



SALON 94

HYPERALLERGIC

ART

Reviving the Iconic Women of *Lowrider* Magazine

Liz Cohen, an artist and award-winning lowrider mechanic, creates vibrant tributes to the women who have modeled for *Lowrider* since 1977.

Sarah Rose Sharp December 12, 2018

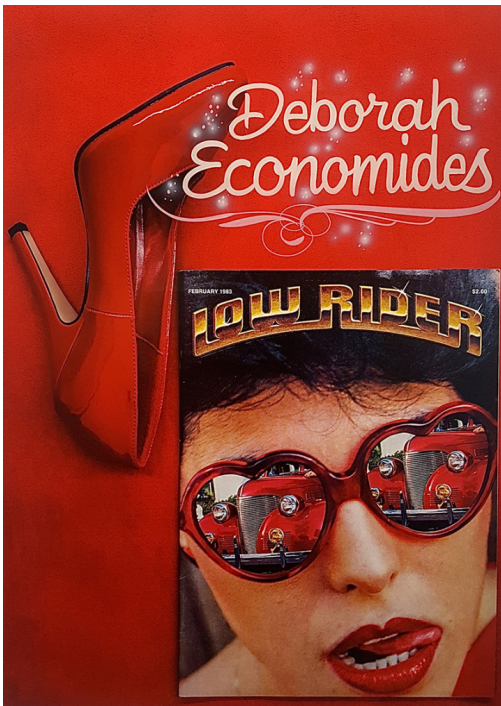


Liz Cohen, "Gloria Garcetti" (2018)
(image courtesy the artist)

DETROIT — The inaugural issue of *Lowrider* magazine, published in 1977, features Gloria Garcetti on the cover. She is wearing an embroidered London Fog coat with her back to the viewer (she was pregnant at the time), and she shoots the camera a knowing look over her shoulder.

“She [Garcetti] embodies the radical hope and defiance that have characterized lowriding and this magazine for decades,” said photographer and performance artist [Liz Cohen](#) in an email interview with Hyperallergic. Cohen’s most recent body of work, [Stories Better Told by Others](#), focuses specifically on the women of *Lowrider*, and mourning the 2015 editorial

decision to no longer feature models on their covers. For Cohen, this represents a profound loss.



Liz Cohen, "Deborah Economides" (2018), detail view, part of *Stořieš Betřer Třid* by Ořheřš at David Klein Gallery (all images by the author, except where noted)

"I remain fascinated by the gals on many of the covers. I see them as important and defining participants," said Cohen. "I am learning their stories and would rather not relegate them to the sidelines."

This is not the first time Cohen has immersed herself artistically in lowrider culture, which she identifies as a crucial part of her cultural identity, growing up in Phoenix, Arizona. Over the course of eight years, for a project titled *Trabantamino*, Cohen custom-converted an East German Trabant into an El Camino, complete with hydraulic lifts, in the Pachuco Chicano tradition. Simultaneously, Cohen transformed her post-pregnancy body into that of a bikini model, eventually creating a series of photographs and videos that showcase both of her "body modification" feats in tandem.

Much of the work for *Trabantamino* was completed in 2008, including the *Rio Grande*, *Bodywork*, *Tools*, and *Zwickau Routine* series. But arguably, Cohen's greatest triumph came in 2013, when her Trabantamino won the top prize at the annual lowrider competition in Espanola, New Mexico.



"Sexynine" (2008), part of an earlier series by Cohen featuring custom cars in garages

Even though her interest in lowrider culture has not waned after a decade of working on and off with the subject, Cohen felt inclined to step out of the frame for this body of work, and into the role of documentarian and archivist. Her object-portraits juxtapose classic *Lowrider* covers from her own collection with bikini model gear or car parts, all set against tactile suede backgrounds in bright custom car colors. Overlaying each of these compositions, Cohen

commissioned car detailer [Bugs Gonzalez](#) to marquee the name of each model in a stylized, custom airbrushed font. Cohen sometimes contrasts these lively visual assemblages with lithographs blanked of content, except for the graphic fields that represent the adjacent cover's framing. This visual device underscores Cohen's feelings about the erasure of these women from *Lowrider*.



Stories Better Told to Others,
installation view, "June 1991" (2018) (left) and
"Christina Robards" (2018) (right)

“When I look at the early covers, to me, there are big stories,” said Cohen. “The cover models have agency and are part of a rich cultural history.”

Cohen recently moved back to her home state of Arizona, and it seems her intention is to track down and photograph as many of the models as she can locate. Some artists might not have an appetite for sustained focus on a single vein, but Cohen seems to draw her philosophy about this work, unsurprisingly, from the car culture that inspires it.

“The wisest tinkerers say that a custom car is never done,” said Cohen. “I feel the same way about artworks.”

Stories Better Told by Others continues at David Klein Gallery (1520 Washington Boulevard, Detroit, Michigan) through December 22.