
RAY SANDER
MOTORWORKS 3 / PROTOTYPE

mfc-michèle didier is delighted to announce *MOTORWORKS 3 / PROTOTYPE*, an exhibition by Ray Sander.

For Ray Sander's first solo exhibition in Paris, mfc-michèle didier is pleased to collaborate with Dumont Gallery, Los Angeles.

MOTORWORKS 3 / PROTOTYPE is a two-parts exhibition taking place simultaneously In Paris and Los Angeles.

At mfc-michèle didier, the gallery will be occupied by semi-abstract objects using the language of automobile. In Los Angeles, Ray Sander will pour gallons of gasoline on the floor of the gallery, to activate *smell of gasoline* a work from 2013, reminiscent of the garage where he used to work.

The exhibition runs from February 16th - April 7th 2018.
The opening will take place in presence of the artist on Thursday, February 15, 2018 from 6pm - 9pm.



Garage Fauriel, work in progress, 2017

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In automobile jargon, the act of driving along the hard shoulder towards oncoming traffic is called *ghost driving*. It is a dangerous manoeuvre, and there are few metaphors which epitomize Ray Sander's work better: his sculptures and performances beg for a reevaluation of the «mechanical».

The artist's actions, brought together under the title *Motorworks*, don't strive to push cars over into the field of art but rather consider the automobile as a medium in itself. His take on the latter as an autonomous object allows Ray Sander to encapsulate the tangential offshoots of the Finish Fetish movement. Tom Wolfe aptly wrote the following about hot rods in 1965: "Eventually you have to reach the conclusion that these customized cars are art objects, at least if you use the standards applied to civilized society."

By transposing the object from one domain to another, a shift occurs in its functions. Performances without audiences and car bodies stripped bare question our ways of seeing and extend an invitation to experience speed. Because they were produced in a garage rather than a studio, Ray Sander's exhibitions make for distinctive spaces. Speed and movement are omnipresent yet suspended and contained in abstract forms. Here we see Sander rework the same shapes appropriated by West Coast artists from industrial contexts in an autonomous and far-reaching use of the automobile.

Frank Dumont L.A.

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MOTORWORKS

There would be no such thing as Los Angeles without cars, and Californian artists from Ruscha to Burden have naturally worked the car into their work. Nevertheless few have made more imaginative use of them than Ray Sander, for whom the automobile is raw material of choreographies oscillating between chaos and the imperceptible. Sander is also a painter, but car culture and its great array of references are at the center of his work.

At the age of 15, Ray Sander was stopped by police on the outskirts of Los Angeles for reckless driving at the wheel of a 1969 Camaro that he had restored himself. The car caught the officer's eye. and rather than send him to jail, the officer helped him to get hired as a mechanic at Anton Lang's garage. The Venice Beach institution was a little known to the world but familiar to car lovers, collectors of vintage edition vehicles and, more than anyone else, drag racers. Most of them were amateur mechanics and could often be found hanging out at the garage, engaged in passionate conversation with the mechanics.

Anton Lang has specialised in muscle cars, which he has been fixing up for the past thirty years.

He frequently modifies cars but his specialty is a subtle form of tuning, covering up his changes. In the mechanical ecosystem of the garage, Sander is a natural fit. Once the cars have been patched up and made secure for driving, they are painted in a uniform midnight blue and sent off to compete in demolition derbies. The reputation of Sander's cars stretches all the way to the East Coast. A customer of the garage once came across a driver who was looking for the exact shade of midnight blue that Sander uses just so he could claim his car came from Lang's garage.

But Ray Sander is not satisfied with being a mechanic. He draws inspiration from car battles to put on a hybrid performance, somewhere between a hot rod show and an art performance. The man who prodded Sander in this direction was none other than Denis Hopper, a long time customer of the garage and of Sander's.

Hopper was not a collector or particularly obsessed about cars, but he kept coming back to the automobile as a window into the American psyche.

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He often called upon Lang as a consultant for his films and television series. Sander talks little of his relationship with the actor, but it appears that Hopper took a liking to him and helped build a bridge between the world of automobiles and the world of art through many conversations together.

For years, Sander kept journals in which he documented his outings notes that piled up for years, unused.

Upon seeing these notes, Hopper encouraged the young mechanic to give them a new life. They became a sort of minimalist score to accompany his automobile choreographies.

In 2007, he staged a few car performances under the name *Motorworks*. Hopper, who was ill, could not attend the first of these clandestine shows, but in his place he sent his friend, Frank Dumont, an art collector who was about to open a gallery.

The first shows were an altered form of demolition derby. *Crash chess*, for example, pits 16 black cars against 16 white cars on a supermarket parking lot that has been transformed into a kind of basic chess board. Two chess players from a local club direct the vehicles remotely, from the rooftop of an overlooking mall. The game, which the players soon break down to its essentials, becomes all about destroying the other team's king. Playing with the rules does not bother Sander. In his view, bringing together two wildly different games is bound to produce friction. In a conversation with a chess player, he explained: "You think we're destroying your game, but you don't see how much the game has changed the destruction."

Sander's work is at once secretive and subversive. It can be difficult to draw a line between the world of clandestine races organized on the outskirts of town and the polished world of contemporary art. In 2009, two Los Angeles car collectors who had been invited by Frank Dumont to attend a show were arrested when police broke up a performance called "Requiem for a Hundred Cars".

Sander, meanwhile, is wary of the polished world of contemporary art, whose codes he does not master, in an environment that remains quite underground.

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For Sander, artistic interpretations impose a meaning and a framework on actions that he finds valuable, first and foremost, for their brute force. It's possible to compare *Motorworks* to other works, such as Karlheinz's *HelikopterStreichquartett*, or some of Georges Brecht's events -but that is only possible if one considers the relationship between art and mechanics as a two way street. Oftentimes, *Motorworks* performances fit into the middle ground between two opposing worlds as is the case with *Secret Drive* - a race and nighttime performance with two cars driving with all their lights off.

Progressively, Sander's pieces become simpler. The grandest among them, like *Requiem*, gave way to more discrete performances. The notes and instructions revealed a careful attention to physical forces and mechanical movements which often escape the viewer because they are only perceived as noise. Although some *Motorworks* remain texts, they are always less interesting as a score than as a live performance. In most cases the spectator is swept up into the action and kinetic display, as in *3 Cars, Side by Side, at 150 mph*, a performance that can only be fully experienced from inside one of the moving cars, or the laconic performance *Faster*, which is at once a programme, an incantation and something beyond text. Linked by nature to their environment, the pieces are sitespecific, but the site is constantly moving.

The critic Angela Kriesler underlines the relationship with the road as a particular category of space. She suggests that *Motorworks'* site-in-movement is an uncontrollable enclave at the heart of the space that Michel Foucault defines as an area of control.

Since the work is about movement, *Motorworks* presents a challenge in terms of documentation and communication. *While Crash Chess* was announced with a flyer, most other performances were only announced informally, an approach which becomes natural due to the fact that performances are often illegal. Sander makes no recording of his performances. For him, documenting the performances would be like "trying to take pictures at a punk rock concert or in bed with a girl you'd ruin the pleasure by trying to do too many things at once".

For Angela Kriesler, any representation of the work is difficult, or even impossible, because the pieces must be experienced first hand, and cannot be communicated to the public as a mediated experience.

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In 2012, for the first presentation of a *Motorworks* collection at the Dumont gallery, only the instructions were displayed: hand-written notes, laconic and minimal at times, just a word.

Sander is not interested in advertising his work, and prefers to expose discreetly. In 2011, he exposes in an empty garage in Indianapolis during the Grand Prix season. In the middle of a cleared space, he presented three miniature models of Buick Grand Nationals. The 1/250 scale models have been carefully crushed and mutilated in such a way as to resemble beat up cars. Many drivers came attend the show, including former champion Walk Andersen, who ordered from Sander a reproduction of the accident that nearly killed him in 2002. A series of abstract, brutalist paintings were shown at parties, given out to friends, and often destroyed. There was a touch of pop influence, darkened by a dry minimalism.

The most successful to this day were perhaps his *HA series* of paintings, a series which repeats a hysterical cry. The monochrome series short circuits writing and makes the repetition of a laughter sound into something more ominous. "Originally, there was just one painting, which was more about sound than images, but that didn't really work. It hung around the studio until we made a screen print and started to replicate it. The result was sinister but we started to hear something, like a laughing sound on loop, kind of like a broken toy repeating 'Mommy, wee wee'. And then, after doing a number of them, we started to find a balance, and we started to find it funny, basically because it was ridiculous and scary at once, a sort of phantom train. At one point, we just started laughing. We were looking at the paintings, and we just couldn't stop laughing. That was the end of the series."

With a distance and a simplicity that can be misleading, Ray Sander is re-appropriating the folklore of Californian sub-cultures. His paintings, like his car performances, only conserve the skeleton of the myth. The fact that he reuses familiar symbols brings our contemporary totems back to their primitive origins. The accidents, the smell of oil everything in his work goes against the illusion of safety sold to us by the automobile industry. Sander's automobile is stripped of its utilitarian and symbolic functions; it's a pure mechanism that he puts on the road. In front of his work, we find ourselves facing the manifestation of a primitive culture: our own.

Nicolas Giraud, "Motorworks", in *Garagisme*, N°4, pp.10-14

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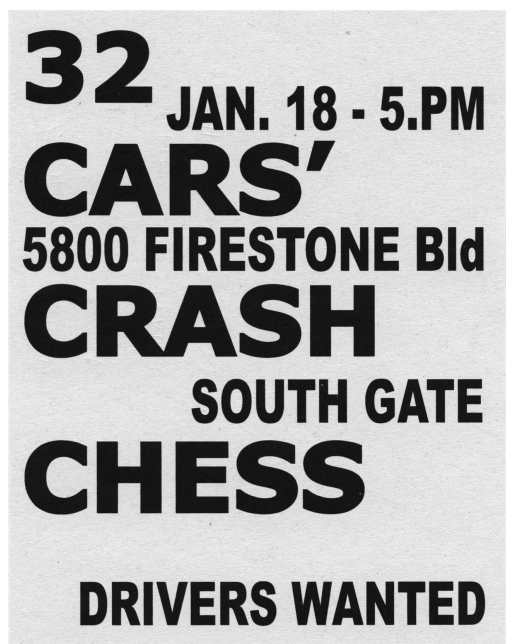


Ray Sander, *SUICIDE motorwork #7 night of destruction*, Irwindale speedway California, 2008



Ray Sander, *accident*, hotwheels car, 2011

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Ray Sander, flyer for motorwork: *32 CARS CRASH CHESS*, 2009



Ray Sander, posters for motorwork: *BRAND NEW ! BURNING SPORTS CAR* (red and yellow), 2014, silkscreen on paper, 49.5 x 39.8 cm each

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Ray Sander, *FIRE SEASON*, 2017, painted car and smoke



Ray Sander, *FIRE SEASON*, 2017, painted car and smoke

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