

Rosson Crow: Myth of the American Motorcycle

November 06, 2010 through April 03, 2011

Curated by Justine Ludwig

ARTIST(S) Rosson Crow

This exciting exhibition pairs all new work from painter Rosson Crow with customized American motorcycles from the Greater Cincinnati region. Known for her large-scale canvases depicting stereotypically male-dominated spaces, Crow delved into the world of motorcycles for the CAC show. A meticulous researcher, she entrenched herself in biker culture for a year prior to the show. And just as Crow's paintings tell a story, so do the customized bikes displayed with her work. The motorcycles in the show—all Indians and Harley Davidsons—are custom-painted by Dauber, a local artist and nationally recognized member of the Hot Rod Hall of Fame. Individually they tell autobiographical tales of the relationship between rider and machine, but together they reveal the gender-bending mashup that is so evident in Crow's work. Precious in the eyes of their owners, the bikes are workhorses with killer paint jobs. This tailoring reveals the bikers' passion and, though never seen in her paintings, these devotees lend character to the environments Crow creates and are as much a part of her scenes as the machines she depicts.

Bold, irreverent and rebellious are often used to describe Crow. But girly, charming and fearless would work just as well. The 27 year-old painter has become a fixture on the club scene, her celebrity status crossing over in recent years from the art world to the party circuit. Though quite young, she has several major shows under her belt already, having caught the attention of galleries and collectors while still in art school. Ever since her senior thesis, Crow has been creating super-sized paintings of daring places. Her tendency is to take on stereotypically male-dominated spaces like strip clubs, hunting lodges, oil rigs and butcher shops and make them her own. For *Rosson Crow: Myth of the American Motorcycle*, she delved into the world of biker bars. Addressing masculine territory is Crow's way of dealing with the consideration of gender in her world. Her very personalized style takes direct aim at its subjects, creating rich and layered scenes infused with theatrical expression and raw emotion. The elements within her compositions are often distorted, obscured and disorienting. The outcome is an evocative funhouse effect of floating neon and dark recesses. Though the end result is pulled from her imagination, it is an imagination informed by copious and meticulous research. In typical Crow style, the artist immersed herself in biker culture the year prior to the show. That level of understanding enables Crow to animate the space she paints, giving the viewer insight into the distinct personality of the place and time she captures. It also allows her drippy, dark and smoldering aesthetics to melt seamlessly with the subject matter. As Ludwig describes, for

this show "Rosson hung out in biker bars, leather stores and repair shops and gathered an extensive library of motorcycle related books, Easy Rider Magazines and memorabilia. Her paintings were created from these multiple points of view and sources, as well as a healthy shot of personal fantasy—resulting in dense and dynamic canvasses. Partially dissolved neon signs hang in a vintage motorcycle shop, a biker funeral takes place in the legendary—but now defunct—punk club CBGB, and a collection of road signs from a mythical cross-country ride to Sturgis find themselves in one single location."

Just as Crow's paintings tell a story, so do the customized motorcycles displayed with her work. Platow remarks, "One of the original hacker cultures, the world of customized bikes is drenched in a romantic sense of individuality. The motorcycles in the show—all Indians and Harley Davidsons—are loaded with character, each one having been thoughtfully revamped to reflect the personalities of their respective owners." Individually they tell autobiographical tales of the relationship between rider and machine, but together they reveal the gender-bending mashup that is also evident in Crow's work. Equal parts muscle and glamour, these bikes are built for performance. Precious in the eyes of their owners, they are workhorses with killer paint jobs. Fussed over and preened, each has taken on a swagger of its own. This tailoring reveals the bikers' passion and the gusto with which they approach biking culture. Though never seen in her paintings, these devotees lend character to the environments Crow creates and are as much a part of her scenes as the machines that star on her stage.