

TO PRESENT MY LOWRIDER IN A SHOWROOM BIKINI-MODEL FASHION, IT WAS IMPORTANT FOR ME TO STAY FIT! ARTIST LIZ COHEN CONVERTS TWO CAR BODIES WHILE ALSO WORKING ON HER OWN

**SELF-PORTRAIT LIZ COHEN
TEXT MARILYNIA ASTRAPHIDOU**

A sexy girl, scantily clad, and sprawled across the hood of a car. It's every mechanic's age-old duty to display an example of the form, like a certificate of professional qualification, but on the wall of Laurent Godin's Paris gallery, an image subverts this stereotype. The girl in question is American artist Liz Cohen and the car is a hybrid lowrider, half '87 Honda 601 Duke, half '73 Chevrolet El Camino.

Cohen is more than just the beams behind this project, she's also the muscle, having personally built this car as part of her most recent project, *Bodyworks*. Lowrider show cars are associated with the owners, the builders, and the models. As a woman building a car, I have an opportunity to play all of these roles, so why wouldn't I? Could this delicate woman have actually gone to the lengths required to create this transformer? Hell, yeah, as the owner of Elwood Bodyworks garage in Scottsdale, Arizona would testify. "I've done all the physical labor myself, but I wouldn't have made it without the guidance of Bill Cherry, an incredible advisor, teacher and car guru who taught me everything I needed to know to build a car," she acknowledges.

Under Bill's vigilant eye she did her best to prove she was worthy of his time and attention and that she was capable of some clever customizations. Starting with the car's engine, "I had a lot of space constraints because I installed a Chevy small block into the body of a Thabart. To hold the engine and transmission and to allow the extensions to happen, I had to construct an extended chassis."

After building some outriggers on it, she began to hoist the two cars. "I cut out the floor and cut the bodies in half and bolted them to the chassis. I then put additional hydraulics in the suspension to change the car's ride height and allow it to do some lowrider tricks," she explains.

Her fascination with cars goes back a long way. "I've always had a strong interest in them and what they

represent, as well as a curiosity about lowriding." Choosing to fuse a Thabart and an El Camino may be quite an eccentric way to go about exploring it, but there's more than meets the eye and Cohen's choices are elaborately substantiated.

"I chose the Thabart because it represents East German national values and the El Camino for its Americanness."

The Thabart, often associated with East Germany's massive wave of emigration following the fall of the wall, enabled citizens to adapt to a new way of doing things at the same time that they were dealing with a cultural loss. "The Chevy El Camino on the other hand exemplifies the hybrid nature of American identities. "It's a car and a truck. It's an American car and its name is Spanish." It's also a popular vehicle in lowriding, the hasty customizing of cars started by first and second generation Mexican-Americans "facing a challenge similar to the one former East Germans face," claims Cohen.

Social and political connotations aside, the mechanical simplicity of the Thabart guaranteed easy tinkering. While overhauling the two cars Cohen simultaneously worked on reworking her own body image. "In order to do my best at each role and present my lowrider in a showroom bikini-model fashion, it was important for me to stay fit."

After two years of meticulous work the project is still not quite finished, but "the car's on the verge of driving. I'm waiting on the details." Until it's time to jump onto the hood of her *Cold War* reimagined lowrider, she's stuck behind the wheel of a 1989 Honda Prelude.

