

Art

How Artists Have Paid Homage to the Bicycle

People throughout history, including artists like Robert Rauschenberg and Ebecho Muslimova, have celebrated the bike's potential for freedom.



by Valentina Di Liscia
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Nina Chanel Abney, "Ridin Solo" (2020), acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 48 x 48 x 1 3/4 inches (courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery and Susan Inglett Gallery, NYC)

“Modernism — and modern art — would never exist without bicycles.” That’s the claim made by a new group exhibition at Manhattan’s Susan Inglett Gallery, **Re: *Bicycling***, curated by David Platzker in collaboration with Alex Ostroy, founder of the eponymous NYC cycling label. Through more than 20 works spanning more than a century, from the Industrial Revolution to the present, the show pays homage to the wondrous two-wheeled vehicle and its awesome potential for autonomy and freedom.



Ricardo Brey, "Joy" (2018), mixed media, 14 1/8 x 25 1/8 x 31 3/8 inches (courtesy Alexander Gray Associates, New York. © Ricardo Brey/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York)

When we think of bicycles and modern art, one of the first works to come to mind is Marcel Duchamp's "Bicycle Wheel" (1913) the earliest of the conceptual artist's provocative *Readymades*.

"It's the hallmark image. When it comes to Modernism, you can't separate the fact that revolutions were on bicycles. Almost every one of the Surrealists, Dadaists, and Futurists did something with a bike," Platzker told Hyperallergic. "They took it to heart that this was a means of self-powered locomotion."



Claes Oldenburg and Coosje Van Bruggen, "Bicyclette Ensevelie, Fabrication Model of Pedal and Arm" (1988), fabrication model of pedal and arm, polyurethane foam, wood, cardboard, hardware, pencil, resin, latex paint (courtesy of Paula Cooper Gallery and Susan Inglett Gallery, NYC)

But the show expands the visual repertoire of cycling far beyond this formative reference. Contemporary works like Sarah Sze's "Lifted" (2020), a silver plated chain and bike lock hooked to a bench at the gallery, tap into the surprising elegance of a rarely cited and perhaps less glamorous signifier of the bicycle. A similar dynamic is at play in Claes Oldenburg and Coosje Van Bruggen's "Bicyclette Ensevelie, Fabrication Model of Pedal and Arm" (1988), a wooden construction that puts the humble pedal on a pedestal. And in her painting "Ridin Solo" (2020), Nina Chanel Abney extolls the joys of cruising alone, portraying a lone biker shirtless and beaming, in her distinctive graphic style.



Ebecho Muslimova, "Fatebe Dirt Unicycle" (2021), Sumi ink on paper, 9 x 12 inches (courtesy Magenta Plains and Susan Inglett Gallery, NYC)

One particularly interesting pairing, says Platzker, is Rodney Graham's kinetic sculpture "Mini Psycho-Opticon" (2008) and Ebecho Muslimova's "Fatebe Dirt Unicycle" (2021), a Sumi ink on paper drawing characteristic of the artist's refreshingly uninhibited depictions of her cartoon alter ego.

"It's about as close to a before, during, and after trippy encapsulation of what it's like to ride a bike on LSD on a warm early summer day," Platzker says.



Rodney Graham, "Mini Psycho-Opticon" (2008), kinetic sculpture, 90 1/2 x 78 3/4 x 86 3/4 inches, installation view at Galerie Rüdiger Schöttle, Munich (courtesy 303 Gallery and Susan Inglett Gallery, NYC)

Every Wednesday during the run of the show, Platzker is leading group bike rides from Susan Inglett Gallery down the path of the Hudson River Waterfront Greenway, stopping at the Little Red Lighthouse at the base of the George Washington Bridge and returning to the gallery for refreshments. The rides are slow and easy, "tight fitting lycra outfits not required," Platzker promises.

The bike rides leave from Susan Inglett Gallery (522 W 24th Street, Manhattan) every Wednesday at 10:30am. Emailed RSVPs are required to info@inglettgallery.com.



Gabriel Orozco, "Standing Bicycle" (2002), Fuji crystal chromogenic archive C print, 16x20 inches. (courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery and Susan Inglett Gallery, NYC)

Both the exhibition and the concurrent group rides embrace what Platzker calls “the camaraderie of motion.”

“The culture of cycling has changed so much over the last few years, from being white middle-aged guys in lycra to the breadth of people in New York City. It’s been amazing to watch, and you can time it exactly with the inception of city bikes and the expansion of bike lanes,” he said. “It encourages people to come out in numbers.”