



Huffy DHS E Special by Titan Studio

SURFACE TREATMENT

The Art of the Bicycle

Where: Galeria 409, 13th Street, Brownsville

When: Through April 22, 2017

hours: 12-6 pm Thursday, Friday and Saturday, and by appointment

Contact: (956) 455 3599.

Is it Art?

A fun exhibit that leaves viewers with questions

The Art of the Bicycle is a strange show. Although the theme suggests a range of exciting possibilities, that's not exactly what this current exhibit offers. Galeria 409 revives the spirit of the Society of Independent Artists' 1917 open show. A very uneven show, viewers are left with the thought: yes, it's interesting, definitely an unusual exhibit, but is it art?

Along with the paintings and prints, there are custom bikes, unaltered bikes, and those whose owners attempted to move them into the field of art with varying degrees of success. Another question is, did these makers go far enough to produce a successful piece of art? The owner's own Huffy bicycle sits out on the patio while another unaltered

bicycle *is* displayed. The old classic Mexican bike purchased in the mercado in central Mexico is irony; it was made by the Hercules Manufacturing Company in Nottingham, England. A few of the wall pieces deserve notice. Manuel Miranda's abstract painting, "La Bicla de Chilindrina", fondly remembers his childhood with rich and colorful strokes, while the painting, "Soledad" by Mister 3-D, depicts a tough, geometrically imagined bicycle in confinement.

Luis Hinojosa's two low-riders are impressively made custom bikes. But are they art or industrial design? When should we observe a distinction? Where's the line in the sand? His larger bike is resplendent with white trim against black wheels; polished steel twisted bars add panache. Among the bicycles directly taking on the challenge of art was Titan Studio's Border Fence inspired bike. Hanging from the ceiling, it is a Frankenbike with a central welded "fence" section. There is an "Untitled" green-tired piñata bike by Josue Ramirez, sporting colored piñata paper, and Eloy Rodriguez expresses the character of his classic Schwinn, "Heavy Duty", by firmly planting its rear tire in a sculpted prickly pear cactus.

"According to the new definition," explained Mark Clark, Galeria 409 owner and exhibit coordinator, "everything is art. We don't have to stretch it a bit. If a urinal can be a sculpture and change the course of Modern Art, then sure, bicycles are one of the highest forms of expression."

The urinal legend is well known throughout art history. In 1917 Marcel Duchamp submitted his "Fountain" (a store-bought urinal) to the Society of Independent Artists Exhibition. For the first time in the United States, subject to a membership fee of \$1 and \$5, anyone could show. The largest art exhibit ever assembled in the US hung works alphabetically so as not to favor the better-known artists, and must have been a mind-boggling event. Traditional works and amateur works hung randomly beside pieces of cutting-edge Cubism. The democratic open admission policy drew protests that it was "democracy run riot". Duchamp's act was to subvert the whole enterprise. Signed R. Mutt, his urinal was not hung only because it was considered indecent. How it changed the course of Modern Art was its coverage in an avant-grade magazine, *The Blind Man*, which read, "Whether Mr Mutt made the fountain with his own hands or not has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view - created a new thought for that object." These words reverberate in the

art field today. Duchamp later exhibited a bicycle wheel mounted on a wooden stool.

"It's basic transportation and great exercise," continued Clark about the bicycle, "and a way to get away from civilization." When asked if he ever felt that art was taking him for a ride, he responded, "Occasionally, yeah. It's all art, and it's all good." Well, perhaps.

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