

[Home](#) / [Features](#)

Exploring Los Angeles by Jeep, Asking "Is That Art?"

Drive-By-Art brought together artists and art lovers while maintaining an appropriate distance in a difficult time.



BY ELANA SCHERR PUBLISHED: JUN 7, 2020



DRIVE-BY ART

The drive-through is baked into the Los Angeles mythology. Even before shelter-at-home orders shuttered sit-down restaurants and doubled the lines for double-doubles at L.A.'s popular In-N-Out burger joints, Southern Californians have enjoyed drive-through donuts, drive-through dairies, and even drive-through church services. Why not art, too?



DRIVE-BY ART

DRIVE-BY-ART ORGANIZER WARREN NEIDICH ORGANIZED A SHOW INTENDED TO BE VIEWED FROM THE WINDOWS OF A PASSING CAR. HERE A PAINTING BY LUCIANA ABAIT.

That's exactly what artists Warren Neidich, Renee Petropoulos, Michael Slenske and Anuradha Vikram thought when they devised [Drive-By-Art.org](https://drive-by-art.org) in response to [pandemic](#)-necessary restrictions. Neidich had put on a similar show in early May, on Long Island in New York. Inspired by social media posts of birthday parades and other socially-distant celebrations, he worked out a similar approach for artists.

"I felt that we were all sitting in front of TV sets and in front of our computers and having virtual experiences, but not having any more physical experiences," Neidich said. "We'd all been digitized, disassembled and distributed. I wanted to reconstitute the body, do something physical."

After the success on the East Coast, Neidich felt the automobile's long history in Los Angeles made that city an even more likely prospect for an art show spread far and wide and made viewable from the car. Because Los Angeles is so large, the exhibitions were divided east and west by Western Ave.—a large north-south street that cuts through the center of Hollywood—and held on successive weekends in May.

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View Drive-By Art Photos From Around Los Angeles



There were no rules about the work, where it was displayed, how it was displayed, or what form it needed to take. Some artists simply propped traditional paintings up against garage doors or walls. Others incorporated local business windows, roofs, and fences. To find the works, an interactive Google map was available on the Drive-By-Art website, listing addresses and artists, but little else about the pieces. The the hunt and discovery were part of the adventure.

To make our own experience just a little more car-centric, we chose a 2020 Jeep Wrangler Rubicon, a darling of off-road exploration, for our urban geocaching. With its foldable soft top, lifted viewpoint, and cellphone-friendly interface (not to mention an eye-catching Mojito Green paint), the Wrangler seemed perfect for slow rolls down side streets in search of creative inspiration. Jeeps are friendly vehicles, which also seemed appropriate for waving from a safe distance at artists and other lookie-loos.

"Even though we are still staying apart from one another, this is also a very social experience," Neidich said. "The only time artists see each other in L.A., the only time you run into anybody in the art world is at an art opening, at a museum, or a gallery, and all that has been nonexistent. It's been a lonely time. It even makes it hard to work. This show allows us to see people, to see each other's work."



DRIVE-BY ART



DRIVE-BY ART

PAINTER KIMBERLY BROOKS STANDS NEXT TO HER PAINTING, WHICH WAS VISIBLE FROM A FREE CARWASH NEXT DOOR.

Neidich's words hit home. Writers and automotive reviewers mostly socialize in magazine offices and test tracks. It has indeed been a lonely time. Our first two stops weren't too promising, as we spotted the little yellow Drive-By Art signs at the designated addresses, but not anything we could easily recognize as art. Perhaps that was the art, the wondering. Is a sweatshirt slung over a chain-link fence art? Is half an Arby's sandwich sign leaning against a warehouse art? It might be, but not the art we were looking for. Things got more obviously artistic when we got to the combined works of Kulapat Yantrasast and Kimberly Brooks on a residential street in Venice. Yantrasast's piece was a car wash offered for free to artists and healthcare workers. While they waited, car owners could look out their windows at a delicate, gold-leafed painting by Brooks. The two did not originally plan to join forces, Brooks told me, but her landlord wasn't comfortable with sharing the location of her studio, so she walked over a few blocks to set up at the carwash. "This is the first social thing I've done in months," she said, adding that there had been a steady stream of cars running through since they'd set up at noon.

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DRIVE-BY ART

ARTISTS BRIAN MOSS AND JODY ZELLEN CHOSE "RIDE BY" OVER "DRIVE BY." BEHIND THEM IS A PAINTING BY KIM SCHOENSTADT.

Around the corner we got to play, "Is this the art?" again for a few minutes before realizing that the menus stuck in the landscaping outside a restaurant were in fact just menus and the painting displayed in the restaurant window was the intended stop. Our mumbles of, "Oh, that's the art," were overheard by Brian Moss and Jody Zellen, who laughed and agreed that the moment of uncertainty was something unique to the scavenger hunt mood of this event.

If you walk into a gallery or museum, there may be the opportunity to question the artistic value of the item on display, but you rarely have to wonder which item it is. For the record, the painting in the window was very nice, and whoever pinned the menus to the bush also had an eye for the aesthetic. Zellen and Moss turned out to be participating artists in the area, riding their bikes around to see what else was on display. "We used to spend every weekend going to art shows," Moss said. "It's been fun to go see things again." He pointed out the masks he and Zellen were wearing. "These are her work too!" An entirely different outlet for creativity. Zellen's work was on display up the street at the Santa Monica airport, but Moss warned we'd have to park and walk to see his, since it was over a curb set off from the street. We pointed back at the Wrangler and said curbs were not a problem but couldn't tell if Moss laughed or winced behind his mask.



DRIVE-BY ART

A JOINT WORK BY KRISTIN CALABRESE AND JOSH ASTOR TOOK TWO PAINTINGS FROM THEIR NORMAL WALL HANGING POSITION AND HINGED THEM AS A FREESTANDING BILLBOARD ADVERTISING ABSTRACTION.

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After the first few stops, we fell into a rhythm of parking the Jeep, searching out nearby installations, and hunting them down. Some were traditional paintings displayed in untraditional ways, like Kristin Calabrese and husband Josh Astor's hinged sandwich board propped up against a pickup truck near their Inglewood studio. Other pieces were more ephemeral, and addressed the moment, like Pam Smith Hudson's paper Target bag titled, "Meditation for George Floyd/Meditation for Humanity." Some were more light-hearted, like a series of six banners, each wearing the image of a white sock. Six feet apart. Get it?

Because not every piece had a parking space, sometimes you'd be past one before it fully registered. It was both a different way of looking at art and a different way of moving through the city, backtracking and moving down small side streets instead of main thoroughfares toward a single destination. Red lights became welcome chances to check the map, or simply look around. The Drive-By-Art displays weren't the only public art, and, with our brains tuned for art, we noticed more murals, sculptures, and—because we are at the core, car people—cool old cars than we normally do. It was a fun reminder that slow can also be a legitimate way to go.

Towards late afternoon, the cellphone in the cupholder began buzzing—an emergency alert about an impending curfew. We cut our day short and headed home. Instagram posts on [the Drive-By-Art page](#) announced that evening performances were postponed. What started out as a reminder to stop and appreciate the art of the city around you became a reminder of the wider world that inspires art and changes cities. For Neidich and his artists there would be another chance to share their work, and address what he calls, "The injustice we all witness together."

THE ART OF CARS



Andy Warhol Never Drove, but the Artist Loved Cars



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ELANA SCHERR

SENIOR EDITOR, FEATURES

Like a sleeper agent activated late in the game, Elana Scherr didn't know her calling at a young age. Like many girls, she planned to be a vet-astronaut-artist, and came closest to that last one by attending UCLA art school. She painted images of cars, but did not own one. Elana reluctantly got a driver's license at age 21 and discovered that she not only loved cars and wanted to drive them, but that other people loved cars and wanted to read about them, which meant somebody had to write about them. Since receiving activation codes, Elana has written for numerous car magazines and websites, covering classics, car culture, technology, motorsports, and new-car reviews. In 2020, she received a Best Feature award from the Motor Press Guild for [the C/D story "A Drive through Classic Americana in a Polestar 2."](#) In 2023, her [Car and Driver](#) feature story ["In Washington, D.C.'s Secret Carpool Cabal, It's a Daily Slug Fest"](#) was awarded 1st place in the 16th Annual National Arts & Entertainment Journalism Awards by the Los Angeles Press Club.

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