



The New York Times

ART IN REVIEW

Liz Cohen: ‘Trabantimino’

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Published: October 29, 2010

What do you get when you cross a Trabant, the “people’s car” of East Germany, with an all-American Chevrolet El Camino? The “Trabantimino,” a clunkily seductive, East-meets-West vehicle conceived and engineered by the Detroit-based artist Liz Cohen. This peculiar lowrider, with the Trabant’s sickly beige hue and the El Camino’s sleek frame, makes a snazzy showroom of Salon 94’s renovated [Bowery gallery](#).

The Trabantimino comes from a long line of cars-as-sculpture, one that includes Richard Prince’s muscle-car hoods, Gabriel Orozco’s narrowed Citroën D.S. and Damián Ortega’s deconstructed Volkswagen Beetle. Its politically hybrid background also brings to mind the appropriation of Western Pop art in the early 1960s [by East German artists](#).

But process, to a certain extent, separates the Trabantimino from other vehicular art objects. Ms. Cohen didn’t just fit together parts from two cars; she made them merge into a functioning whole, with a hydraulics system that extends the rear frame from Trabant to El Camino length. (She’ll be at the gallery this Saturday to give hourly demonstrations between 2 and 6 p.m.) And where other artists might have chosen to delegate the manual labor, she was intent on doing the bulk of it herself — with advice from six mechanics in three cities she credits in press materials.

The work took longer than she thought — eight years in all, during which time she photographed herself as a bikini-wearing car-show model. (Some of [those pictures](#), which relate more explicitly to her earlier explorations of gender, can be seen on request at the gallery’s other Lower East Side branch in Freeman Alley.) Ms. Cohen also made an elegant series of black-and-white photographs documenting a



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mechanic's tool kit — inspired partly by [Walker Evans's](#) “Beauty of the Common Tool” — which is exhibited on a wall near the car.

In [interviews](#), Ms. Cohen has spoken about her adventures with the Trabantimino as a sustained performance. Yet there's scant evidence of that at the gallery — no axle grease, no exhaust fumes, just the pristine chrome and enamel of the finished product. In August she told [The New York Times](#), “I need it to look like jewelry.” It does. **KAREN ROSENBERG**