

Bijutsu Techo Monthly Art Magazine
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Robert Stone "Out in the Beautiful World"
at Post Wilshire March 18 - April 15, 2000
by Charles LaBelle

Presenting a diverse array of five photographs, two diagrams, four objects, one magazine and two additional works ("Fitted Shirt" and "Low Volvo" (both 2000) that had to be custom-ordered, Robert Stone's first one-person exhibit was a witty and insightful display of both product design and socio-economic critique. Blending a reverence for minimalist aesthetics with an unabashed affection for skate-rats and car-freaks, the work performed a deft inversion of "high" and "low" cultural signifiers. Similar to artists such as Andrea Zittel and Jorge Pardo, Stone's work presents essentially functional objects and utilizes design as a strategy for bridging the art world and the real world. Yet, in contrast to Zittel, whose "life-style improvement objects" seek to maximize an individual's efficiency at daily tasks and involve a subservient constraint of the user, Stone's projects offer leisurely alternatives to work of any sort and provide speedy avenues of escape. Returning consistently to modes of transportation, from automobiles to motorcycles to skateboards, his work conflates physical and social mobility, suggesting that one's freedom is dependent on the nature of one's ride.

His "Strap-on Subwoofer for MBZ 230 SLK" (2000), for example, succinctly outlines the complex interrelation of identity, mobility, and the body. Essentially, a giant, mega-watt speaker system designed to fit onto the rear-end of a Mercedes, the work literally broadcasts one's difference to the outside world. Like the prosthetic phallus referenced in the work's title, the "Strap-on Subwoofer" functions transgressively, creating a disturbing hybrid out of a "normal" automobile. Taking a cue from Vito Acconci's "Conversion" works of the early 70s, Stone's cars, chairs, houses and clothing all undergo a sexualized modification. Significantly, his work relocates the site of our subjective self from the body to the things that contain and transport the body.