

Rosson Crow: Myth of the American Motorcycle

For over a hundred years, the motorcycle and its surrounding mythology has been evolving. First invented in 1885 in Germany as a bicycle with an attached motor, it grew into a fast-moving and easily maneuvered machine that would play a major role in World Wars I and II. The history of the American motorcycle began in 1901 with the creation of both the Harley Davidson and Indian motorcycle and by 1920 the United States was the largest producer of motorcycles in the world selling motorcycles through 2,000 dealers in 67 countries.

It was the American G.I.s returning from war that brought motorcycles into mainstream culture. Familiar with the machines from battle, returning soldiers sought out American models back home to retain the thrill of the ride without the horror of war. This machine so attached to the concepts of war, victory and leisure quickly came to stand for freedom and the American way of life. As the motorcycle transformed from a common form of transportation into an icon, motorcycle culture began to infiltrate film and literature. Films like Dennis Hopper's *Easy Rider* and books such as, Hunter S. Thompson's *Hell's Angels: A Strange and Terrible Saga* helped solidify the motorcycle's place in modern America.

Rosson Crow is interested in this history. She has read the writings of motorcycle legends, collected back issues of *Easy Rider* magazine and explored leather shops and biker bars. In the resulting body of work, she explores nostalgia-laden places, symbols, and objects relating to motorcycles and the American road-trip. The environments and sites encountered in her paintings were made famous through popular culture in the 50s, 60s and 70s. Crow's paintings are that of a collective history of the motorcycle. Drawing simultaneously from many sources, these places don't quite exist in reality, but they have become an integral part of its narrative.

Customized motorcycles selected from the Cincinnati area punctuate the exhibition and enter the landscape of Crow's large scale canvases. These bikes become storytellers, relating autobiographical tales of the relationship between rider and machine. They are built for performance, but have been altered until each takes on its own unique style reflecting the identity or desired identity of their owners. The vision of each rider is interpreted through the paint jobs executed by Jim Farr, known by most as Dauber. He is a master freehand pin-striper, graphic designer and illustrator with a unique ability to translate individual personalities and stories onto the surface of motorcycles. These individual narratives come to life in the environment created by Crow's paintings.

Rosson Crow was born in Dallas, Texas in 1982. She studied at the School of Visual Arts in New York and Yale University. In 2006 she had a residency at Cite Internationale des Arts in Paris. She most recently exhibited her work at Deitch Projects in New York and has had a solo exhibition at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas.

Rosson Crow: Myth of the American Motorcycle is curated by Justine Ludwig and organized by the Contemporary Arts Center.