

Custom Made

Jas Hugonnet, Curator/Exhibition Manager

Custom Made was inspired by the enthusiasm of a colleague who has slowly customised a Harley Davidson Deuce since 2002. This exhibition of five customised bikes at Craft ACT: Craft and Design Centre highlights the role of design and crafting in customising large objects while at the same time playing with the perception of the gallery as a showroom. The five bikes on display are all exquisite customised Harley Davidson's, three Softails, a Deuce and a V Rod. The Deuce travelled down from Sydney while the V Rod and Softails reside in Canberra. One often views these inspiring machines in the street with awe and it was this exact reaction that suggested that these head turners were the perfect forms to be shown in a space dedicated to the admiration of objects.

As usual the planning for this exhibition started about a year ago and at the start I knew if all else failed I would at the very least have the bike of my close friend Jonathan Desprez available for the exhibition, as it was his passion in talking about the details of customising his bike in the shed that inspired this exhibition. Back in Canberra I made some calls in an attempt to get in touch with local riders and builders of these magnificent machines. Then while walking I spotted a superb customised Harley Davidson V Rod outside City Custom Racing the workshop of Geoff Noakes that specialises in exhaust systems. I spoke to Geoff who agreed to be part of the show and he put me in contact with Corey Allen who heads up the Chopperworks workshop in Fyshwick. Corey was well connected in terms of customising and was able to bring his own Harley Davidson Softail plus the Softail's of Ralph Smith and Aaron Meneghel into the exhibition. The event and process was new for all involved, Craft ACT hadn't shown this scale of work before and the riders had never placed their bikes in an art gallery for viewing.

As the show continues, it is becoming evident that challenging the context of an art gallery and people's perception of what is shown in a gallery brings a great element of surprise and wonderment to audiences. It has also been an excellent



opportunity to develop new audiences. Since the exhibition opened we have had a steady flow of new faces in the gallery who have been admiring the fine lines and amazing details of these bikes. It has been rewarding to focus on a form of crafting that is going on in the community and bring it into our artistic program, while at the same time letting people know we have this dedicated space to visit and reflect on objects and creative endeavours.

Customising involves modifying an original and in the case of these bikes they were all original Harley Davidson's. To varying degrees they have been stripped back to the structural frame with each component replaced with either a hand formed part as is the case with the metal work, or a workshopped part from a specialist supplier. They are transformed in terms of suspension, brakes, exhaust, forks, hand grips, sheet metal, seats, wheels, paint, rear wide tyre kits, indicators, lights, mirrors and in some cases the motor has been replaced with a higher capacity worked engine. The finishing touches like the paint work and



polishing really makes the final ensembles swing. These objects are built for speed and the lines, colour and components embody the art of movement.

It must be pretty special having and riding something that is this unique. I imagine that in customising, the desire to have a one-off original that looks this good is a driving force. There is also something deeper that makes these objects so cool; its the admiration factor and how one can marvel at the skill involved in producing something where the parts seem to effortlessly fit together to produce a functional machine that personifies travel through space.



Images: (front) *Custom Made* exhibition installation (front to back) **Jonathan Desprez**, (Black Blue), Customised Harley Davidson Deuce (detail), Worked 2002-2009; **Ralph Smith**, Courtesy of Chopperworks, (Teal), Customised Harley Davidson Softail, Worked 2008; **Geoff Noakes**, Workshopped at Chopperworks, (Deep Red), Customised Harley Davidson V Rod, Worked 2007-2009; **Corey Allen**, Courtesy of Chopperworks, (Candy Blue), Customised Harley Davidson Softail, Worked 2007-2009; **Aaron Meneghel**, Courtesy of Chopperworks, (Charcoal/Candy red), Customised Harley Davidson Softail, Worked 2005-2009. (this page top left and bottom left) **Jonathan Desprez**, Customised Harley Davidson Deuce (detail); **Ralph Smith**, Customised Harley Davidson Softail (detail). (this page bottom right): *Custom Made* exhibition installation (front to back): **Aaron Meneghel**; **Corey Allen**; **Geoff Noakes**; **Ralph Smith**; **Jonathan Desprez**. All Photos: Creative Image Photography.



Custom Made
2 July - 8 August 2009

Level 1 North Building, 180 London Circuit, Canberra ACT. PO Box 992, Civic Square, ACT, 2608, Tel (02) 6262 9333 www.craftact.org.au GALLERY HOURS Tues - Fri 10am - 4pm and Sat 12noon - 4pm



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