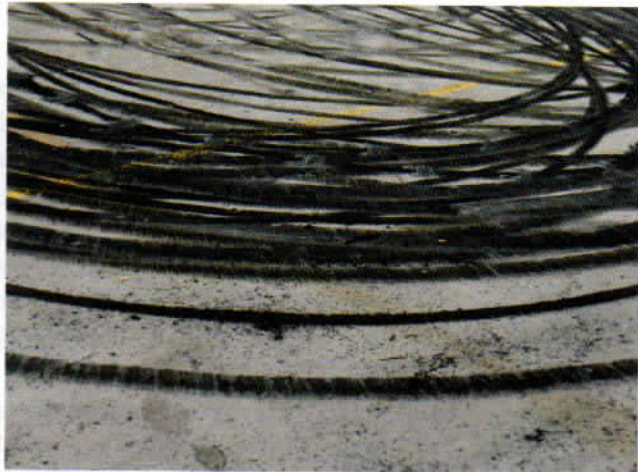




CARS



kindness of strangers and self-sufficiency. There is a jest here about the idea of a sexy hunk of metal, its opposite drawing the curiosity of rural communities.

Who is loving what about cars is purposefully ambiguous in Ruth Proctor's *Car Drawing 1 and 2*, created for Peckham's Bold Tendencies in summer 2013, and inspired by its setting on the roof of a car park. The works references showmanship and thrill seeking, enacting it even, as a drift car burns patterns on the asphalt. Proctor admits the immediately masculine connotations to 'any idea involving a car or stunt', but was also interested in ideas of aimless rebellion and transient records or notations. At first Proctor wanted to use a female driver, but changed her mind. She says, 'I think if I had done, the work could have been read as more of a statement rather than anything else.' She liked the idea that viewers would assume the piece had been made by a man, but admits 'identity can be a more interesting concept than specifically gender.'

Sylvie Fleury's *Skin Crime 3 (Givenchy 318)* is a crushed car, painted the shade of a nail polish released by the well-known fashion house. Female concerns undercut the macho here, which extends in Fleury's practice from machines to canonical art history – she has made Warhol-like boxes not of Brillo, but Slim-Fast. Her gilded car tyre fountains accompanied by 'relaxing music' and smoke are like flamboyant, soft-core Duchamp references. Rather than just a simple act of intellectual one-upmanship however, the formal bite and bon viveur in her work suggests that Fleury enjoys smashing things up just as much as anyone. Admitting she is not interested in flatly critiquing consumerism – we all know it's bad – rather Fleury is caught up on the workings: why a certain aesthetic grips us.

The kind of everyday fetishism most of us can admit to says something about our psychology, and about art, that is more intriguing than the various non-merits of

superficial consumerism. The fact that so many artists are happy to adorn cars is testament to the vehicles' potency. Richard Prince hits the nail on the head in terms of the sheer formal success of (vintage) car bodywork – nodding to macho visuals both high and low.

British photorealist John Salt made a career painting cars. He's from one of Britain's own motor cities, Birmingham (and has automobiles in the blood – his father and grandfather applied body paint), but was seduced by the States. 1960s paintings of car interiors swiped from catalogues segued into a strange oeuvre focused almost solely on impoverished semi-urban decay, exclusively in North America. His cars (not to mention mobile-homes, but that's another story) became clapped-out, mere symbols of a social milieu. As the obverse of the flawless object deeply connected with social 'success', these subjects might be seen to speak of the reality that the dream car belies instead.

Today car buying in the West is on the decline and as we fast forward to the future, driverless cars will almost certainly become a reality. The Prince school of engine-led glamour already has the nostalgic taint of fondly looking back, just as filmmaker George Lucas idealised his car centric adolescence in *American Graffiti* (1973). Cars as we have known them will change and die but their historic standing as social signifiers, capitalist commodities and masculine accoutrements is surely guaranteed. It is hard to imagine that any future machine will speak to our condition with the same particular strength as the humble car.

PICTURE CREDITS: Opening spread (clockwise): John Salt, *Pontiac with Tree Trunk*, 1973, oil on canvas, 107×152cm, courtesy of Mr and Mrs W. Jaeger, New York. Sylvie Fleury, *Gold Fountain PKW*, 2003, gold porcelain tyre, technical supplies for the installation of a fountain, lacquered wood pedestal 18×18×62cm. © Sylvie Fleury, courtesy Sprüth Magers Berlin London. Ruth Proctor, *Car Drawing*, 2013, performance and installation courtesy the artist and Hollybush Gardens. Richard Prince, *Untitled* at Frieze London, 2007. Daisy Delaney, *Liverpool Biennial Car*, 2010, courtesy Payne Shurvell.