

LEILA HELLER GALLERY.

SHRINES TO SPEED

Art and the Automobile: From the Postwar to the Postmodern

CURATED BY ALEXANDER HELLER AND VIVIAN BRODIE

May 5th to July 9th, 2106



Opening Reception: Thursday May 5, 2016, 6-8pm

Leila Heller Gallery

568 West 25th street, New York, NY 10001

NEW YORK, NY—FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE—Leila Heller Gallery is proud to present *Shrines to Speed: Art and the Automobile, From the Post-war to the Post-modern*, co-curated by Alexander Heller and Vivian Brodie, from May 5th to July 9th, 2016. From ideas of acceleration, to the iconography of the liberation, to the dream of the open road, the American death drive of the automotive pervades the visual economy and theoretical discourse for artists from William Eggleston to Andy Warhol, John Baldessari to Rob Pruitt, Dennis Hopper to Jonathan Monk—all to be included in this groundbreaking exhibition. The sixty plus works of art by nearly forty artists, additionally reflect international artistic responses to an US dominated ideology of car culture—either in its specificity as an object or in its symbolic significance—from Swiss-born Sylvie Fleury to Belgium’s Wim Delvoye.

The automobile is a cypher of desire, but also destruction. The ‘need for speed’ as it is often called, announces a call for the road results as much in lurid exhilaration as it does in utter devastation. In *Shrines to Speed* this reality is evoked by Warhol’s image of twisted piles of metal and steel, set against William Eggleston’s diptych portraying 1970s pleasure seeking culture with a man and woman posed alluringly, proudly, next to cars which appear not as backdrops for the image, but co-presences, even extensions of the subject’s bodies themselves. Sylvie Fleury’s pastel pink sculptural address of the tragic in the experience of the automobile presents the unlikely scenario of a car being literally cut in two, whilst Wim Delvoye offers the viewer a pristine objet d’art in the form of tires carefully carved with motifs from gothic chapel stained glass window designs from his native Belgium. Richard Prince’s *Untitled (Van Door 3)*, a sculptural presentation of a van door suggests undisclosed cargo, the occult, even kidnapping, while his print *Untitled (Upstate)* presents a similar dead end of celebratory car culture as a vehicle appears stranded, abandoned, left in a field to rot—no way forward.

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Car culture however is inextricably linked to the idea of the west, heading west, and the California sunset. *Shrines to Speed* recognizes this ideological horizon with the important inclusion of Ed Ruscha's rare publication *Every Building on Sunset Strip from 1966* (with other copies held at the MOMA and Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), one of a number of photobook works completed by the West Coast artist between 1962 and 1970, which virtually invented the notion of the artist's book today and which represents a key conceptual engagement with the road and the car as a framing device for a diffuse, highway centered experience of landscape. Likewise, John Baldessari, a conceptual artist and fellow denizen of Angeleno Americana, is featured in an homage to his home town in National City, in a suite of eight archival photographs, layered over by hand painted acrylic circles. Meanwhile, Robert Bechtle and Richard Estes present sedate, even domestic, comforting images of the plebian city streets. Also included in this exhibition is a never before exhibited painting by Richard Diebenkorn a major figure in Abstract Expressionism in the Bay Area. Painted in 1957, on the cusp of the revolution of the American landscape with advent Highway act, this painting demonstrates how Diebenkorn applied his characteristic saturated hues to the icon of the automobile.

This exhibition also includes a new work from the Bruce High Quality Foundation, which exploits the cultural importance of cinema to the mythos of car culture as the brightly hued bumper of a New York City taxi, equipped with a motion sensing device, which interrupts the viewers experience, delivering the soundtrack of the movie *Taxi* itself as the spectator approaches.

Finally, not only does *Shrines to Speed* present the Post-war, Conceptual, Pop, and Post-modern artistic approaches to the automobile, but the curators have also chosen to include a preface to their own endeavor—highlighting a select group of early twentieth century images which present a pre-history of conceptual approaches to the car in an era prior to the highway explosion of the later half of the twentieth century. Though car culture in America had been on the rise since the Ford's assembly line ethic made motorized transportation accessible to the American middle class in the first decade of the 20th century, it's capture in early photography presents the high gloss fashionable allure of the works of photographer William Klein, against William Gedney's images of struggle and socio-economic destitution in the style WPA documentary photographs.

The experience of the automobile as both object and idea comes to frame multiple and divergent artistic inquiries on the car, the road, and a culture of ever-increasing acceleration, emergent from the work of multiple, renowned Post-war and contemporary artists. Mining the cultural rise of car culture, the exhibition of paintings, works on paper, photography, and sculpture extends the discourse of the icon of modernity that is the automobile in both its aesthetic and cultural dimensions: in its seduction of escape and the open road, in its violence and potential for danger, in its unique engagement with landscape; and in its ultimate expression of an exalting and endless experience of speed, excitement, energy.

ARTISTS INCLUDED IN THE EXHIBITION

Ron Arad, Arman, Daniel Arsham, John Baldessari, Jean Michel Basquiat, Robert Bechtle, Bruce High Quality Foundation, John Chamberlain, Bruce Davidson, Wim Delvoye, Richard Diebenkorn, William Eggelston, Richard Estes, Nick Farhi, Louis Faurer, Sylvie Fleury, John Aaron Frank, William Gedney, Dennis Hopper, William Klein, Jeff Koons, Jacques Henri Latrigue, Arthur Leipzig, Nate Lowman, Jonathan Monk, Robert Olsen, Ruth Orkin, Kaz Oshiro, Michael Andrew Page, Raymond Pettibon, Jack Pierson, Richard Prince, Dana Powell, Rob Pruitt, Robert Rauschenberg, Ed Ruscha, Salvatore Scarpitta, Blair Thurman, Robert Williams, Andy Warhol, Aaron Young

FOR PRESS INQUIRIES

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