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Yerba Buena exhibit takes bike culture to a fine art



Bike to the future

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SLIMM BUICK will be the first to admit the show he curated is misnamed. There is no "Bicycle Culture."

There are a whole bunch of them.

"There's all different cliques," Buick says, looking across an assemblage of mountain bikes, racing bikes, lowriders, concept bikes and elaborate "art bikes" crowding a 5,000-square-foot gallery space in San Francisco's Yerba Buena Center for the Arts.

The "Bicycle Culture" exhibit, to be unveiled tonight at an open-to-the-public party, is paired with "Ecotopias: Not Just a Pretty Picture," a showing of artwork echoing environmental values.

The challenge for Buick and his co-curators, Shannon Essex, Kimo Toguchi and Bradley Woehl was

to represent as much of cycling's sometimes surprising diversity as possible. The task was more difficult than it might sound.

"Different groups of cyclists have different cultures," Buick says.

Those cultures are reflected in the gleam of the gear.

Roughly 100 bikes rolled into Yerba Buena for the show. Old 40-pound-balloon tire clunkers ridden in

Marin's pioneering Ropack races share floor space with the latest high-tech Titanium full-suspension wonder bikes. The steel-framed Gitane 10-speed that Tour de France champion Greg LeMond rode as a teen-ager is a few feet away from a "Road Warrior"-esque "Chopper From Hell." Buick's oddly themed "Five Faces of Elvis" art bike is one gallery removed from the rolling chrome and lacquer fantasies of the lowrider bike world.

Buick, who estimates his own bike collection at "probably about 30," says the show should open people's eyes to all the possibilities that come with two wheels. "You get a variety of all the different things you can do with a bike."

You also get a bit of history.

Essex, Toguchi and Woehl, partners in The Bicycle Trader, a compendium of classifieds for used and collector bikes, were in charge of gathering the bikes that represent Northern California's contribution to

IF YOU GO

"Bicycle Culture" and "Ecotopias: Not Just a Pretty Picture" open tonight at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco with an opening night party beginning at 8 p.m. in the grand lobby at 701 Mission St. Tickets are \$10 (free for Art Center members). After tonight, the show will run through Jan. 3, 1999. Hours are Tuesday through Sunday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Admission is \$5 for adults, \$3 for seniors, students and children ages 16 and younger. For more information, call 978-2787 or go to www.YerbaBuena.Arts.org.

cycling industry and awareness. "Northern California is the epicenter of cycling innovation in the world," Toguchi says.

Somewhere in the middle of that epicenter is Marin. Of the 100 or so bikes in the show, nearly a quarter are from Marin builders. Joe Breeze, Gary Fisher, Otis Guy, Steve Potts and Charlie Cunningham all have bikes in the show.

The mountain bike came to its full bloom in Marin and Essex believes that bloom is what sparked the

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WELL SPOKEN:

Left, Silmm Buick and his bike 'Rawhide.' Buick is a co-curator of the 'Bike Culture' show opening tonight at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts.

Top left, three custommade show bikes by Specialized. Top center, a vintage Black Phantom Schwinn from the balloon tire era.

Top right, the rear hub of 'Crazy Tango,' a lowrider bike built by Anthony Cuevas, Jr.



Bike

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explosion of innovation and technology that has rocked the bike world in the two decades since mountain bikes were first sold. "A lot of those same people are responsible for why the bike went beyond the Huffy," he says.

Many of those historically significant bikes are on the floor at Yerba Buena. Breeze's first off-road specific frame, the 12th Cunningham bicycle ever built, an early Gary Fisher production model, a pair of Steve Potts bikes and one of the first Specialized Stumpjumpers. There are also

some of the latest creations like Otis Guys titanium full-suspension bike, and an \$8,000 ultralight from Ibis Cycles in Santa Rosa. For the bike aficionado, the gallery gleams like a giant toy store.

"It's interesting to see how quickly the species evolved," says Woehl.

Beyond the mountain bike saga, the exhibit will also touch on Northern California road racing history and the track bike craze that flourished in the first third of the century when masses of newly arrived European immigrants pulled bicycles out of steamer trunks and made cycling a San Francisco spectator

sport.

Other bikes reflect other eras in bicycle history. "Every generation has a different idea of what a cool bike is," Woehl says.

Buick's definition of cool has nothing to do with a generation. It has everything to do with Buick. His bikes, the Elvis machine, a bike with hand-tooled leather fenders he calls "Rawhide," the monstrosity of "Retread" and a playful two-wheeler named "Little Clown," are all examples of what he calls "art bikes." It was an idea that came to him 11 years ago, when he decided to reflect a hot-rod mentality on a smaller, more planet-friendly scale and created

a "little cowboy bike with cowhorn handlebars."

"You can do as much with a bike as you can with a car," he says. "At some point, I just didn't want a car any more." You can have more fun on a bike than you can "driving around with your window rolled up screaming at the windshield," Buick says.

"On a bike, you're allowed to be a little goofy."

He hopes people who see "Bicycle Culture" come away with some of that goofy feeling. Bicycles are fun. So is "Bicycle Culture."

All of them.

CINEMA WEST ★

Bargain Matinees Before 6 PM