

Low: René Amado

Who are we if we don't say it ourselves? Gangsters? Illegals? A project for you to photograph? Nah homie...these cars—the patterns in the paint, the brushstrokes of the pinstripes, the details of the engine, every chiseled cut from the engraver, each and every stitch of the upholstery to the style of rims—they are the expressions of us. They are us. Our joy. Our pain. They are members of our families. They are our loved ones passed on. They are our love. They are our art.
—René Amado



(right)
René Amado
Cholitas, 2023, printed 2024
High-gloss metal print
Courtesy of the Artist

(below)
René Amado
Cruisin' Jefferson, 2021, printed 2024
High-gloss metal print
Courtesy of the Artist

Photography: Courtesy of the Artist

Engaged in lowrider culture most of his life in one way or another, Racine-based **René Amado** showcases the cars, bicycles, and community through photography and video. Both a photographer and a teacher, Amado has focused on a broad range of subjects in his work—whether by professional necessity or personal interest—from street photography to portraits to culinary themes. *Low*: René Amado blends his photography with custom bicycles and other small vehicles from various builders/makers (including himself) and a video in which he expands on the story of lowrider culture through interviews and documentation. Each component of the exhibition—photographs, bikes, and video—

stands on its own, but together create a powerful narrative underscoring how objects and images can address personal and community development, tradition and innovation, and creativity and aesthetics.

Lowriders and lowrider communities have been appearing globally since the 1980s and early 1990s, but are rooted in Mexican American cultural traditions—which in turn reflect large-scale social issues such as migration and place-making. The practice and culture have grown in the intervening years, connecting families and friends of all demographics and showcasing cultural pride, personal creativity, and individual skills. Academically, lowriders are historically associated with customized vehicles that were meant to cruise “low and slow” down streets. Developed in opposition to speed-oriented hot rods, there is a “meant to be seen” quality often talked about in lowrider culture—colors are bold and vehicle processions, with cars cruising low to the ground, intentionally take their time.



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The aesthetics and mechanics most associated with lowrider cars—bold paint jobs; hydraulics that allow the vehicle to move up and down and potentially “hop;” plush, customized interiors; and cultural iconography, such as Our Lady of Guadalupe—extend to other vehicles such as bicycles and motorcycles. Some builders push this even further and customize all manner of smaller vehicles, including pedal cars and strollers—indirectly reflecting the importance of family and children. Lowrider events are not just about seeing vehicles but also about community, tradition, culture, heritage, pride, individual style, and more.

While he was familiar with lowriders in his young life, Amado’s introduction to their stories in a magazine helped shape his identity by encouraging him to join a club and start building his own lowrider bikes. In addition to being a connection to a community, the vehicles, people, and events captivated him visually and led him to document what he saw for inspiration and posterity. Amado photographs portraits and street scenes that reflect aesthetics, style, and fashion. His photography is a visual record of moments and experiences.



Serving as the focal point of a book he finished in 2023, lowrider culture has had consistent and expanding appeal as subject matter for Amado—encouraging him to continually document it via photography and video and inspiring him to renew his pursuit of custom bike building. In addition to operating as a metaphor for social and cultural

dynamics, the lowrider community speaks to tradition and innovation, heritage, family, history, place, and creativity. In particular, the vehicles that builders create are, in Amado’s words, “a beautiful and artful testament to our ever so colorful culture.”

Lena Vigna
Director of Exhibitions

Bicycle/vehicle builders featured in *Low*: René Amado:

Armando Alba, René Amado, Edin Gamboa, William Guardado, Junior Herrera, Emanuel Lagunas, Bombita Lopez, Francisco Rubio, Hector Salinas, Jr, and Omar Villa.



(top)
Emanuel Lagunas and Mario’s Autoworks
Emanuel’s Blueprint, 2020
Custom 1952 Taylor Tot Stroller
Collection of the Artist and Mario’s Autoworks
Photography: Emanuel Lagunas

(center)
René Amado
Elysian, 2023, printed 2024
High-gloss metal print
Courtesy of the Artist
Photography: Courtesy of the Artist

(right)
René Amado
Jefferson 6-Tre, 2023, printed 2024
High-gloss metal print
Courtesy of the Artist
Photography: Courtesy of the Artist

