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Cyclepedia and the Museology of Things

Of course Portland was a great choice for a show of Michael Embacher's amazing collection of bicycles, *Cyclepedia*. What town in this country better goes with the world bicycle? But why was it hosted at the Portland Art Museum? And why did they also have a show with collector cars?

I would like to explore the idea that commodities like mass-produced bicycles (or cars, watches, etc.) can be viewed as art works in the museum context. I'll look at ideas from studies of material culture, as well as the Dada idea of the readymade (e.g. Duchamp's bicycle wheel).

Of course bicycles can be represented in art, sometimes in nearly the same way as in the *Cyclepedia* show. See for example Taliah Lempert's work. Is a painting of a bicycle art, but the bike itself is not?

Questions I am pondering: does the fact that something is shown in a museum make it art? How rare must an artifact be to be considered valuable? Does craftsmanship plus time eventually equal art? Does a bicycle need to be transformed or its parts reused (e.g. Picasso's *Bull's Head*, Ai Weiwei's *Forever Bicycles*) to become art? Does a change in scale as with Jeff Koons' *Balloon Dog* transform an ordinary object into a work of art?



Pablo Picasso, *Bull's Head*, 1943.



Marcel Duchamp *Bicycle Wheel*, 1951.



Taliah Lempert, *Bob Jackson on Stripes 7*, 2002.



Ai Weiwei, *Forever Bicycles*, 2013.



Photos from *Cyclepedia* exhibition at PAM, 2013.

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