

auto

PATRICK KILLORAN / MATRIX 141

MAY 13 – AUGUST 20, 2000

WADSWORTH ATHENEUM MUSEUM OF ART
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT

patrick killoran

body

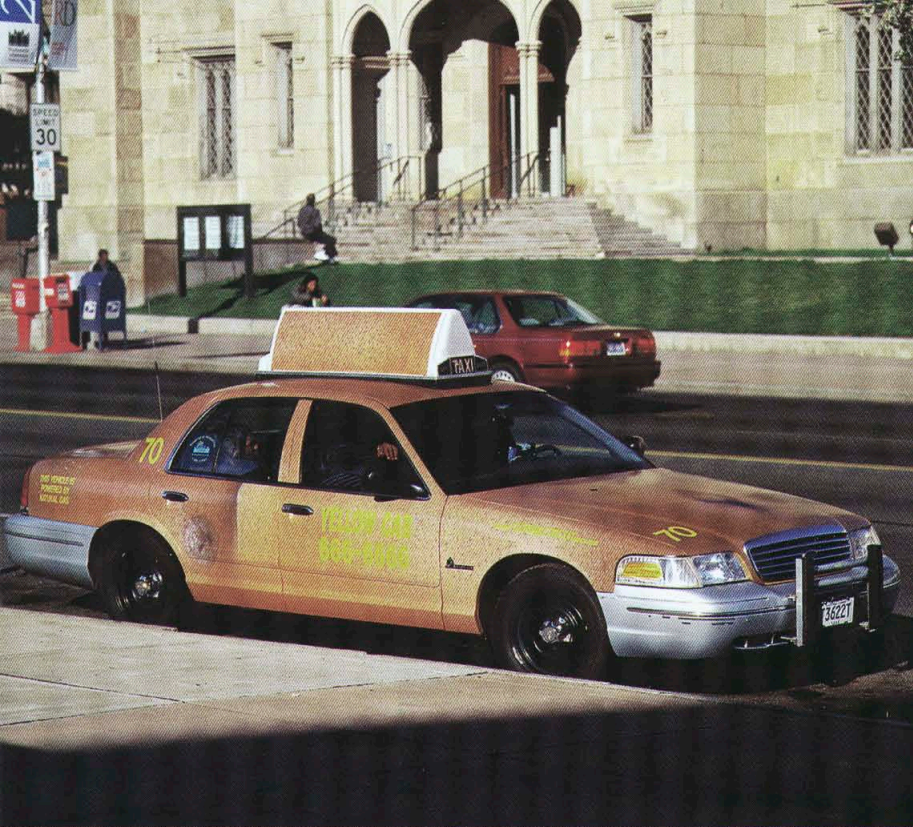




70

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CONNECTICUT





body

During the exhibition, *Autobody*
is available for regular taxi service.

Please call The Yellow Cab
Company at (860) 666 6666 to
request a ride in an *Autobody*.

Please note availability may vary.

THE PHENOMENAL ART OF PATRICK KILLORAN

NICHOLAS BAUME

EMILY HALL TREMAINE CURATOR OF CONTEMPORARY ART

Numerous parallels may be drawn between the automobile and the human body. The former is a complex, powerful and sometimes temperamental transportation machine, in constant need of refueling and maintenance, whose mysterious inner workings are concealed by an armature of metal and glass, painted and polished. It comes in all manner of shapes and sizes, from the sporty to the sophisticated, the compact to the stretch. The latter organism, to which motion is also fundamental, protects an extraordinarily delicate and complicated interior with an outer layer of infinite variety: skin.

Following this line of thought, we very quickly notice that references to the automobile are often decidedly anatomical. In essence, the car has a body, just as we do. Hence Patrick Killoran's *Autobody*: a work of art that uses an image of human skin to conjoin the metaphorical body of the car with the actual body of its driver in the unexpected but entirely appropriate form of the taxi cab.

The *Autobody* project exists both inside and outside the museum. It involves one out-of-service taxi cab "parked" in the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art's Avery Court, and two working taxis on the streets of Hartford. The appearance of each has been transformed by the application of a second skin – in fact, an enlarged photographic image of the skin of the taxi's own driver. Killoran has adapted the process often used in wrap-around bus advertising to wrap an image of the driver's torso onto the cab. The customary elements of the taxi exterior, including the rooftop signage and company logo remain in place. The image is temporary, and can be removed from the vehicle at the conclusion of the exhibition.

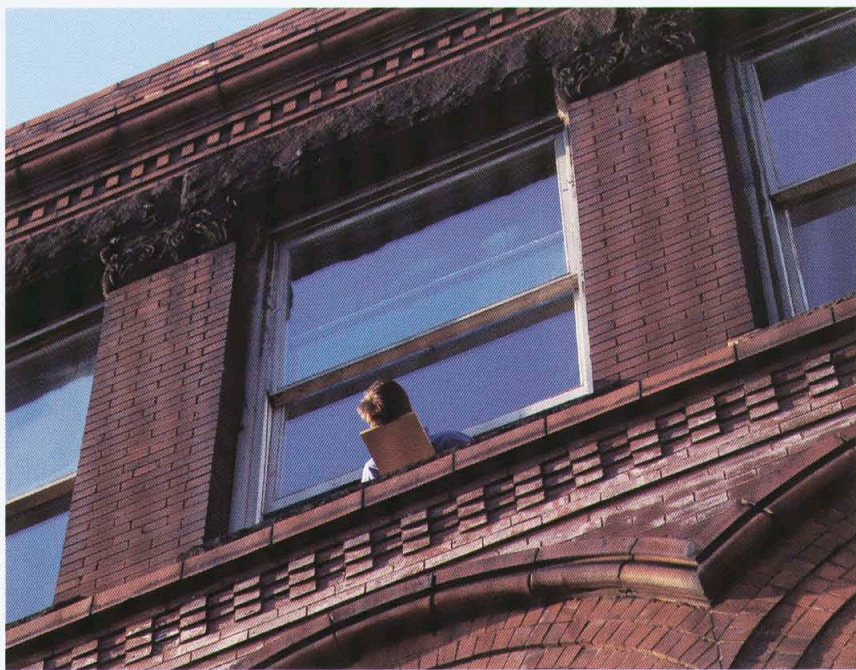
Inside the museum, in addition to the parked taxi, is a short video of the *Autobody* taxi in service, and a computerized monitoring system that enables visitors to track its location at any time. This device, known as a GPS (global positioning system), is normally used by Hartford's Yellow Cab Company to dispatch the nearest cab to an incoming booking.

Despite the parallels already noted between the human and the automotive body, wrapping a car with a magnified image of human skin invites us to also consider how different they are. The pores, follicles, wrinkles and variable colorings of human skin, as well as its softness and vulnerability, contrast with the metallic hardness, industrial standardization and even finish of the car body. Indeed it is perhaps because of these very differences that cars are so appealing as surrogate projections of personal identity: the mid-life crisis hot rod being only the most obvious example.



Yet Patrick Killoran's work is not primarily an investigation of the symbolism or aesthetics of American car culture. His interest resides more keenly in what a philosopher might term "the phenomenology of perception." That is, the way we experience ourselves in space and time. These concerns are evident in Killoran's previous works, including *Observation Deck*, a horizontal platform installed in an upper story window that enables participants to slide their body twenty-one inches outside the building. The world is, quite suddenly, turned upside down. Altered perspectives are also important to *Insight*, a T-shirt that the artist modified in order to function as a camera obscura, using principles of photography to project an inverted image onto the wearer's body. In *Hammocks*, visitors to the 1998 Biennale of Sydney were invited to relax in hammocks that had been connected to a series of ropes, weights and pulleys that harnessed the motion of the water in Sydney Harbor.

As the primary boundary of the body, skin defines our physical limits. Yet the psychological limits of the body are more fluid. Killoran is intrigued by the way inanimate objects can become integral to our perception of psychic space. When we drive a car, there is a sense in which the limits of the human body extend to those of the car body.



We “feel” when we come too close to another vehicle or when we “touch” bumpers in a parking maneuver. *Autobody* makes this expanded space literal by giving the car its own skin, that of the driver.

This play between the limits of interior and exterior space is matched by another ambiguous relationship; that between the public and the private. Killoran is fascinated by social relationships and the ways that objects from everyday life come to be invested with particular meaning and value. The taxi cab is, for Killoran, a particularly interesting social space.

The taxi is a form of public transport, yet whenever it is occupied, becomes a temporarily private space. The taxi is typologically identical to the private vehicle, yet the relationship of driver to passenger is a commercial one. By extending the limits of the driver’s body to the taxi’s exterior, and by exposing the torso, a part of the body usually kept private, Killoran throws open the question of the physical, psychological and social limits of the public sphere.

Considered in these terms, Killoran’s broader project becomes increasingly clear. *Autobody* deploys the naked human form, but has little to do with the art historical



genre of “the nude.” Killoran’s work cannot be described in the terms of conventional painting or sculpture; each project uses materials and ideas that relate in different ways to popular culture. In fact, Killoran has referred to his work as “crateless,” emphasizing the way they are usually ephemeral objects or idea-based works that can be realized in different locations. Insofar as his work is driven by ideas, Killoran might be thought of as a conceptual artist. Yet Killoran’s ideas are not permutational systems or compositional devices. Nor is the artist the subject of the work – it is not Killoran’s own body on the taxi.

Patrick Killoran’s interest lies not in the artist’s studio (in fact he doesn’t have one), but in the realm of real social relationships. Hence the experience of *Autobody* resides as much in the actual use of the working taxi as in the viewing of the project inside the museum. At the conclusion of the exhibition, nothing remains except the experiences and interactions of all those who participated, wittingly or otherwise. This approach might be viewed as an implicit critique of the process whereby art objects become commercial commodities. For Killoran, it remains more simply an affirmation of content over form and, ultimately, of the power of art.

Matrix Lecture

6pm, Thursday, June 1, 2000

Patrick Killoran delivers an informal lecture on his work in The Hartford Courant Room.

Gallery Talk

12 noon, Tuesday, June 20, 2000

"Patrick Killoran: *Autobody*," Judy Kim, Assistant Curator of Contemporary Art

Project Credits

The Yellow Cab Company, Bloomfield, CT:

Marco Henry, President

Scott L. Feron, General Manager

Jasper Mc Bride, Driver and participant

Jose Centeno, Driver and participant

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Delta Air Lines is the preferred airline of the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art.

The Hilton Hartford is the preferred hotel of the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art.

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