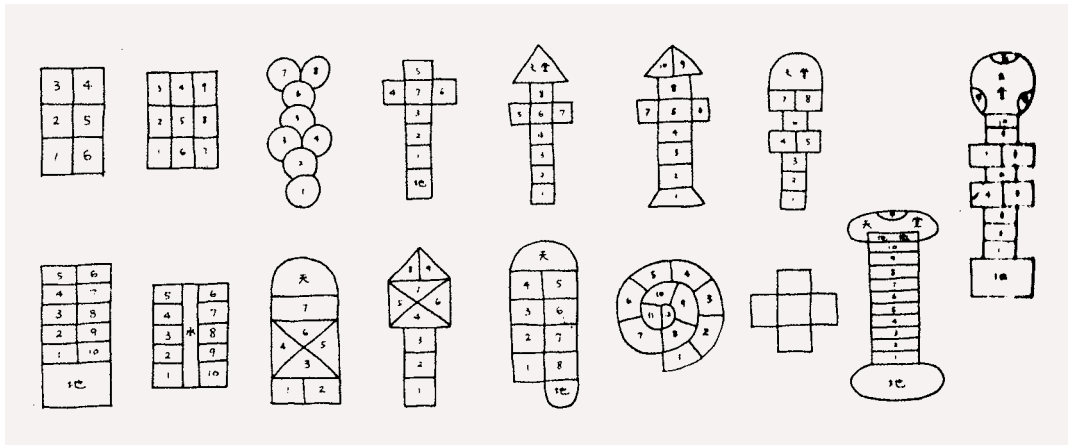
Girls playing a round-about game, c. 2330 BC. Egypt. Relief on the north wall of Mereruka's hypostyle hall, tomb of the vizier Mereuka.



Snap the Whip, 1872. Winslow Homer, United States of America. Oil on canvas.

# Hopscotch

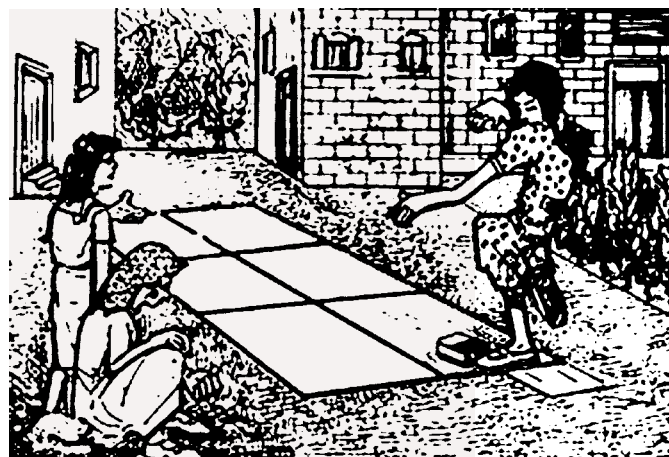
The Brazilian *Amarelinha* (little yellow) evolved phonetically through the appropriation of *La Marelle*, the French term for the game of hopscotch and testament to its widespread global circulation. The game entails a progression along a sequence of shapes chalked on the pavement or traced in the dirt, its name often imbued with symbolic meaning and evoking the shape of the diagram or mimicking the act or sound of jumping along it: *Tumatu* (jump and let's jump) in Ghana, *Tiao fangzi* (jumping the houses) in China, *Kith-Kith* in India, *Jogo da Macaca* (Monkey Game) in Portugal, *La Peregrina* (Pilgrim Girl) in Puerto Rico and Cuba, *Himmel und Hölle* (Heaven and Hell) in Germany, *Campana* (Bell) or *Mondo* (World) in Italy. The journey – hopped along on one or two feet – is driven by the tossing and retrieval of a stone, coin, seed or bag. The Chichimeca people in Mexico follow a serpentine, its winding shape a tribute to the might and turbulence of *Ehcamalotl*: the tornado.



Hopscotch diagrams, 1978. From Games Chinese Children Play, Echo Magazine. China.



Hopscotch board, Paradis, date unknown.  
Hans Olaf Heyerdahl (1857–1913), Norway. Oil on canvas.



Girls playing Hajla. Palestine. Illustration.

One foot down, then hop! It's hot.  
Good things for the ones that's got.  
Another jump, now to the left.  
Everybody for hisself.

In the air, now both feet down.  
Since you black, don't stick around.  
Food is gone, the rent is due,  
Curse and cry and then jump two.

All the people out of work,  
Hold for three, then twist and jerk.  
Cross the line, they count you out.  
That's what hopping's all about.

Both feet flat, the game is done.  
They think I lost. I think I won.

— Harlem Hopscotch by Maya Angelou



Hop Scotch, 1991. Margaret Burroughs,  
United States of America. Linocut on paper.

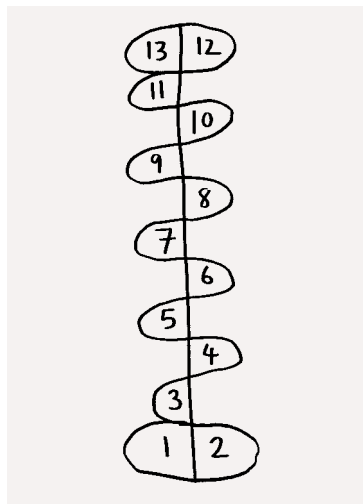


Diagram of Ehcamalotl (tornado) hopscotch, Mexico.



Children playing hopscotch, c. 1820.  
Artist unknown, France. Engraving.

States Parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

— Article 31, Convention on the Rights of Children (CRC), United Nations, 1989



School Studies, 1944. Horace Pippin,  
United States of America. Oil on canvas.



The Skipping Rope, 1883.  
Janet Archer, England. Oil on canvas.



The Banjo Lesson, 1893. Henry Ossawa Tanner,  
United States of America. Oil on canvas.



The Puzzle, 1870. From *The Infant's Magazine*.  
Artist unknown, England. Engraving.

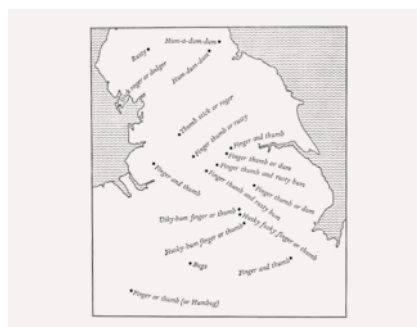




Map of predominant names for touch-chasing in Great Britain. From Iona and Peter Opie's *Children's Games in Street and Playground*, 1969.



Map of "Peep Behind the Curtain", showing distribution of principal names in Great Britain. From Iona and Peter Opie's *Children's Games in Street and Playground*, 1969.



Map of Names for "Husky-bum, Finger or Thumb?" in Northern England. From Iona and Peter Opie's *Children's Games in Street and Playground*, 1969.

# War Games

Children's war games often connect with the realities they witness in contexts of conflict and political tension. Representations of children mimicking or re-enacting scenes of battle and violence abound, at times in tension with the connotations of innocence so frequently attributed to childhood. In some instances – as in the *heitai gokko* (war games) played in Japan during the Asia-Pacific War (1941–45) – these are encouraged by families, schools and governments to instil patriotism and reinforce imperial ideals. Other versions are more symbolic: from “tug of war” to “I’m on your land”, and chase games where harmless props become deadly weapons.



Tug of War, 1891. Harry Brooker, England. Oil on canvas.



Genre scene evoking the life and trades of Joseon Korea, c. 1880. Kim Chun-gun, Korea. Album sheet.



Genre scene evoking the life and trades of Joseon Korea, c. 1880. Kim Chun-gun, Korea. Album sheet.



Boys Playing at Soldiers, c. 1775–99.  
Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes, Spain. Oil on canvas.



Medieval children playing the war game “I'm on your land”, others playing croquet and others trying to hit each other while tied back to back, 1903. From Henry-René d'Allemagne's *Sports et Jeux d'Adresse* (Sports and Games of Skill). Artist unknown, France. Lithograph.



Yōchi asobi shison no kensō (Children's war games), 1894.  
Baidō Kokunimasa (Utagawa Kunimasa V), Japan. Print.



Japanese children (in uniform) and a Geisha sink toy Russian Ships with blowpipes and darts at a fair, c. 1905. Artist unknown, Japan. Postcard.



Ikusa gokko (Boys play pretend-war), 1897. Miyagawa Shuntei, Japan. Nishiki-e woodblock print.

Adults are more likely to use speech to process experiences, children play to assimilate the realities they encounter. Their games mimic, mock or defy the rules of the adult society that surrounds them. The act of playing may also help them coping with traumatic experiences such as war by creating a simulacrum of the real and turning the dramatic circumstances around them into a more fictional, ludic world.

— Francis Alÿs



The Children, 1968.  
Spiro Kristo, Albania. Oil on canvas.

# Role Play

Impersonation and role play cast open the endless possibilities engendered through becoming other – someone, or something else – in the fantastical realm of make-belief. Masks and costumes are sometimes used to comedic or terrifying effect; props become horses or weapons in adversarial games of war; trees and attics are transformed into palaces and shelters; and whole worlds conjured, inverted and subverted as imagination is let loose, bridging time and space, the self and the other, the real and the imaginary.



La barbe du sapeur (The sapper's beard), 1824.  
Charles Aubry, France. Lithograph.



Le Masque (The Mask) from Jacques Stella, *Les jeux et plaisirs de l'enfance* (The games and pleasures of childhood), 1647.  
Claudine Bouzonnet Stella, France. Engraving.

Reality can be entered through the main door or it can be slipped into through a window, which is much more fun.

— Gianni Rodari, *The Grammar of Fantasy: An Introduction to the Art of Inventing Stories*





Dois meninos jogando bilboquê (Two boys playing cup-and-ball), date unknown. Belmiro de Almeida (1858–1935), Brazil. Oil on canvas.



L'Enfant au toton (The child with the spinning top), 1738. Jean Siméon Chardin, France. Oil on canvas.

# Bluff

Like in piñata or hide and seek, blindman's bluff is a game where sight is relinquished, and victory relies on the activation of hearing. From the medieval term for buffeting or striking, and alternatively referred to as blindman's bluff, the game involves one blind-folded player who must follow the voice or sounds of others and catch them if they can. The game is named after animals in several cultures: *kanamachi* and *mosca cieca* (blind fly) in Bangladesh and Italy, *blindekuh* (blind cow) in Germany, *blindbock* (blind buck) in Sweden and *gallina ciega* (blind hen) in Spain. The game is played globally – one variant played by the Igbo people in Nigeria is known as *Kola onye tara gi okpo?* (Can you find the person who knocked you on the head?) – and has been documented since Ancient Greece, where it was known as copper mosquito.



Băt măt băt dê (Blind man's bluff), c. 1715–20.  
From a dispersed Bhagavata Purana (Ancient Stories of Lord Vishnu). Artist unknown, Vietnam. Hàng Trông painting.



Woman plays mekakushi (blind man's bluff) with two children, c. 1790. Kiyomizu Komachi, Japan. Nishiki-e woodblock print.



Blind Man's Bluff, date unknown.  
Theodor Klee Haas (1854–1929), Germany. Oil on canvas.

# Piñata

Records of piñatas can be traced back to Aztec religious ceremonies celebrating the birth of the god of war Huītzilōpōchtli at the end of the year. A clay pot covered with colourful feathers contained small treasures and was hit with a stick. In China, piñatas took on the shape of cows and oxen, and were filled with seeds for New Year's celebrations. In the 16th century, they were made of clay in Acolman, just north of Mexico City, and were used by evangelical Spanish missionaries – the paper spikes symbolised the seven cardinal sins. At Christmas, papier-mâché piñatas are filled with candies, fruits and confetti. For birthday parties, children sing "Dale! Dale! Dale!" (Hit it! Hit it! Hit it!) as the child swings to release the treasures inside.



La Piñata (The Pinata), 1953. Diego Rivera, Mexico. Mural painting at the Hospital Infantil de Mexico Federico Gomez, Mexico City.

Dale, dale, dale,  
no pierdas el tino  
Canción de la piñata

Hit, Hit, Hit,  
Don't Lose Your Aim  
Piñata Song

Dale, dale, dale,  
No pierdas el tino,  
Porque si lo pierdes  
Pierdes el camino.

Hit, hit, hit,  
Don't lose your aim,  
Because if you lose it,  
You'll lose the way.

Ya le diste una,  
Ya le diste dos,  
Ya le diste tres  
Y tu tiempo se acabó.

You've hit it once,  
You've hit it twice,  
You've hit it thrice,  
Now your time is up.



Jeu des pots cases (the piñata) in a village, 1854. Max Radiguet and J Gaildrau, France. Engraving.



Woman with book sitting next to a New Year pull toy, c. late 1810s. Totoya Hokkei, Japan. Woodblock print.



Taters and point (children play a game with potatoes and a rag hanging from the beam), 1891. Erskine Nicol, Scotland. Print.

# Kites

The earliest written account of kites goes back to 200 BC in China. Initially conceived for military purposes, the surfaces of their wings were often made of robust silk fabric and the frameworks in bamboo. They were also used as fishing instruments in Malaysia and Indonesia. Paper kites were sent as messages for rescue missions or used in religious rituals to communicate with deities. In the 18th century, they were used scientifically in meteorology then aeronautics. In Brazil and Afghanistan, kite-fighting is popular with children who try to knock each others' kites out of the sky. In north India, the skies are filled with colourful kites on Independence Day, commemorating the nation's independence from British colonialism.



Kite Flying, c. 1766. Suzuki Harunobu, Japan.  
Woodblock print.



Krishna and Radha flying kites, c.1800. Artist unknown,  
India. Gouache painting.



A new type of kite being flown in South Africa, c. mid-19th  
century. From *Magasin Pittoresque*. South Africa. Illustration.





Children playing games in Paris, 1866.  
Artist unknown, France. Engraving.



A kite flying festival, c. 1800.  
Artist unknown, India. Watercolour.



La merelle from Jacques Stella, *Les jeux et plaisirs de l'enfance*, with illustrations by Claudine Bouzonnet Stella



Pipa, 1964. Heitor dos Prazeres, Brazil.  
Oil on canvas.

# Water Play

The natural elements are both premise and prime matter for play. Water's material possibilities are endlessly harnessed and transformed by children, who make miniature dams in streams and rivulets; bring the weather indoors in recreations of a rainy day; sleigh, slide and fight battles in the snow; shape water's frozen state into snowy animals; use the breath to navigate sailing ships in tubs or ponds; or blow liquid into magical, prismatic, spherical worlds, only to delight in their vanishing: bubbles are chased then popped, or escape outstretched fingers, becoming air again.



Dans le ruisseau à Montmartre (In the stream in Montmartre), 1890. Auguste Lepère, France. Engraving.



Children playing at creating the effect of a wet day with bellows, watering-can and an umbrella, 1890. Alice Havers, England. Chromolithograph.



Contrary Winds, 1843. Thomas Webster, England. Oil on wood.



Winter sports, 1913. Alexander Viktorovich Morvov, Russia.  
Oil on canvas.



Making a Snow Dog, 1762–1770. Suzuki Harunobu, Japan.  
Colour woodblock print.

I will develop, more obstinately than usual, the hypothesis that love stories are stories of form, and that every act of solidarity is an act of sphere formation, that is to say the creation of an interior.

— Peter Sloterdijk, *Bubbles: Spheres I*



Blowing Soap Bubbles Under the Plum Blossom, date unknown.  
Suzuki Harunobu (1725–1770), Japan. Woodblock print.



Les bulles de savon, Réflexion sur la fragilité humaine (The soap bubbles, Reflection on human frailty), 17th century. Slingeland Pieter Cornelisz van, The Netherlands. Oil on wood.



Les Bouteilles de Savon (The Soap Bubbles) from Jacques Stella,  
Les jeux et plaisirs de l'enfance (The games and pleasures of  
childhood), 1647. Claudine Bouzonnet Stella, France. Engraving.

Games can be made out of nothing.

They can be made with anything that can be found.

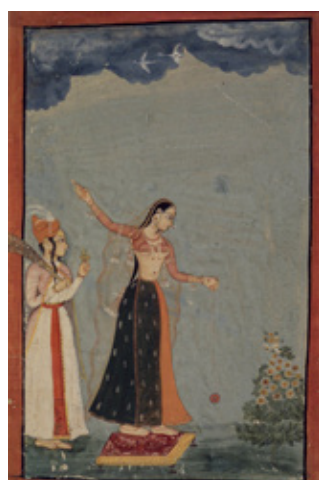
A handkerchief, a bit of rope, an empty can...

They often are about invention.

— Francis Alÿs



Boy playing yo-yo, c. 440 BC. Artist unknown, Greece. Attic red-figure kylix.



Lady with a yo-yo, c. 1770. Artist unknown, India. Opaque watercolour and gold on paper.



Children playing a game in front of a church, from the Book of Hours, Use of Rome, c. 1480. Italy.



# Leapfrog

The earliest records of leapfrog games date back to the 16th century. Children successively leap over the backs of others bending down in a row. It is known as *말뚝박기* (Piledriving) in Korea, and more often than not its name is inspired by animals: *Aar Ghodi Ki Par Ghodi* (Horse Leap) in India, *跳山羊* (Leap Goat) in China, where it is played in pairs, and *Luksóng Báka* (Leap Cow) in the Philippines: a version originating in the Province of Bulacan where the players jump over the person designated as the "Baka". Leapfrog is also a strategy board game from 19th century England where pieces on the board can capture others by "hopping" over them.



Boys playing leapfrog, 1780.  
Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes, Spain. Oil on canvas.

# Knucklebones

Knucklebones is a game of chance and dexterity. It is believed to be the first form of dice. The player cups small objects in the palm of the hand, tosses them over, and must catch them while in the air. Another variant consists of catching as many as possible on the back of the hand. From Ancient Greece to Central Asia, small bones – from the ankle of the sheep or goat – were commonly used although pebbles, seashells, seeds and metal cubes have also been found in the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Morocco, Algeria, Cuba, Peru and Brazil. In 2014, the Mongolian version called *shagai* was added to the List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO.



Men playing at knucklebones, 1310–1320.  
From The Queen Mary Psalter. England. Illuminated manuscript.



The song of King Araras playing knucklebones in Carchemish,  
c. 8th century BC. Artist unknown, Syria. Orthostat relief.



Medea (with children playing knucklebones), 1st Century AD.  
Artist unknown, Italy. Ripped fresco.



Children's Games (detail), 1560. Pieter Bruegel, The Netherlands. Oil on panel.



19th century Russian peasants playing a game of knucklebones, 1906. From Henry Rene d'Allemagne's Recreations et Passe-Temps. France. Lithograph.



The Wishing Bone Game, 1987. Andrew Qappik, Qikiqtaaluk region of Nunavut, northern Canada. Lithograph.

# Marbles

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Calendar scene for September (above: ploughing, sowing and harrowing; below: playing with marbles and stilts), 1520–1530. From the Golf Book (Book of Hours, Use of Rome). Workshop of Simon Bening S., The Netherlands.



Game of Marbles, c. 1660. The Netherlands.  
Earthenware maiolica tile.



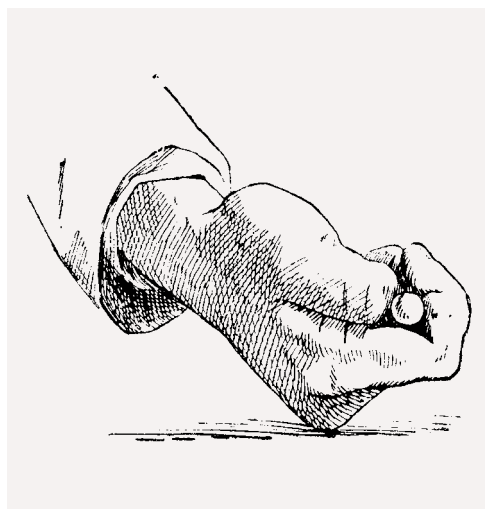
Marble Players, 1938. Allan Rohan Crite,  
United States of America. Oil on canvas.



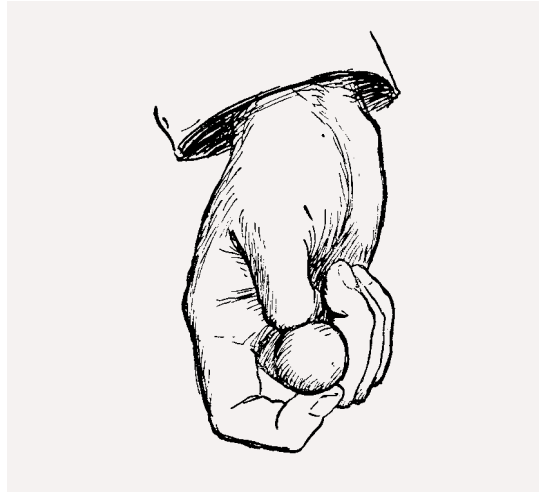
Boy Playing with Marbles, date unknown. Jan Havicksz Steen (1625/26–79), The Netherlands. Oil on panel.



Fortifications (an outdoor game of marbles similar to picking cherries), late 19th century. From American's Boy Books of Sports and Games. Artist unknown, United States of America.



Knuckling the Marble, 1908. From Country Pastimes for Boys. England. Engraving.

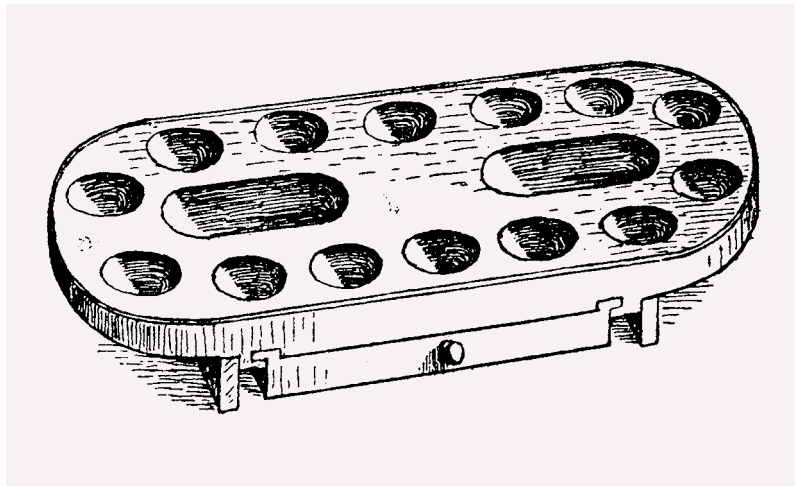


Knuckling Down, c. 1906–1922. From *Three Hundred Games and Pastimes* by Edward Verrall Lucas and Elizabeth Lucas. England. Lithograph.

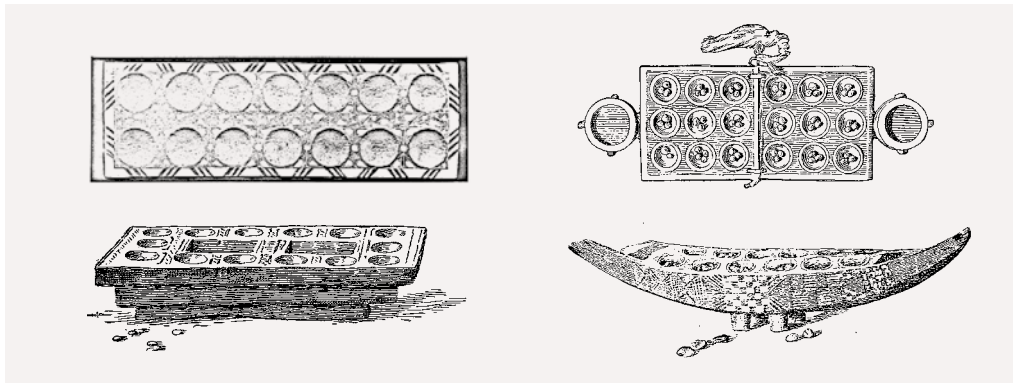


# Mancala

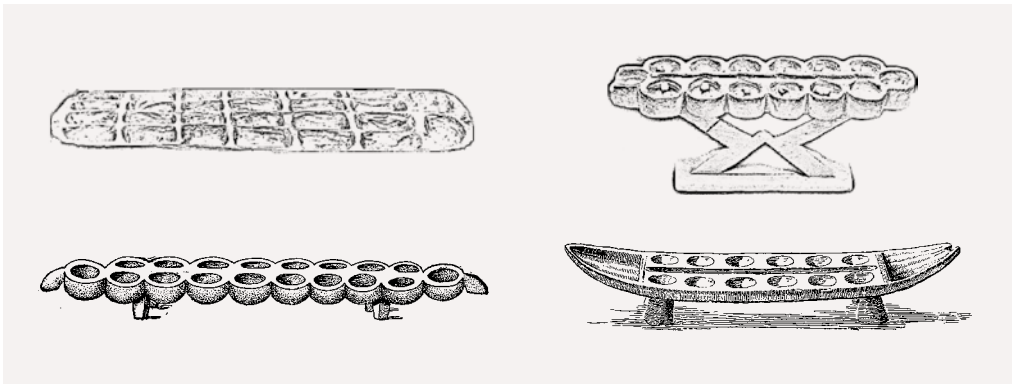
Known variously as Awale, Bawo, Congkak, Daramatu, Kisolo, Layo, Oware, Tchonka and Sungka across cultures the world over – from the Middle East, to Africa and Asia – Mancala, the Syrian name attributed to this game fittingly means “the game of transferring” in Arabic. Mancala boards have been found carved into the stone in Petra, and early records of the game are cited in the 10th century *Kitab al Aghani* or “Book of Songs”, an encyclopaedic collection of poems and songs attributed to the Arabic writer Abu al-Faraḥ al-Isfahānī. The game typically consists of a carved board with small holes on either side, sowed with seeds by players who count and strategise to capture their opponents’ pieces.



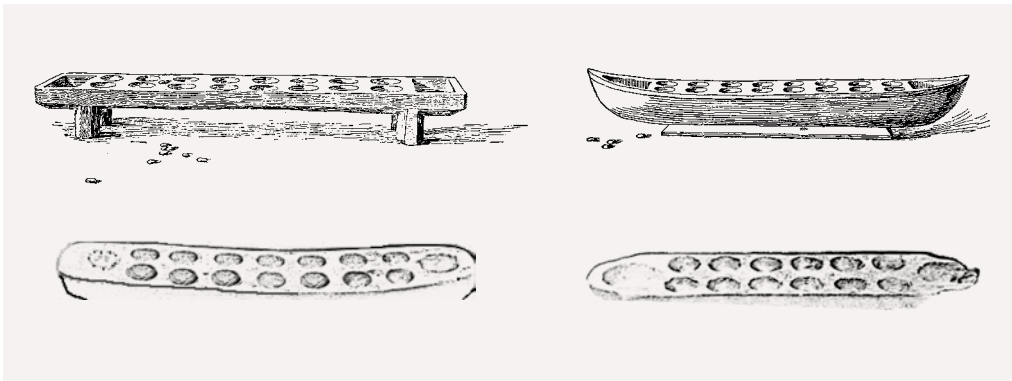
Daramutu (row of pearls) mancala board, Sri Lanka.



Clockwise from top: Mancala Board, Syria; Board for Gabattà (Mancala), Ethiopia; Board for Poo (Mancala), Liberia; Board for Chanka (Mancala), Sri Lanka, dates unknown. Artists unknown. Illustrations.



Clockwise from top: Óchi Board for Bau (Mancala), Mount Kilimanjaro, Tanzania; Board for Mbau (Mancala), Elmina, Ghana; Board for Kale (Mancala), Gabon River; Board for Abangah (Mancala), Central Africa, dates unknown. Artists unknown. Illustrations.



Clockwise from top: Board for Naranj (Mancala), The Maldives; Board for Chongkak (Mancala), Johore, Malaysia; Board for Wa-we (Mancala), St. Lucia; Board for Chuncajon (Mancala), Philippines, dates unknown. Artists unknown. Illustrations.

The persistence of games is remarkable. Empires and institutions may disappear, but games survive with the same rules and sometimes even the same paraphernalia. The chief reason is that they are not important and possess the permanence of the insignificant.

Herein lies a major mystery. For in order to benefit from this kind of fluid and yet obstinate continuity, they must be like the leaves on the trees which survive from one season to the next and remain identical. Games must be similar to animal skins, the design of butterfly wings, and the spiral curves of shell fish which are transmitted unchanged from generation to generation.

— Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, 1961



Sennedjem and his wife playing senet, 19th dynasty, 1550–1077 BC. Artist unknown, Egypt. Painted wooden door to the chamber of Sennedjem's tomb.



Achilles and Ajax playing a board game, c. 540–530 BC. Exekias, Greece. Attic black-figure amphora.



Medieval children playing, c. 1320–25 BC. From The Massacre of the Innocents Breviary. France. Tempera colours, gold leaf and ink.

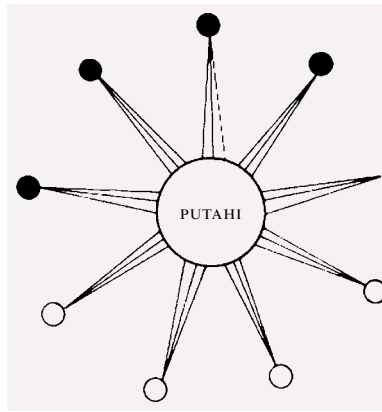


Diagram of Mu Torere Maori game,  
Australia and New Zealand.

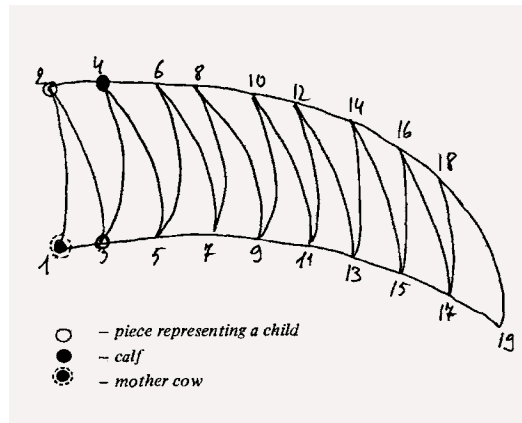


Diagram of ox horn board game played with  
sheep knucklebone pieces, Mongolia.

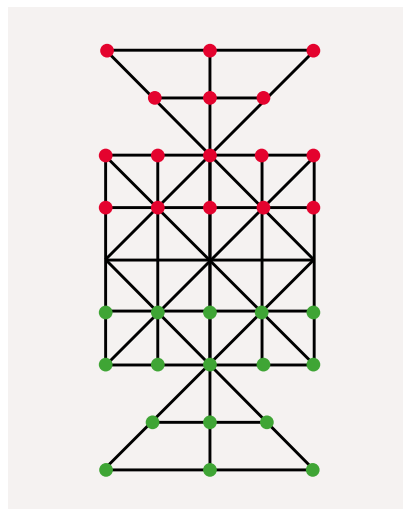
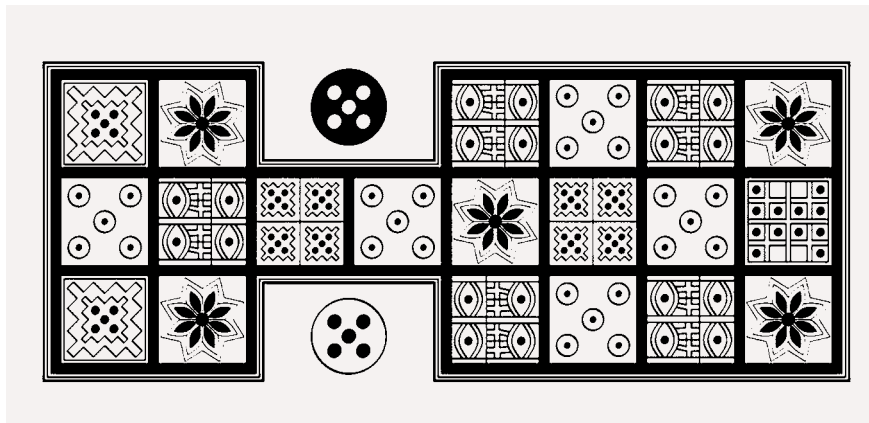


Diagram of sholo guti (sixteen soldiers)  
board game, Bangladesh.



Madjâles al-'ochhâq (A gathering at al-'ochhâq), c. 1575.  
Hoseyn Gazorgâhi, Iran. Illuminated manuscript.



Game Board from the Royal Graves, Ur, date unknown.  
Artist unknown, Iran. Drawing.



Nine men's morris, 13th century. From Libro de los juegos  
(Book of games) commissioned by Alfonso X of Castile,  
Galicia and León. Spain. Manuscript miniature painting.

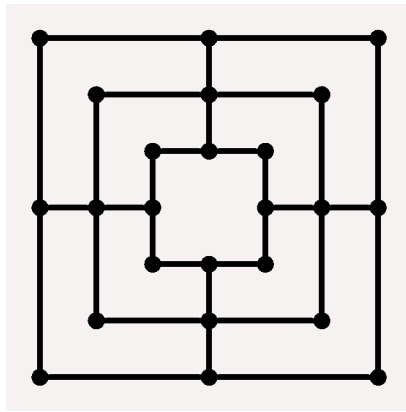


Diagram of shax board game, Somalia.



Two children play a Quechua game before a branch of culen and a Chilean pine and palm tree, 1776. Juan Ignacio Molina, Chile. Engraving.

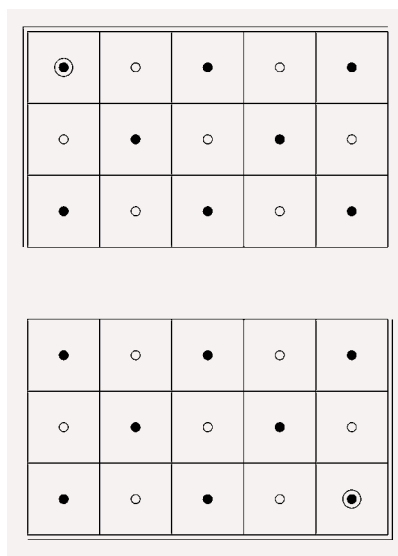


Diagram of Konane strategy game, Hawai'i.





Domino Players, 1943. Horace Pippin, United States of America. Oil on fiberboard.



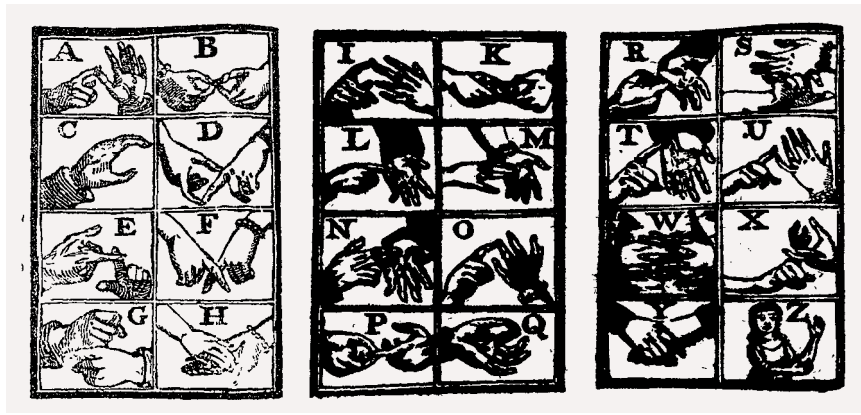
Das Buch, das man nennt das Guldon Spil  
(The Book, Called the Golden Game), 1472.  
Master Ingold, Germany. Woodcut and watercolour.



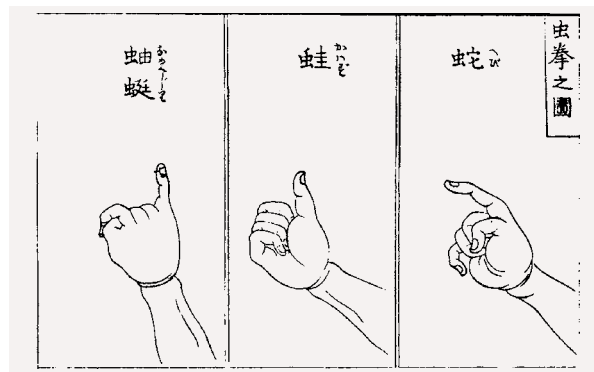
Âs Nas type playing cards depicting: left, Bîbî (a queen) and  
right, Lakat and Kouli (a dancer and hunter), 1750–1850.  
Artist unknown, Iran. Illuminated and lacquered oil painting  
on cardboard.

# Hand Games

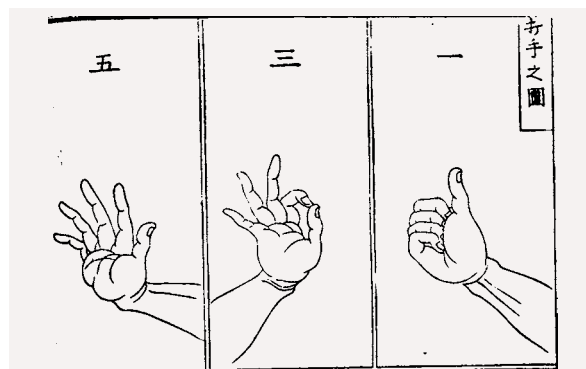
Hands are used to play a vast array of games, but constitute their own ludic category, from children's secret conversations spelled out with finger alphabets to games made up entirely of gestures. One example played globally is Rock, Paper Scissors, which originated in China and migrated to Japan where other three-gesture versions known as *sansukumi-ken*, were popularised. Some hand games involve stacking, as in Handstack, or harness the musical potential of the hand, in clapping games often accompanied by words or rhymes. Fingers are used in Thumb War – where one thumb must press down its opponent's – and transform into a fantastical theatre of animals and figures when paired with light in hand shadows.



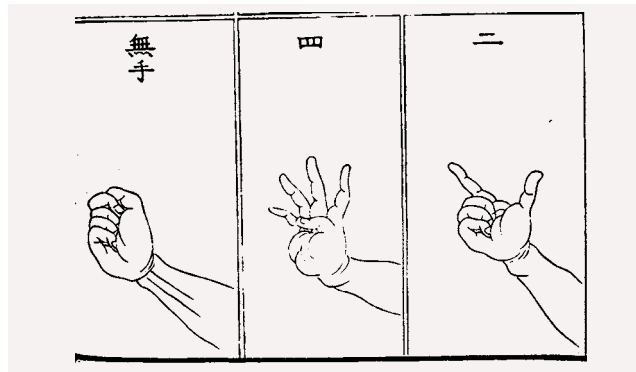
Finger alphabets, 1800. From *The Art of Talking with the Fingers in Mirth Without Mischief*. England. Print.



Mushiken (the earliest Japanese sansukumi-ken game, using three hand gestures), from right to left: snake, frog, slug, 1809. From *Kensarae Sumai Zue*. Shōkōsai Hanbei, Japan. Woodblock print.



Mushiken (the earliest Japanese sansukumi-ken game, using three hand gestures), from right to left: one, three, five, 1809. From *Kensarae Sumai Zue*. Shōkōsai Hanbei, Japan. Woodblock print.



Mushiken (the earliest Japanese sansukumi-ken game, using three hand gestures), from right to left: two, four, empty-handed, 1809. From *Kensarae Sumai Zue*. Shōkōsai Hanbei, Japan. Woodblock print.



Men playing the ancient game of Morra, early 19th century. Jackson and Porter after an illustration by Bartolomeo Pinelli, Italy. Engraving.



Jeux d'enfants la main chaude (The hot hand, children's game), 17th century. Jacques Bailly (1629–1679), France. Oil on canvas.

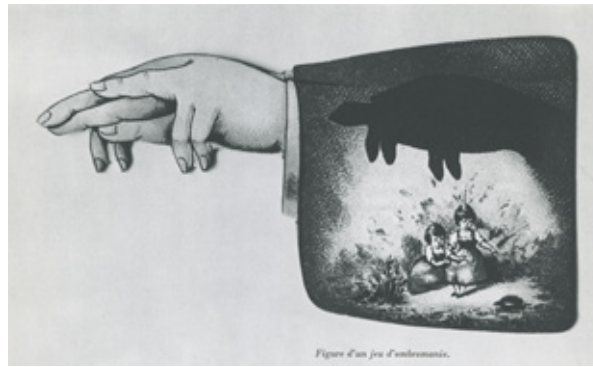
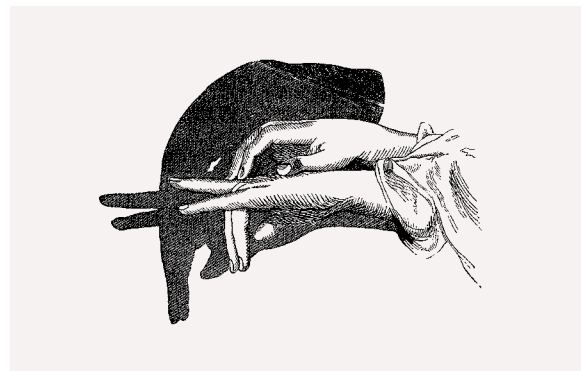


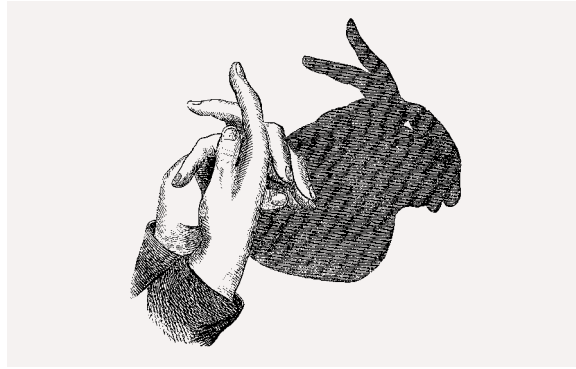
Figure d'un jeu d'ombromanie (Figure in a shadowplay game), date unknown. From Jean Brun, *La Main (The Hand)*, 1968.



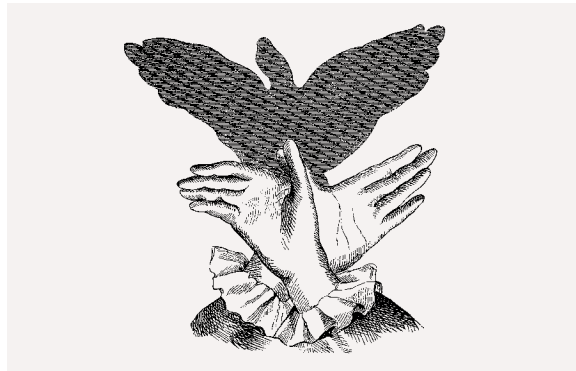
The Goose, c. 1860. From *Hand shadows to be thrown upon the wall: a series of novel and amusing figures formed by the hand*. United States of America.



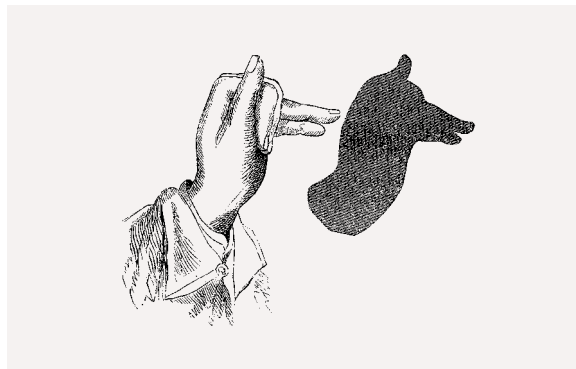
An Elephant, c. 1860. From *Hand shadows to be thrown upon the wall: a series of novel and amusing figures formed by the hand*. United States of America.



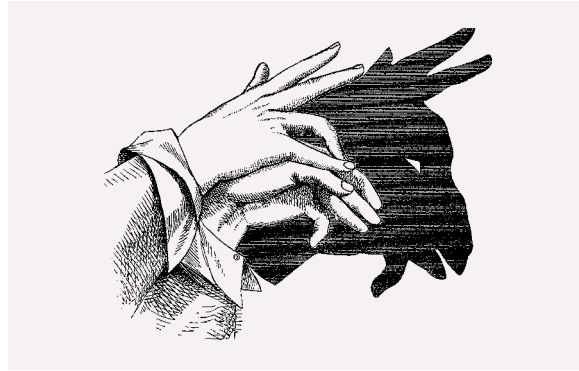
Bunny, c. 1860. From Hand shadows to be thrown upon the wall: a series of novel and amusing figures formed by the hand. United States of America.



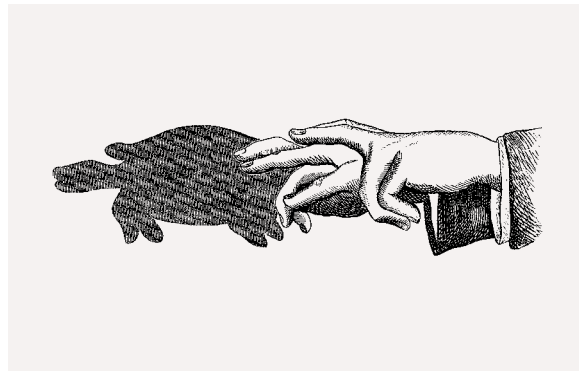
A Bird in Flight, c. 1860. From Hand shadows to be thrown upon the wall: a series of novel and amusing figures formed by the hand. United States of America.



Greyhound, c. 1860. From Hand shadows to be thrown upon the wall: a series of novel and amusing figures formed by the hand. United States of America.



Goat, c. 1860. From Hand shadows to be thrown upon the wall: a series of novel and amusing figures formed by the hand. United States of America.

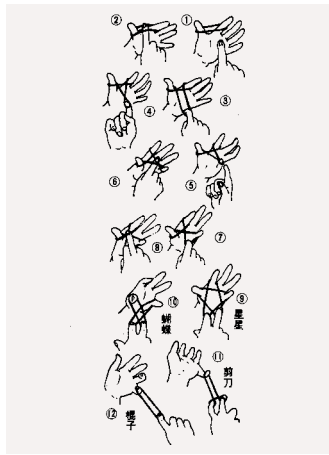


A tortoise, c. 1860. From Hand shadows to be thrown upon the wall: a series of novel and amusing figures formed by the hand. United States of America.

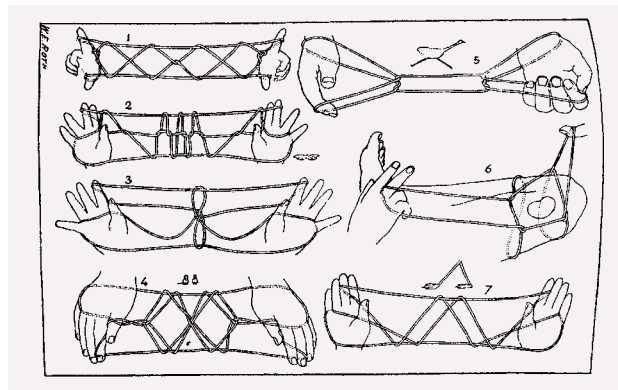
# Strings

One of humanity's most ancient games, string figures – which purportedly evolved from the use of string in early societies for hunting, fishing and weaving – is a global pastime that more approximates the art of drawing, in its ability to create a breathtaking variety of looping shapes and patterns representing the natural world or imbued with symbolic meaning. Figures range from sunsets, lightning, stars and porcupines to complex symbols of tribal mythologies, with some games – like the well-loved cat's cradle – requiring multiple players. The first written account of a string figure was by the Greek doctor Heraklas in his 1st century treatise on surgical knots and slings. Thousands of patterns have been catalogued worldwide since the 19th century and the International String Figure Association was founded in 1978 to preserve and disseminate the game.

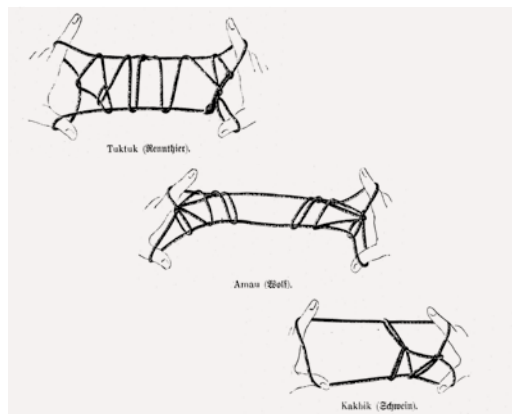




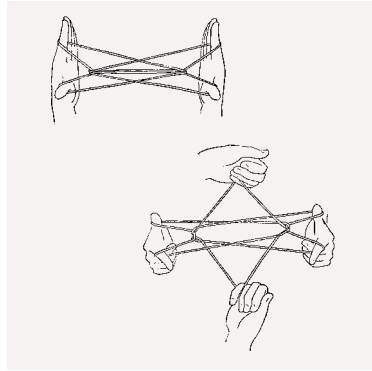
String figures, 1978. From Games Chinese Children Play, Echo Magazine. China.



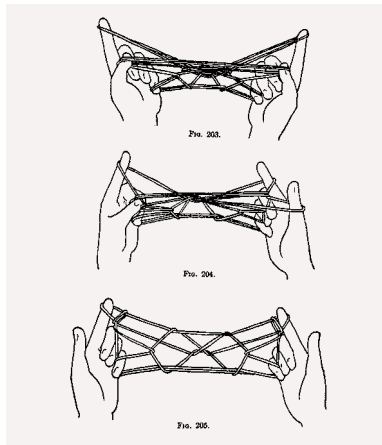
North Queensland (Australia) string figure – animals: quadrupeds and birds (1. Bandicoot, 2. Bat, 3. Flying fox: the wings, 4. Two rats, 5. Emu, 6. Emu’s nest with the egg represented by a “match-box” bean, 7. Cassowary: the two legs)



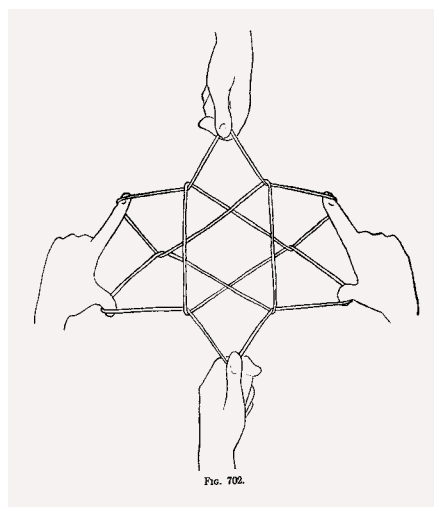
Inuit string figures – reindeer, wolf, and pig, 1881. Sketch by H. Klutschak. Nunavut, northern Canada.



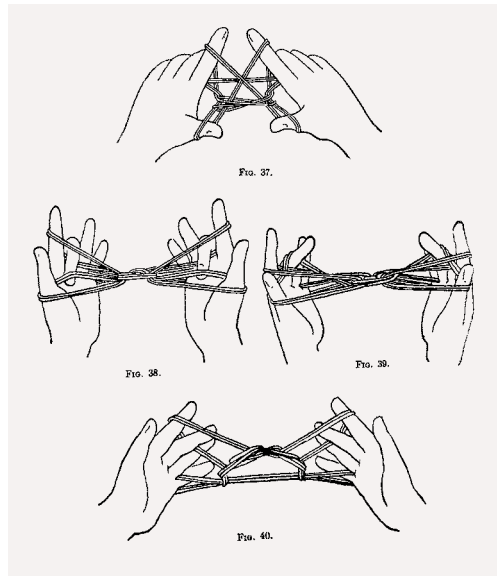
Cat's eye to fish in a dish, 1906. From String figures: a study of cat's-cradle in many lands. Caroline Furness Jayne, United States of America.



Kiwai Island (New Guinea) string figure – a crab. From String Figures and How to Make Them, 1906.



New Mexico (USA) string figure – a six-pointed star. From String Figures and How to Make Them, 1906.



Murray Island (Australia) string figure – a sunset. From *String Figures and How to Make Them*, 1906.

We may fairly safely venture the generalisation that civilisation kills cat's cradles.

— Kathleen Haddon

SF (string figures, speculative fabulation, science fiction, science fact, speculative feminism, so far) is storytelling and fact telling: it is the patterning of possible worlds and possible times, material-semiotic worlds, gone, here, and yet to come.

— Donna Haraway



Two Young Women Seated by a Kotatsu Playing Cat's Cradle, c. 1765. Suzuki Harunobu, Japan. Woodblock print.

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Artist unknown, England. The Infant's Magazine. Photo Look and Learn/Bridgeman Images.

Artist unknown, England. Tip-cat, 1744. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Artist unknown, Ethiopia. Horniman Museum, London (23.2.65/37).

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Artist unknown, France. Medieval children playing the war game "I'm on your land". from Sports et jeux d'adresse by Henry René d'Allemagne, 1903.

Artist unknown, Greece. Boy playing yo-yo. Altes Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.

Artist unknown, Greece. Daïora h Vrachionios. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Julia Bradford Huntington James Fund and Museum purchase with funds donated by contribution (10.191a). Photograph 2024, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

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Artist unknown, Push-along toy illustrations, from *The Child and play: theoretical approaches and teaching applications. Educational studies and documents: New series, No. 34.* Unesco 1980.

Artist unknown, Syria. Orthostat relief. Museum of Anatolian Civilisations, Ankara, Turkey/Bridgeman Images.

Artist unknown, The Netherlands. Earthenware maiolica tile. Rijkmuseum, Amsterdam.

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Băt măt băt dê, Vietnam. Courtesy <http://www.asiafinest.com/forum/index.php?showtopic=259200>.

Baidō Kokunimasa. British Library archive/Bridgeman Images.

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Belmiro de Almeida. MASP, Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand, São Paulo, Brazil. Photo The Picture Art Collection/Alamy Stock Photo.

Book of Hours, Use of Rome, c. 1480. British Library archive/Bridgeman Images.

Breviary. France. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

Caroline Furnes Jayne, String Figures. Harry Houdini Collection. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Charles Aubry. Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris (G.9350). Image CC0 Paris Musées/Musée Carnavalet-Histoire de Paris.

Diagram of Ehcamalotl (tornado) hopscotch, Mexico. courtesy petitsjeuxculturels.com.

Diagram of Konane. Courtesy <http://www.cyningstan.com/>.

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Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes, The Seesaw. Philadelphia Museum of Art. Gift of Miss Anna Warren Ingersoll, 1975 (1975-150-1).

Giovanni di Ser Giovanni. Photo A. Dagli Orti/NPL - DeA Picture Library/Bridgeman Images.

Girls playing Hajla. Palestine. Courtesy <https://www.welcometopalestine.com/article/traditional-palestinian-childrens-games/>.

Great Palace Mosaic Museum, Istanbul. Photo Album/Alamy Stock Photo.

H. Klutschak: eine Schilderung der Erlebnisse Schwatka'schen Franklin- Aufsuchungs-Expedition in den Jahren 1878-80.

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Henry Buckley Ashmead, *Hand shadows*, 1860s. Beinecke  
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Henry Rene d'Allemagne's *Recreations et Passe-Temps*. Photo  
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Hopscotch diagrams, 1978. *Echo Magazine*, China.

Horace Pippin, *School Studies*, 1944. National Gallery of  
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Horace Pippin, *Domino Players*, 1943. The Phillips  
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Jean Brun, *La Main (The Hand)*, 1968.

Jean Siméon Chardin. Photo Luisa Ricciarini/Bridgeman  
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naturale, e civile del regno del Chile*, 1776.

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Kim Chun-gun. Musée Guimet - musée national des Arts  
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