

HISTORY REPEATING ITSELF

by Elaine Juska Joseph



The HUMMER Cart rolls into midtown Manhattan, powered by Percherons Duke & Diesel.

Brandon Tuelor Aviram photo

Artist Jeremy Dean and His HUMMER Cart

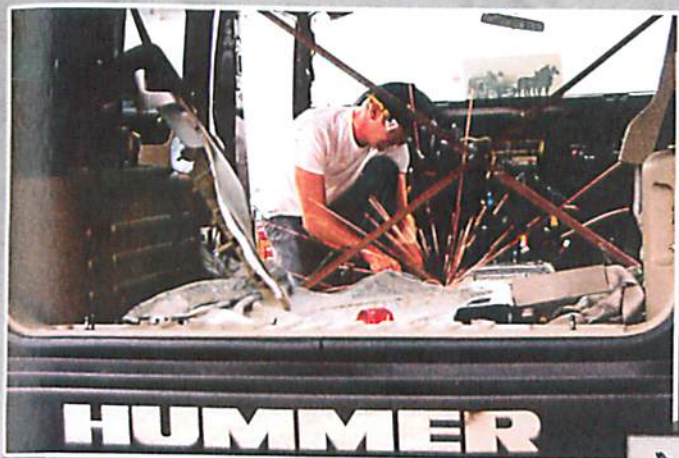
Jeremy Dean's HUMMER rolled into New York City the first week of March 2010, tied down to the long bed of a vehicle transport truck. Devoid of its engine, the HUMMER obviously wasn't capable of going anywhere on its own power.

Jeremy found his HUMMER through a Craig's List ad from Florida. With the current going-rate show-room price tag of \$65,000, Jeremy was mindful that a vehicle like this was not going to last very long on the used-car market, and he rushed down to Florida with the seller's asking price and his life savings in his pocket. "It was very important to me to acquire, at market price, a working automobile in the best condition possible. To cut any corners on this point was for me, completely unacceptable," says Jeremy.

The seller was a dealer who had, in fact, purchased the HUMMER H2 at an auction for vehicles repossessed by financial institutions. No surprise in this economy that this HUMMER H2 was among them. What was astonishing is that someone like Jeremy, a filmmaker/artist from Brooklyn, New York, was able and willing to buy this HUMMER in immaculate condition for a mere \$15,000. After buying it without even trying it, he proceeded to take it to a body shop in Palmetto, Florida, where it was systematically sawed apart, disemboweled, re-welded, repainted, and otherwise twisted into a vehicle with far

less horsepower than it originally had. "I have always been interested in exploring contemporary issues by deconstructing and re-contextualizing iconic symbols," says the artist, in order to help the viewer understand his perspective. "This has been even more important to me in the current state of global instability—economic, environmental and security. This project uses an American symbol of power and status to question our future by looking at a past response to excess and subsequent collapse."

Step back three quarters of a century, and common folk with little or no artistic vision were performing similar acts on their own cars and trucks. The citizens of the 1930s mangled these modes of transportation not in political protest or for artistic expression, but out of necessity. With the crash of '29, many people, particularly those in the rural south, found themselves choking on the great American dream of a "car for every household." At a whopping 17 cents a gallon, they could no longer afford the gasoline to run their automobiles. Instead, horses and mules were once again between the shafts and on the pole, pulling cars and trucks whose engines were rendered useless, or more often completely cut away. With President Hoover taking the blame for the Great Depression, society cleverly and angrily dubbed these modified vehicles "Hoover Carts" (also called "Bennett Buggies" in Canada, after then Prime Minister R.B.



Jeremy Dean, modifying his HUMMER at the body shop.

photos courtesy Jeremy Dean



"Back to the Futurama": Jeremy Dean's exhibit at the PULSE Art Fair in New York City.



Left: "The Golden Parachute," a model of another deconstructed vehicle designed by the artist.

Bennett). For the unfortunates and destitute, genuine horsepower was again king, if only by default.

"I first learned of the 'Hoover Cart' while making a documentary film in Tarboro, North Carolina," says Jeremy. "The film was an oral history-take on the evolution of this small agricultural town through the generations. I was fascinated by the stories, and the image I saw in my mind of the re-imagined vehicle, this ultimate coping mechanism. It seemed to me then, as it does now, a monument to the absurd, as only something utilitarian done in prolonged crisis can be." He continues, "I sat with that image in my mind for years, and would revisit it when a particularly blaring example of American overindulgence confronted my senses. I began to wonder what we would do with all this stuff if it became, through crisis, impossible to use as originally intended."

Jeremy sees a frightful similarity in the culture of today and the culture of the 1920s, just before the Depression hit. "The excess of the roaring '20s were punctuated by Ford's inexpensive Model T, making it possible for virtually everyone to own a car," explains Jeremy. "Realizing that at some point everyone who could afford a car would have one, General Motors (GM) introduced 'planned obsolescence' by annually changing its models, allowing for the extravagance of regular new cars and inventing consumerism as we know it," he continues. "GM also began extending credit through the GM Acceptance Corp. at a rate of 30% interest." At the same time, the debate over bank regulation and American consumerism raged. "In 1926, Americans responded to the doctrine in advertising that claimed, 'Every free-born American has a right to name his own necessities,'" says Jeremy, "and that list of 'necessities' grew."

"For me, the symbol that best personifies the arrogant and unsustainable indulgence of the last era," exclaims Jeremy, "is the HUMMER H2. This military vehicle turned Grocery-Getter, consuming fuel at 9 miles per gallon, has been called 'An indictment of the American psyche on wheels,' and is clearly consumerism at its peak. By choosing the HUMMER as a symbol to deconstruct," Jeremy explains, "it speaks to the broader culture that bought into the ideology that resulted in the largest financial collapse since the Great Depression."

Jeremy Dean found an audience for his newly "deconstructed" HUMMER with an exhibit at the 2010 PULSE

Contemporary Art Fair in New York City, held March 4 through 7. He titled his exhibit at PULSE, "Back To The Futurama" as a nod, he says, "to the General Motor's exhibit at the World's Fair that opened in 1939." Among the exhibits at the World's Fair, viewed at the time by over 44 million people, was a display sponsored by General Motors—aptly named "Futurama." The exhibit attempted to show what the world would be like in 20 years (1959-1960). It included a diorama of a "better, brighter tomorrow"—automated highways and vast suburbs, all to be utilized by the ever-increasingly popular and attainable automobile, the best of which were built by GM, of course. "The viewer was confronted with a self-described monument to the American scheme of living," says Jeremy. And indeed, after WWII, this "Futurama" took shape as the real thing. "Massive government investment in the highway interstate system in the '50s and '60s created suburbia," he says, "leading to the very American Dream of a two-car family, with the house, picket fence and dog named Spot. At one point in the 1950s," he continues, "one in seven jobs was directly related to the auto industry and GM alone represented 10% of the national economy. Adding to its 'Planned Obsolescence' strategy, that bit of marketing genius that made the previous year's model dreadfully outdated, GM now added the 'Ladder of Success.' This," says Jeremy, "effectively put the consumer in a class system according to wealth and social status by the corresponding GM model they could afford—Chevrolet, Pontiac, Oldsmobile, Buick or Cadillac. In a wordless exchange everyone knows where everyone else stands, and if one wants to appear to rise socially, simply buy the more expensive, latest brand. With these two marketing ideas GM was able to weld an existential link between who we are and what we drive, and put the American consumer on the acquisitive treadmill they continue to pant on today."

Included in the exhibition with the modified HUMMER, equipped with four, 9" screens playing video of the process of its transformation, Jeremy exhibited a number of models, precious little sculptures of other car designs modified into horse-drawn "carriages," hooked to toy horses. With names like "The Golden Parachute" and

continued on next page



The HUMMER Cart met up with the Percherons in Central Park by way of a transport truck.



The maiden voyage of Jeremy Dean and his HUMMER Cart (or CEO Stagecoach), through Central Park.
Brandon Taelor Aviram photos

History Repeating itself continued

"The Sweet-16," these visions are, perhaps by no surprise, eerily similar to 19th century Doctor's Buggies and Town Coaches. When looking at some of these fantastic little models, "sketches" of future modified vehicles, it is striking at how easy it is to see a connection between the modern car and its horse-drawn carriage ancestor. One could argue that, after more than a century of innovation, the "horse-less carriage" is still very much that by design. The HUMMER Cart is subtitled by Jeremy as the CEO Stagecoach—visually, the title works. It is large, bulky, and the driver sits high off the ground above his

horses. The console, which sits tight against the driver's knees, includes a 9" DVD screen and electric brakes. The headlights and taillights are battery operated. Chrome rails running parallel on the roof of the HUMMER Cart are emblazoned with the initials "CEO"—after those infamous top guns who helped cause the recent financial fall. Inside, leather seats face each other, and, because of its modification, things are a bit cramped here as well. Unlike the ride in a 19th cen-

tury stagecoach, however, the ride is smooth, velvety and posh. Windows are tinted against the glare of the sun, and passengers can pass the time watching a DVD on miniature screens, if they wanted to. "Though I am not necessarily obsessed with cars or car culture, I am obsessed with the idea of the American Dream," says Jeremy. "It is impossible to talk about one without the other as they are historically and inextricably linked."

The HUMMER Cart was to have

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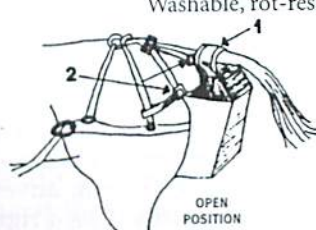
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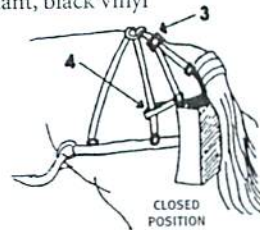
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its debut on the streets of Manhattan the weekend before the exhibit opened, so Jeremy rented a truck and trailer to bring it up north. Perhaps it was karma in retaliation to the man that stole the engine from this HUMMER H2, or perhaps it was just bad luck, but Jeremy's rental truck broke down in Georgia, forcing him to hire a professional hauler to take it the rest of the way. The hauler, too, had engine problems and broke down, also south of the Mason/Dixon line. The HUMMER Cart sat. Meanwhile, the installation date, and the opening to the prestigious art exhibit, were coming on fast. Snow fell, adding to the many feet of snow from the Blizzard of 2010 which crushed the East Coast just weeks before, increasingly hampering Jeremy's plans for a "pre-show" debut. By the time Jeremy's HUMMER Cart got to the city, it was too late for his much-anticipated test run. The vehicle was, however, well received at PULSE. Plans were made with Cedar Knoll Farm of Lisbon, Connecticut, to hook a team of white Percherons to it the day after the close of the exhibition.

On March 8, the transport truck rolled into the parking lot of the famed restaurant Tavern on the Green, recently closed down, on Central Park West. It was greeted by Percherons Duke and Diesel, already harnessed and ready to give back some horsepower to the shiny black HUMMER. Modified from its original weight of 6,600 pounds and without its powerful, 393 hp V-8 engine, the vehicle weighed just over 2,000 pounds—something of concern for Jeremy but of little concern to the teamster. With the body of the vehicle welded to the wagon running gear already equipped with pole, eveners and neck yoke, it only took a few minutes to hook the Percherons. Jeremy's dream was coming to fruition, and it showed in his mannerisms and on his face. He eagerly hopped aboard with teamster Terry Joseph, and the HUMMER Cart pulled away from the gawking crowd that was already collecting, with an entourage of photographers and film crews following.

The first leg of Jeremy's trek in his modified HUMMER took him through Central Park, past cyclists, joggers and New Yorkers out walking their dogs. Naturally, people stared, and shook their heads at the

spectacle. Once out on the street, at Central Park South, the horse-drawn HUMMER literally stopped traffic. Taxi-drivers halted in the middle of the street to take pictures. Tourists asked for a ride. The park's horse-drawn carriage drivers, all lined up on 59th Street, clapped and yelped and snapped their own pictures. Tour buses went by with passengers scrambling to see the odd contraption. "Only in New York" seemed to be the most common phrase in response to the gleaming HUMMER

Cart in mid-town Manhattan that day. If they only knew that the concept was 80 years in the making, spurred by the great wealth and extreme poverty of history repeating itself all over this nation.

Artist Jeremy Dean is represented by The Creative Thriftshop, Brooklyn, New York www.creativethriftshop.com

Flaming enthusiasm, backed up by horse sense and persistence, is the quality that most frequently makes for success.

—Dale Carnegie (1888-1955)

Ox Kill Farm Shires

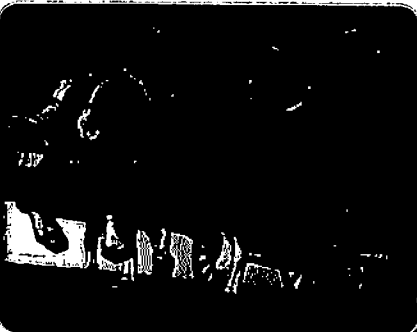
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