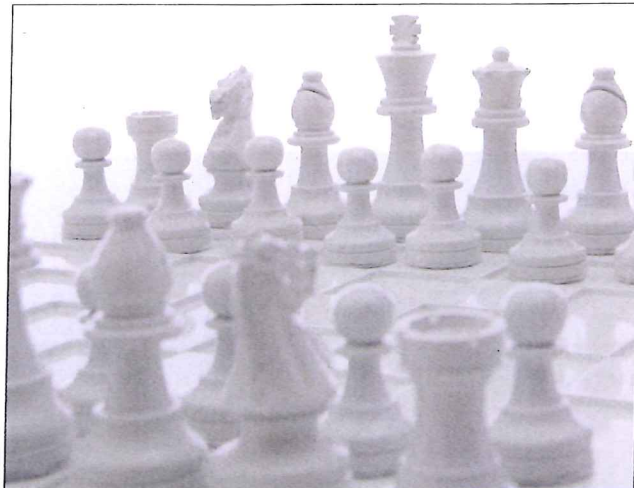




Liliya Lifanova's  
*Anatomy Is  
Destiny, The  
Wardrobe:  
Game in  
Waiting*, 2009  
(detail).



*Play It by Trust (Roskilde Version)*, 2002, by Yoko Ono.

## Pawn Stars

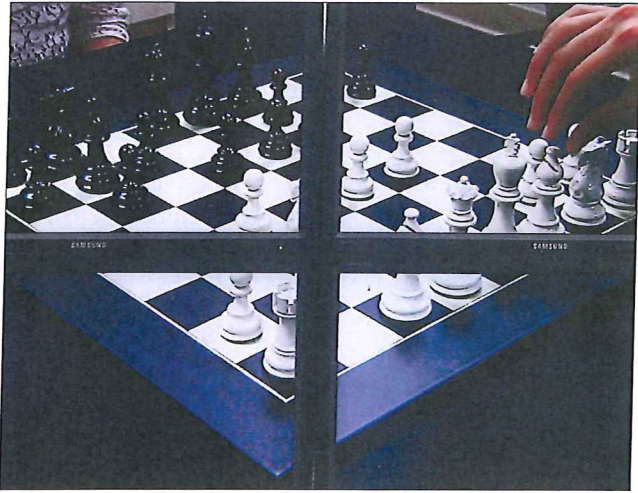
Yoko Ono's chess set *Play It by Trust (Roskilde Version)*, 2002, has a chessboard and all the knights, rooks, bishops, queens, kings, and pawns needed for competition. But it's hard to play the game on it—everything is completely white. This is one of a series of all-white sets Ono began making in the 1960s that transforms the militaristic game into a proposition on mutual respect and reliance. Likewise, any attempt to win on Tom Friedman's untitled set from 2005 would be an exercise in absurdity: no two chess pieces are alike, and their shapes—a melting lollipop, a shaving brush, a decorative toothpick, a foam peanut—are utterly arbitrary.

These works and many others appeared in "Out of the Box: Artists Play Chess," a survey of contemporary chess-themed art at the World Chess Hall of Fame, which recently relocated from Miami to Saint Louis. In its new space, a historical building across the street from the Chess Club and Scholastic Center of Saint Louis, the Hall of Fame has almost 16,000 square feet and three galleries dedicated to public exhibitions on chess.

*Untitled*, 2005, by Tom Friedman.



LEFT: COURTESY DAVID ULMER PHOTOGRAPHY AND WORLD CHESS HALL OF FAME, SAINT LOUIS/COLLECTION OF THE ARTIST; RIGHT: COLLECTION OF JEANNE AND REX SINOUEFIELD (2)



Still from Diana Thater's *Georges Koltanowski vs. Marcel Duchamp, Paris, 1929 (Played by Ellen Simon and Cybelle Tondou)*, 2010.

history, culture, and art. Saint Louis University's **Bradley Bailey**, an expert on **Marcel Duchamp** and the art of chess, curated "Out of the Box." "All these artworks require an understanding of chess as an operation, a strategic mental process," Bailey says. "They also address the game's strong social component—for instance, chess is an allegory of war."

**Barbara Kruger's** *Untitled (Do you feel comfortable losing?)*, 2006, turns a chess match into a conversation, with the pieces electronically triggering recorded statements as they move about the board. British artist **Gavin Turk** plays the role of an infamous automaton in *The Mechanical Turk* (2008), a video based on a fraudulent chess stunt perpetrated in the 18th century.

Still from Gavin Turk's *The Mechanical Turk*, 2008.



**Guido van der Werve**, from the Netherlands, weighed in with his expansive *Number Twelve: Variations on a Theme* (2009), encompassing film, photography, a musical soundtrack, and a "chess piano" fashioned by the artist.

In her installation/performance piece *Anatomy Is Destiny* (2009), **Liliya Lifanova** looks at the parallels of war and sexuality as they operate in chess. (The title is taken from **Freud**.) This work features a human-scale chessboard and 32 costumes designed to echo the movements of each chess piece. For the performance, dancers put on the costumes and enacted an imaginary match written by the artist **Arman** in 1972, in which Duchamp faces off against his female alter ego, **Rose Sélavy**. "I wonder if Arman saw the game the same way I do," says Lifanova: "Duchamp is 'playing with himself.'"



**Barbara Kruger's** *Untitled (Do you feel comfortable losing?)*, 2006.

The spirit of Duchamp, who famously quit art to become a chess master, was present throughout the exhibition. But video artist **Diana Thater** is quick to point out that "Marcel Duchamp doesn't own chess" as an art form. Thater has long made chess-themed video works, initially inspired by **Lewis Carroll's** fantastic version of the game.

In "Out of the Box," she showed a filmed reenactment of a real-life match between Duchamp and Belgian champion **Georges Koltanowski**, but she downplayed the players' identities, focusing instead on the board and the mesmerizing motions of the reenactors' hands. "Chess is very good looking," Thater says. "You don't have to know anything about chess—you can just enjoy the way it looks." —*Ivy Cooper*