

## LET US PLAY

by Helen Margaret Giovanello

It would seem that, at the very heart of living beings, there exists an irrepressible desire to play — to interact for the sheer pleasure of it, without immediate purpose. Gratification arises from this space-time set apart from daily tasks: a time for encounter, for suspension, perhaps even for rest. Playing is like a breath within the flow of the world.



sports for all, association grow up, cultivating culture of peace,

Nature itself seems to indulge in it. Does the river not play with the stones it patiently smooths? Are the waves not endlessly chasing one another? Foliage dances with the wind, whirls in autumn, whispers in summer, rocked by the warm air. And what could be more playful than the rain, improvising a thousand rhythms upon roofs and earth? In these movements there is an essential gratuity — a game without spectators, without reward, without any purpose beyond the impulse itself.

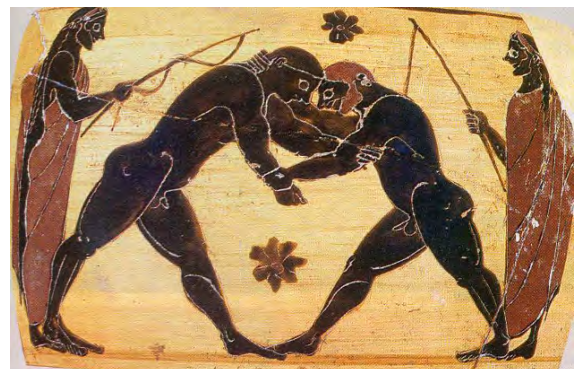


Carl Constantin Steffeck 1890

Animals play as well. Young wolves test one another in mock combat, kittens pounce on invisible shadows, dolphins spin through the foam. This play is never entirely gratuitous: it is learning disguised as lightness, an exercise in strength, cunning, coordination, and limits. Likewise, human children discover the world through play. Even before words, they handle, imitate, invent. In that in-between space — neither fully real nor fully imagined — trust, creativity, and understanding of others take shape. Playing is not merely entertainment; it is learning how to be in the world.

Since prehistoric times, humanity has played. Games have crossed centuries and cultures, creating symbolic spaces in which different rules are willingly accepted. Uncertainty, rules, chance, fiction, and pleasure outline territories set apart from everyday life.

Very early on, games became bearers of meaning. Senet and the Mesoamerican ballgame inscribed play within the order of the cosmos. Gyan Chaupar, an ancient Indian board, represented the soul's journey: virtues and vices raise or cast down the player, while chance symbolically orders the unpredictable. Games such as Chatrang or Go became instruments of strategy and decision-making for elites. Everywhere, play models life.



From Antiquity to the Present Day: The Place of Sport in Greece

Over time, play became spectacle and competition. In the nineteenth century, it was codified and professionalized. When Pierre de Coubertin revived the Olympic Games, it became a universal rite. Today, competition is global, professional, and mediated, driven by glory and recognition.

Long excluded, women have gradually claimed their place in this arena. Their presence transforms the game itself. When they run, strike, jump, or wrestle, they redraw the invisible boundaries of power. Where exclusivity once seemed certain, plurality emerges. The field becomes a shared space, and competition a more faithful mirror of humanity. In this way, play recovers something of its original innocence: an energy offered to all, without distinction.

Every sport remains a game, but not every game is a sport. Sport demands effort, discipline, and hierarchy; play preserves fantasy and fluid identity. Between professionalization and spontaneity, cohesion and rivalry, inclusion and confrontation, play lives in constant tension. Risk is one of its hidden springs. To challenge an opponent or chance itself is to tame uncertainty.

In the theater, the stage becomes a playground: one embodies another, experiments with multiple identities. In *Le Jeu de l'amour et du hasard* by Pierre de Marivaux, feelings disguise themselves, strategize, and test one another as in a subtle game. Love becomes a sport of the mind; the aim is not victory but revelation.

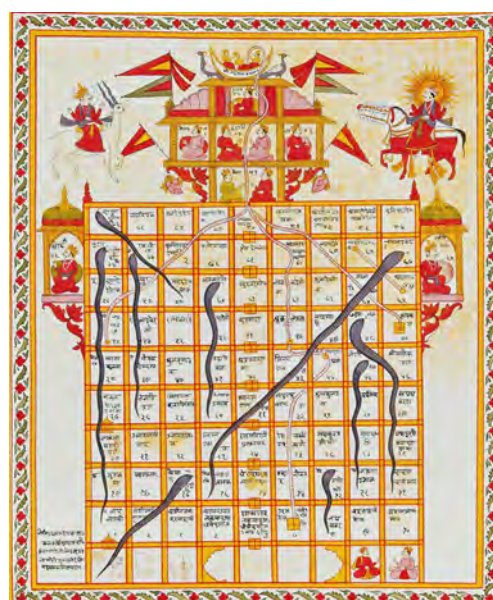
Paintings, sculptures, vases, engravings, and frescoes recount children's games and human competitions, power plays and romantic duels. Even in utilitarian objects, the representation of play recalls its central role in culture and the human imagination.



gene kelly singing in the rain, 1952

Art thus offers a mirror: it captures moments of pleasure, competition, learning, and creativity, and shows how play runs through and shapes every experience of existence.

For to play, ultimately, is to experiment with the world in miniature. It is to create a framework in which to confront uncertainty, test rules, and explore freedom. Play contains within itself all these potentialities: gratuitous pleasure, confrontation, learning, chance, cohesion, rivalry. It is both light and tension. It is that fragile place where life observes itself, challenges itself, tells its own story — and where, sometimes, in the thrill of contest or the gentleness of a shared fiction, existence becomes, for a moment, pure poetry.



13th Century CE, Indian poet and saint Gyandev created a children's game called Moksha Patam. Named by the British Snakes and Ladders