



Drive

Curated by Joshua Fischer and
Katia Zavistovski

John M. O'Quinn Gallery

November 21, 2014 – January 10, 2015

CURATORIAL STATEMENT

Freeways and cars have a ubiquitous presence in cities like Los Angeles, Dallas, and especially Houston, where the Katy Freeway, Highways 59 and 45, Interstate 610, and Beltway 8 circumscribe the city's inner and outer loops, bisect its downtown, and stretch over its neighborhoods and bayous. The freeway's monolithic pillars and sweeping curves have become as natural to these urban landscapes as mountains or rivers, and for the artists included in the group exhibition *Drive*, they are sites for aesthetic inspiration, dystopian antagonism, or more neutrally a platform or stage. *Drive* brings together an eclectic mix of artists who work across media from sculpture to photography, painting, drawing, and performance to explore how freeways and car culture shape human experience and perceptions of the city.

Artist Bryan Gardner's proposal to build a recreation of downtown Houston for Lawndale Art Center was the catalyst for *Drive*, and his large-scale sculpture titled *Cells* stands as the physical and conceptual centerpiece of the exhibition. Gardner's whimsical work loosely portrays Houston's skyline, surrounding freeway, and cars to reflect on his experiences commuting. In his sculpture, Gardner captures the imaginary residents of downtown's skyscrapers and the everyday occurrence of sitting in traffic that has become as natural for many people as sleeping, eating, or breathing. While stuck in traffic, cars—often touted as symbols of freedom and progress—can feel like personal "cells" or prisons. When smoothly flowing along the freeway's arteries, they are elemental pieces of the larger organism of the city.

Mike Osborne and Jesse Morgan Barnett photograph the freeway and related scenery with a more ominous edge than Gardner. Osborne's four photographs show a flooded Toyota Corolla in San Antonio, an oil refinery, an eerily lit overpass under construction, and a fragment of a Shell gas station sign, simultaneously evoking a crumbling, sci-fi dystopia and the power of the petrochemical industry. Morgan Barnett presents the tiremarks, scuffs, and chipped concrete left by a car's collision with freeway medians. In his photographs, the marks are transformed into calligraphic traces of accident and destruction. Claudia Casbarian also isolates elements of the freeway in her cut photographs that focus on the lyrical geometry of bridges, overpasses, and the rhythm of roadside signage.

Other works in the exhibition less directly depict the freeway itself, but allude to perceptual qualities associated with driving. Drawings by artist Cody Ledvina are composed of tight and dynamic networks of superimposed lines suggestive of mazes full of physical and psychological

unease. Susie Rosmarin's optically dazzling abstract paintings explore the perceptual qualities of visual repetition and seriality, realities basic to the life of any commuter. *Rhythmicity*, a looping ambient soundtrack by Michael Galbreth, records the steady flow of cars passing over the Pierce Elevated on the west side of downtown Houston, filling the gallery space with the familiar sound of one car after another (and on and on). As Galbreth explains, "I consider it a percussion piece with the rhythm (music) created by the action of the cars. In other words, the instruments are the cars and the road (the city), and the "score" is determined by those people's lives." Later projects by The Art Guys use the freeway as a site for performance-based work, such as *Driving Two Cars from Houston to Galveston (V.II)*, in which the distance between the two gulf cities is laboriously delineated and the purported ease of freeway driving is absurdly used against itself.

In contrast to these direct actions, other artists in *Drive* take a macro view by drawing and mapping urban systems, of which the freeway is an integral part. Lars Lerup's drawings, from his book *One Million Acres & No Zoning*, show with a frenzy of colored pencil hash marks a unique perspective on the city of Houston: how it is organized (or disorganized) spatially, its relationship to its natural system of bayous, and the fundamental forces of economic activity and development that shape it. Working with thread and linen, Heather Johnson also confronts urban planning through the drawn line. For her large-scale, five-panel piece titled *Somewhere Between Here and Anywhere*, Johnson has painstakingly hand-embroidered blueprints from a plan to tear down a freeway on-off ramp in San Francisco. The immensity of the freeway's footprint is the subject of Anthony Álvarez's humorous Google maps project where Houston's Beltway 8 loop is laid over other cities throughout the United States and abroad. A poster by Thumb design (Luke Bulman and Jessica Young) commissioned by Rice School of Architecture also takes a comparative look at Houston's freeway system to the "ring roads" of other large cities, transforming the normally negative symbol of urban sprawl into overlapping colors akin to geometric flower petals.

A section featuring visual culture and ephemera, as well as examples of films, videos, and other documents, provides a historical glance at the freeway and driving. Early films like General Motors' *To New Horizons* (1940) and Hilary Harris' upbeat *Highway* (1958) show the initial excitement and optimism surrounding the promise of the open road. Flash Gordon Parks illustrates how deeply the subject is rooted in our popular consciousness

as he culls together a selection of freeway and driving related songs in his "Switching Four Lanes" mix. Other works in this section of the exhibition call attention to the fraught socio-political effects of urban development. Artist Charisse Weston presents historical documents and poetic text addressing how the building of highway 288, I-45, and I-10 displaced people and altered various neighborhoods. A slideshow of the City of Houston's "Pothole of the Week" images document the contemporary reality of our infrastructure and its costly maintenance.

The exhibition title, *Drive*, hints at the incredible ambition needed to build such a vast network of concrete and asphalt, but it also hopes to show the "drive" needed by artists to contend with this impossibly massive system. Freeways and driving are so engrained in our everyday lives that they are either accepted as natural fact or too commonplace to reflect upon. The works on view in *Drive* offer the opportunity to slow down and take a deeper look.

CHECKLIST

1. The Art Guys

Study for Infinite Loop: The Art Guys Funeral Procession (from "101 of the World's Greatest Sculpture Proposals"), 2012

Collage, graphite on paper
22" x 30"

Driving Two Cars From Houston to Galveston (V.II) (from "101 of the World's Greatest Sculpture Proposals"), 1994

Collage, graphite, colored pencil on paper
22 x 30"

2. Jesse Morgan Barnett

Such Customary Writings 2F, 2014
Ultrachrome inkjet photographs
26" x 255"

Such Customary Writings 4F, 2014
Ultrachrome inkjet photographs
26" x 255"

Such Customary Writings 3M, 2014
Ultrachrome inkjet photographs
26" x 146"

A Nearly Perfect and Absorbent Night VII, 2013
Ultrachrome inkjet photograph
28" x 42"

3. Claudia Casbarian

Left Lane Ends, 2014
Inkjet prints mounted on foam core
13" x 19" each

4. Michael Galbreth

Rhythmicity, 1985
Audio

5. Bryan Gardner

Cells, 2014
Acrylic on wood
Dimensions variable

6. Heather Johnson

Somewhere Between Here and Anywhere, 2005
Thread on linen
Approx. 60" x 84"

7. Cody Ledvina

Richard Tuttle I, II, and III, 2014
Ink on paper
11" x 14" each

Blue Maze Painting, 2013
Paper, cardstock, and acrylic paint on canvas
35" x 35"

8. Lars Lerup

Drawings from One Million Acres & No Zoning, 2011
Ink and colored pencil
11" x 8 ½" each

9. Mike Osborne

Shell, Houston, 2014
Archival inkjet print
38 ½" x 48"

LyondellBasell, Houston, 2014
Archival inkjet print
38 ½" x 48"

Flooded Corolla, San Antonio, 2013
Archival inkjet print
48" x 38 ½"

High Five, Dallas, Texas, 2006
Archival inkjet print
38 ½" x 48"

10. Flash Gordon Parks

Switching Four Lanes
All vinyl music mix

11. Susie Rosmarin

Waffle, 2014
Inkjet on canvas
48" x 48"
Courtesy of Texas Gallery

Shift, 2014
Inkjet on canvas
48" x 48"
Courtesy of Texas Gallery

12. Charisse Weston

Exit Only: Up over thru beneath, 2014
Mixed media
Dimensions variable

VISUAL CULTURE and EPHEMERA:

Compiled by Joshua Fischer

A Brief and Incomplete History of Freeway Art, 2014

13. Thumb (Luke Bulman and Jessica Young)

Ring Roads of the World, 2009

Commissioned by Rice School of Architecture

21 ½" x 31 ½"

14. Anthony Álvares

Beltway 8 in Houston laid over other cities, 2014

Series of five Inkjet prints

Dimensions variable

15. Selection of Postcards

Howdy from Houston,

Astrocard Company, 1967

Spaghetti Bowl,

Astrocard Company, 1967

Greetings from Houston,

Astrocard Company, 1967

Gulf Freeway, Houston, Texas,

Seawall Specialty Co.,

Houston, Texas, n.d.

16. Insulated beverage holder from

The Grand Parkway Opening Ceremony,

August 31, 1994

Courtesy Erik Slotboom,

www.houstonfreeways.com

17. Selection of Videos (left to right)

Excerpts from *To New Horizons*, 1940

Documents the "Futurama" exhibition in General Motors' "Highways and Horizons" pavilion at the 1939 World's Fair

Producer: Handy (Jam) Organization

Commissioned by General Motors Corporation

Looped excerpt from *FREEWAYPHOBIA or The Art of Driving the Super Highway, Part 1*, 1965

Directed by Les Clark

Produced by Walt Disney, Ken Peterson

Animated by Cliff Nordberg, Bob

Youngquist, Bob McCrea, Jack Boyd

Written by William R. Bosché

Hilary Harris

Highway, 1958

16mm film transferred to DVD

Excerpts from *Reyner Banham Loves Los Angeles*, 1972

BBC Films Production

I-610 Houston, TX

By YouTube user ScrewUPClickV2

Uploaded February 1, 2010

Music: "Take It (Dani Koenig Remix)" by Tom Novy

Images collected from The Pothole of the Week

A project of The City of Houston "to highlight the great work that our employees perform on a day to day basis," according to the city's website.

You can submit a "Pothole of the Week" via 3-1-1 service line / 713.837.0311 or <http://hfdapp.houstontx.gov/311/index.php>.

Found advertisement for

SKYFLATABLES Fly Guy

SKYFLATABLES TM Inflate Co., Inc

Uploaded to YouTube March 7, 2011

BIOS

Joshua Fischer works as the assistant curator at Rice University Art Gallery, where he's curated installations by Yusuke Asai, Andrea Dezsö, Ana Serrano, and Yasuaki Onishi. He contributes to *Glasstire*, an online art magazine. He graduated from Trinity University where he double majored in Studio Art and Sociology. He then received an M.A. in American Studies from the University of Texas at Austin.

Katia Zavistovski is an independent curator and a PhD candidate in art history at Rice University. She was the William A Camfield Curatorial Fellow at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston from 2012-2013, and the Rice Curatorial Fellow at the Menil Collection from 2011-2012. In 2012, she curated the exhibition *Staring at the Wall: The Art of Boredom* for the Lawndale Art Center, and she co-curated *Raid the Archive: The de Menil Years at Rice* at the Rice Media Center. Katia received her MA in art history at Williams College. During her time at Williams, she had a curatorial fellowship at MASS MoCA, where she organized the exhibition *InVisible: Art at the Edge of Perception* (2010).

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LAWNDALE ART CENTER

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Gallery Hours
Monday–Friday 10–5
Saturday 12–5
Closed Sunday

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