

Spoke of Genius

“Re:Cycle” explores the social and political implications of SoCal bike culture

By: Christopher Michno

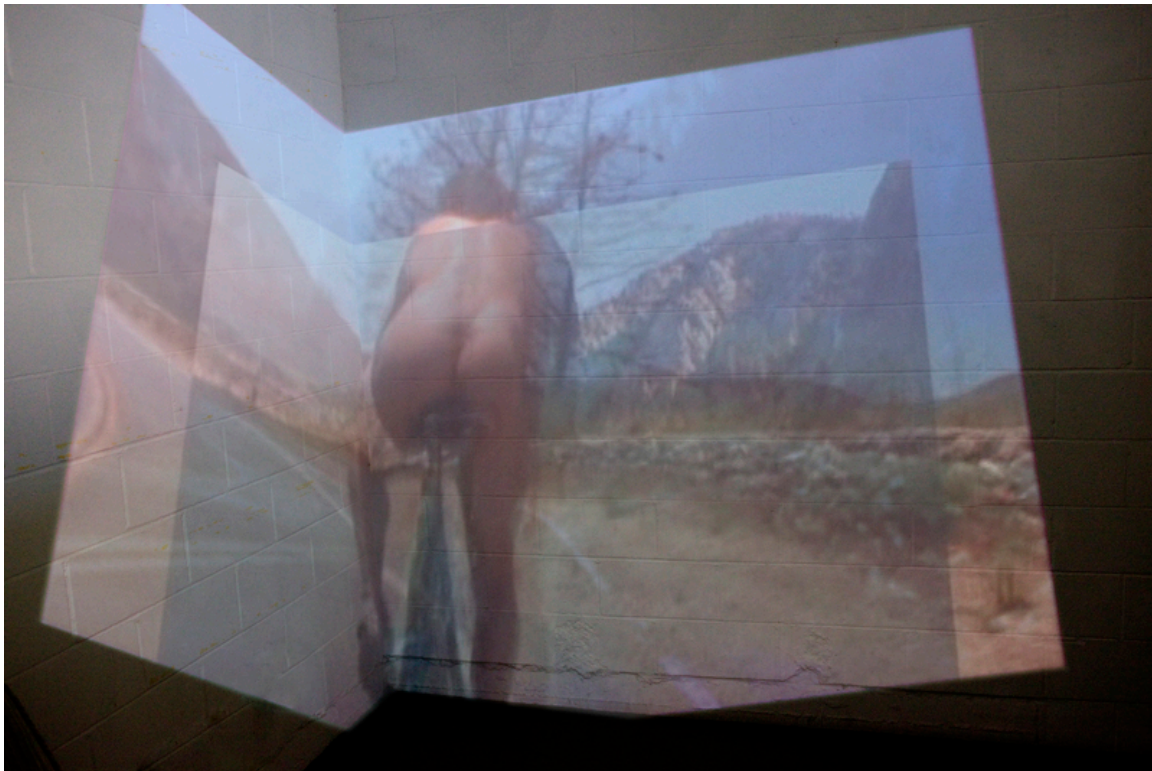
“Vehicles of Imagination,” a collection of pedal cars in the atrium of the Culver Center, proves an elegant example of engineering, design and fantasy. These children’s toys hang from cables in an array like a sheet of miniature hot rods, fire trucks, luxury sedans and very cute planes. They are cultural relics that feed nostalgic longing for emblems of childhood and paradoxically, in their smallness and their cuteness, they encapsulate grace and power in shiny gleaming objects. The smart paint jobs and the sculptural curves of sheet metal provide an eye-candy moment. While these cars may unlock the imaginative freedoms of children, the accompanying exhibit at Sweeney Gallery in the Culver Center, “Re:Cycle: Bike Culture in Southern California,” goes beyond encouraging adults to engage in the same carefree imaginings.

Although “Vehicles of Imagination” and “Re:Cycle” both speak to our culture’s love affair with vehicles—since the invention of the wheel, we have been occupied with making transportation more efficient and highly stylish—in addition to looking at bikes as objects of desire or expressive modes within an artistic practice, Re:Cycle explores the increasingly vociferous activism and the guerrilla tactics of public rides that are designed to take the streets back for bicycles. The battle-hardened tactics of road cyclists are addressed in Lee Tusman’s broadside, *Riverside Cyclist Monthly*, a low-brow, word-on-the-street paper, which provides practical advice for cyclists: “Take the lane if you need to. Riverside drivers don’t leave space for bikes and RTA buses will push you off the road if you don’t hold the lane down.” Tusman’s broadside, and his video, *Grit City*, allude to cycling as an alternative lifestyle rather than a sport, a fitness craze or a hobby.

Light Cycles, Patrick Miller’s extraordinarily beautiful video, transforms a critical mass ride into a transcendent experience. Diane Meyer’s *Without a Car in the World*, a series of portraits and

interview excerpts, deepens the sense of politics, both cultural and ecological, that occupies Tusman's and Miller's work. Meyer investigates how traditional models of transportation are broken and how cycling might provide a fix, suggesting in her title that to be without a car is to be without a care in the world. A statement from a community activist asserts that, ". . . mobility is our most significant civil rights issue right now in L.A." This is underscored by a photo of a beleaguered looking man with a low-cost mountain bike, who speaks to the difficulty of finding effective public transportation in Los Angeles that will get him to and from work at the right hours. "It's why so many people drive here without a license." *Without a Car in the World* is split between people for whom riding a bicycle it is a luxury or perhaps a political choice, and those for whom it is a necessity.

Perhaps the most quietly moving piece, *Moments of Silence, Stars into Skies*, by Ashira Siegel, memorializes a young bike messenger named "Bronx Jon," who died after being hit by a car, and "other fallen riders who have been killed by cars and their drivers." Bits of Bronx Jon's story decorate a papier mâché bicycle which hangs beneath a canopy of bicycle rims draped in sheer black cloth.



Tying into the meditative aura of *Moments of Silence* are Miller's *Light Cycles*, Samuel Starr's

Circulus, and Tad Beck's *Bipod*. All three work with hypnotic combinations of sounds and images. The effect of Miller's *Light Cycles*, woven from the mesmerizing images of car and bicycle lights photographed at dusk and an accompanying soundtrack of real-time recordings from large-scale rides, forms a meditative fabric. *Circulus*, a section of Starr's circular cycling track with a projected video, shows Starr in an essentially meditative exercise, circling the track, generating his own gravitational force. The noise of the bicycle on the track is predictable and patterned; the rolling of the wheels on plywood as the bike advances through time and space is wholly consistent with the trance-like effect of the original location for *Circulus*—a library. Beck's video installation, *Bipod*, overlaid with the sound of a cyclist breathing from exertion, forms a loop of biorhythms that very quickly send us out into the stars.

“Re:Cycle: Bike Culture in Southern California” at UCR Sweeney Art Gallery, 3834 Main St., Riverside, (951) 827-3755; <http://sweeney.ucr.edu>. Thru Dec. 31.