



## Myth of the American Motorcycle

*CAC revs up Rosson Crow's new motorcycle-themed exhibition*

**MATT MORRIS** // NOV 9, 2010

With the opening last week of its newest exhibition, *Rosson Crow: Myth of the American Motorcycle*, the Contemporary Art Center (CAC) is drawing regional attention to another rising star who produces art-history savvy works with heavy doses of A-list glamour and the red-and-black color schemes of revolutions and rebels.

This seems like an ongoing train of thought at the CAC — it encompasses Carlos Amorales and Shepard Fairey before Crow, and foreshadows the survey of Keith Haring coming next year. Crow's series of brand-new paintings considers the imagery

and culture of motorcyclists in America. Her work is paired with a set of actual bikes, each with personalized and highly detailed custom-paint jobs.

Crow is a friendly, fashionable and funny twentysomething who grew up in Dallas and now is based in Brooklyn. She has a BFA from the School of Visual Arts (SVA) in New York and also has an MFA from Yale. Demand for her enormous paintings has skyrocketed and she has shown in most of the world's art hot spots, including Los Angeles, London, Paris and in New York at the legendary gallery and downtown party spot Deitch Projects.

Crow's paintings usually present fish-eyed vignettes of empty rooms — like exclusive clubs, art collectors' homes or Keith Haring's densely patterned art-meets-commerce Pop Shop — with lusty splashes and gashes of paint criss-crossing across their surfaces. While at SVA, she studied with Marilyn Minter, whose paintings of glittering fashion models recently graced the same exhibition space at the CAC. The two exhibitions possess comparable bravado and a joyous embrace of big paintings and big statements.

Associate Curator Justine Ludwig invited Crow to create a body of work in response to the idea of traditionally male-oriented motorcycle culture. Seven of Crow's soaring paintings fill the room and down the center of the gallery are a set of motorbikes that have all been custom-painted based on design by Jim "Dauber" Farr, a local car detailer and nationally celebrated member of the Drag Racing Hall of Fame. Each bike is an expression of its owner, but they are all bejeweled machines, odd and mesmerizing.

Crow's paintings depict several biker bars, painted with such action that they seem to flash and convulse or to threaten to cave in. Alongside them are depictions of a leather shop, an abstracted bike junkyard and "The Boneyard," a pileup of neon sign imagery that condenses into an acid-hued backdrop for road trips and dream sequences.

The best painting in the show is "Standard Station at Night," a send-up to similarly isolated gas stations in paintings by Edward Hopper and Ed Ruscha. The outpost is luminous and washy, with night suggested by glossy, sticky black paint that resembled crude oil.



“I didn’t want to do *just bars*,” Crow explained in an interview. “I wanted to do environments that reflected biker culture. The gas station and the old neon sign wreckage reflect the idea of the open highway and freedom, but also abandonment and being alone — being the lone rider.”

That sense of solitude runs through the entire suite of unpopulated scenes.

“I’m interested in the idea of the subculture, who and what it includes and who and what it excludes,” the artist explained.

This makes sense with the way she paints. An almost believable room is broken apart visually when splattered with hot pink, rosy red and milky cream.

She added, “I like the idea of creating a space that has depth and acts like something that the viewer can enter, but then I like having elements that block out the viewer. So there’s invitation and denial at the same time.”

Frequently withdrawing access almost as quickly as permitting it into her daydreams of dives, her use of materials follows her train of thought. And even as a celebrated insider among the art world’s elite, Crow’s paintings always remark on being left out and not being accepted.

“I’m not a biker, but it seems to me that biker culture is nostalgic. Even these bikes are new, but they’re very much modeled after old Harleys,” she said as she gestured to the vehicle parked in front of her work. “Harley Davidson definitely knows that bikers want a retro look. A lot of their politics — along with America in general — is all going back to nostalgia and the way America was when it was good and we had our

freedoms. But I'm not sure that America ever existed. The biker is a carryover of the cowboy mythology and how that all fits into American history."

Raphaela Platow, CAC's director and chief curator, sees this project as an opportunity to compare and blend different art forms.

"This show really creates a dialogue between two very different forms of expression," she says. "It is important to me that we constantly investigate how art is divided by categories that we establish. There's high art and there's all these subcultures that find their own ways of expressing, but we've looked at them in very separate ways. I love bringing them together to see what happens."

*Myth of the American Motorcycle* mostly reads as a solo exhibition accessorized by actual bikes. I wonder if the two artists and their differing art forms might not have been more clearly placed in dialogue had the show been billed as a two-person project. There is as much to be wondered about and said for the bikes as for Crow's paintings.

If the exhibition allowed for both the motorcycles and the paintings to be presented equally, the CAC could be seen as more welcoming and accessible to the disparate subcultures that this exhibition already seems to be bringing together.

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**ROSSON CROW: MYTH OF THE AMERICAN MOTORCYCLE is on display at the Contemporary Arts Center downtown through April 3.**

**<https://www.citybeat.com/arts-culture/visual-arts/article/13013099/myth-of-the-american-motorcycle-review>**