

VENUS

MANHATTAN

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Speed Freaks

Artists and fashion designers are completely obsessed with cars. W goes on a cultural joyride.



For its first ever runway show, held on a massive pier off New York's West Side Highway this past fall, Opening Ceremony rolled out a procession of Bentleys, Ferraris, and other gleaming beauties. As Justin Bieber and Rihanna Instagrammed from the front row, a gaggle of models swung their legs out of the vehicles and struck poses. Va-va-vroom. Had some music-video director dreamed this up? Or a luxury-car dealer? Either way, it played as a perfectly choreographed traffic jam of celebrity, fashion, and car culture.

And the duo behind Opening Ceremony aren't the only fashion-world auto-philes. Givenchy's Riccardo Tisci parked a smoking pile of steel and glass in the middle of his spring 2014 runway in Paris. A visceral embodiment of his collection's mash-up of Japanese and African references, the scene doubled as installation art. "It's savage!" the actress Noomi Rapace said. "You can feel the blood taste in your mouth."

Artists too have long been seduced by cars, and that love affair has only accelerated of late. For his current survey, at the New Museum in New York, Chris Burden restored a 1974 Porsche. Suspended in balance opposite a fallen meteorite, the exquisite object made by Germans four decades back seems as awe-inspiring as the one produced by the cosmos light years ago.

But such exotic imports don't hold much allure for the Tennessee-raised artist Virginia Overton, who installed a sculpture of a pickup truck in a parking garage at the High Line earlier this year. Now she has a Dodge Ram bound for Miami Beach, where, just in time for Art Basel, it will meet up with a fleet of art cars that includes Richard Prince's muscular Dodge Challenger, Damien Hirst's spotted Mini Cooper, and the other four-wheel sculptures featured in "Piston Head," a group show curated by the collector-turned-gallerist Adam Lindemann. The exhibition runs from December 3 through December 8 in the soaring Herzog & de Meuron-designed parking garage on Lincoln Road, where Richard Phillips will be showing his first sculpture in more than 18 years: a soot black Dodge Charger that looks as if it has jumped, Dukes of Hazzard-style, through one too many fires.

So what's fueling this fascination with all things automotive? A taste for danger? An epidemic of wanderlust? Perhaps it's more than that. The art critic Dave Hickey once said that everything he knew about desire, style, and image first came to him "couched in the lingua franca of cars." Among the creative types now hitting the road in search of such enlightenment is fashion photographer Craig McDean. Next year he launches Mph, a stylish semi-annual car magazine. Gearheads, be warned: Artists in the rearview mirror may be closer than they appear.

