

**Motorcycle as Metaphor for Life and Movement
"A Biker's Artwork"**

OK, all you secret lovers of leather. We know who you are. Monday through Friday you toil as doctors, lawyers, accountants, construction workers, school teachers, MBAs, various and assorted "cube rats". But come weekend – now we're talking the real you. The you that would like the world to know that you are a free spirit, that you are more, way more, than that guy or gal in "business casual" or jeans and a hard hat. Whether you're young or not-so-young, tall, short, thin or packing several spare tires at your mid-section, you yearn for the thrill of fresh air rushing past your face. Yep, you're a biker or at least an armchair biker!

You might be riding a crotch rocket or a cruiser, a Harley or a Honda, but you share something special with your fellow biker chicks and biker buddies. You love more than leather and chrome. You've locked into the sometimes indescribable feeling of riding a motorcycle down a country road, canopied with old, leafy trees. You take in the dappled beauty of the sun poking



through the trees with an abundance of little sunlit splotches that make the road look like God is finger painting. You feel the fantastic freedom of cruising through the outdoors in a participatory way unknown to cage riders (those folks in their cars). And you can smell! The fresh air, the blossoms on the trees, the exhaust, and yes, even the fertilizer in the fields. Way better than smelling the AC in the car!

Well friends, you've got a brother with a paint brush, and he knows how to use it. Wesley R. Baker is one of you. After his executive job in the general construction industry was eliminated at age 55, Wes reinvented himself by combining his two passions, motorcycles and art. And what a passionately cool collection of paintings this second career is producing! You can view these originals at the "Motorcycle as Metaphor" solo show of Wes' paintings, held in the Elmhurst Artists Guild Gallery at the Elmhurst Art Museum, 150 S. Cottage Hill Ave., Elmhurst, IL. The show, partially supported by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency, opens July 12, 2008 and closes August 15, 2008. The Opening Reception, open to all lovers of art and bikes will be held on Sunday afternoon, July 20, from 1pm – 4pm.

There's the beautifully creepy painting of "Ghost Riders", inspired by the song of the same name, only these ghostly riders are riding 2-wheeled horsepower rather than the fabled four-legged horses through the stormy midnight sky. "Night Captain" is similarly eerie, with a group of bikers riding through a night full of foreboding, with the posse all trusting the leader, the "Night Captain," to lead the way to safety.



Not all of Wes' oil paintings are spooky. "Ladies First" is a light and breezy painting of an afternoon group ride, led by three women bikers who are clearly enjoying the joie de vivre of leading the run. Wes admits that this painting was inspired by some constructive chastising he received from a patron, a highly successful female attorney. "She astutely pointed out that all of my paintings featured women on the backs of bikes, and women leaders, whether on bikes or in boardrooms, do not want to see themselves pictorially depicted on the back seat," Wes confessed. Since Wes' circle of close friends includes several women who own and ride their own bikes, he took the advice to heart, and thus began the "Lady Rider" series.

Wes' paintings range in style from abstract representational to highly abstract. None of them are like the photorealistic paintings we are used to seeing on motorcycle posters. The "Speedy" series includes some of the more fun paintings. "Speedy One" and "Speedy Twins" are two paintings that can be viewed singularly, or together as a diptych. They are bright, with orange backgrounds, and depict crotch rocket riders zipping down the road at maximum speed.

Artistic inspiration has come from a variety of well-known artists, ranging from 19th Century impressionists Manet and Van Gogh to 20th Century abstract painters Franz Kline and Jackson Pollock. Kline's influence is clearly visible in "Jake's Bikes" employing broad splashes of blue and white to imply the presence of roaring motorcycles. Wes pays homage to these masters in his "Painting with the Artists" series. "Riding with Jackson Pollock" is a spirited work, rendered in Pollock's style of artfully dripped paint upon the canvas. "Starry Starry Bike" takes Van Gogh's mystical "Starry Starry Night" to another dimension. These latter two paintings are works in progress at the time of this writing, but are expected to be finished and exhibited at the show.

Wes describes his goals as an artist as, "The most important mission I want to accomplish is to communicate, through my paintings, how wonderful it is to ride. The passion in these paintings is personal. The camaraderie, along with the adrenaline, for those who ride is almost magical. There are moments during a run that riders experience the

thresholds of eternity and a moment later, the great joy of truly being alive."

He talks about his first ride on his uncle's old Pan Head Harley when he was about seven years old. "The sound of that machine and the excitement of that day will stay with me forever. In my artwork, the motorcycle becomes a metaphor for life and expression. My goal is to bring riders and non-riders alike into the realm of riding a motorcycle.



I strive to capture the soul of riding. Most riders identify with the joy and the risk. When we swing a leg over, we challenge our mortality." Wes invites non-riders to experience that world of the rider; to feel the emotional connection as well as the attitude that comes from this mixture of joy, fear and freedom. "My hope is that my paintings will convey to non-riders a philosophical view of life as a journey, to make the best of their own ride through life."

Life as a professional artist first began for Wes, who has a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree, as a sign painter and pin stripier, followed by a stint as an artist for Uncle Sam. Wes spent four years in the U.S. Air Force, working as an illustrator for the flight magazine and the flight school, drawing pictures of ailerons and engines, interspersed with pictures of Playboy Bunnies to keep the student pilots awake!

Then came 25 years donated to the construction industry, during which time Wes was more focused on feeding his family than a career as a fine artist. Before his obligations caused him to put down the brush for two decades, he had paintings accepted into the eclectic and long since closed juried Rental Gallery at the Art Institute of Chicago. Currently Wes is a member of the Chicago Artists Coalition, Elmhurst Artists Guild, where he is a past Board Member, and the Addison Art Guild.

Wes introduces his work simply, "This is my art. I hope you enjoy what I see." Indulge yourself in a "Culture Run." Take an afternoon ride out to the gallery and see for yourself. If you come to the Opening Reception, Wes will personally share his passion with you. If you can't make it to the show, you can view some of Wes' paintings online at www.FineArtMotorcycle.com. Admission to the Motorcycle as Metaphor show and the Opening Reception are free on July 20. On other days, admission to the Elmhurst Art Museum, including the Elmhurst Artists Guild Gallery is \$4.



24. S Rolling Meadows Dr. Fond du Lac, WI 54937 ~ 920-921-2344

THROTTLE THE LAKE

www.openroadhd.com

Come celebrate the 105th Open Road Style! August 28-31st

- ~ Taste the flavors of Fond du Lac's finest foods!
- ~ Bike wash
- ~ Stretch your legs, relax and get a massage!
- ~ Need a quick oil change? Stop by for in & out service



- ~ Party Friday night with live music by **Running Blind** 4-8pm
- ~ Open extended hours 8am-8pm
- ~ Cool off with a ride around Lake Winnebago
- ~ Win a Rocker™ C with the Titan Touchdown Club





Wisconsin Street Rods
Saturday & Sunday

Exit west on HWY 23 or Exit west on HWY 151 to frontage road Rolling Meadows