

Andrew Bush: Drive, He Said

By Peggy Roalf Monday, June 22, 2009

As two out of America's Big Three automakers continue their downward spiral, our car culture shows little sign of taking a reality check. While many home buyers are seizing on real estate foreclosures and flipping to a more upscale lifestyle, car buyers are also taking advantage of overcrowded dealership lots for bargains on gas guzzling SUVs.

If we are what we drive, and bigger remains better for many, then a visual reality check loaded with social insight can be had in a photography exhibit closing this weekend at Yossi Milo Gallery, in Chelsea.



Two by Andrew Bush, from Vector Portraits, at Yossi Milo Gallery. Copyright the artist, courtesy the gallery.

Andrew Bush: *Vector Portraits* is an exploration of what it is to be behind the wheel. Done over a roughly 20-year period starting in 1989 on the streets of Los Angeles, these photographs reveal telling and often-painful truths. Made using a 4 x 5 camera and strobe light installed in the passenger seat of his car, Bush's large color prints depict his subjects at pretty much the same distance and scale.

As well as revealing the trance-like state that many road warriors succumb to, the finely recorded details here tell much about the choices these drivers have made. Pride of ownership and its opposite are on full view, with the personal style of the drivers a close match to their rides. Long, detailed captions contribute a tongue-in-cheek narrative to the images, which challenge ideas about privacy and what constitutes private versus public space.

Here the American muscle car is the star, with Camaro, Impala, Le Mans and Trans Am leading the pack. Foreign makes, including the occasional Porsche and even a VW Beetle unwittingly become pariahs of design quality and good maintenance when compared to so many other cars that appear to have survived natural disasters and other abuses.

In *Woman gliding southeast at 64 mph on U.S. Route 101 near Santa Barbara at 4:39 p.m. sometime in March 1990*, a quintessentially California blond zooms along in a perfectly maintained Japanese-made sub-compact, her expression one of questioning contemplation. *Man traveling southeast on Route 101 at approximately 71 mph somewhere around Camarillo, California, on a summer evening in 1994* depicts macho-ness in everything from the burly man's pork chop sideburns and tattoo to his buffed Camaro.

The high definition of the images tells much, yet sometimes blurs reality, as in *Woman going about her business at 62 mph on southbound Interstate 5 near San Diego at 9:38 a.m. on a Tuesday in February 1992*. Without reading the caption, viewers might dispute the sex of the driver.

So much detail occasionally puts the subject in a kind light, as in *Woman heading West at 71 mph...in January 1991*. She glances distractedly at the camera, her expression conveying an intense sense of mission. For the most part, though, the opposite is true. Some drivers are oblivious. Some appear angered by the intrusion on their joy ride. Some are running low on everything, including a place to live. Just about as bad as it gets plays out in *Man heading west at 78 mph...in 1990*. Lack of sleep and nourishment mark the wan face of a young man with uncombed long hair, driving a battered Mustang that looks as if it had just careened off a guardrail.

Andrew Bush: Vector Portraits, through Saturday, June 27 at [Yossi Milo Gallery](#). 525 West 25th Street, New York, NY. 212-414-0370. Tuesday-Saturday 10 am-6 pm. The monograph, *Andrew Bush: Drive* (Yale University Press 2009) is available at the gallery. The exhibition was organized in conjunction with [Julie Saul Gallery](#).
