

Getting ahead: Artist adds fun to Berkeley streetscape

March 15, 2012 1:20 pm by [Tracey Taylor](#)



Artist artist Lynne-Rachel Altman created the heads that have appeared on old parking meter posts in the Elmwood. All photos: Peter E.V. Allen

Visitors to the Elmwood shopping district on College Avenue may have spotted something a little unusual recently.

While Berkeleyans are no strangers to pop-up street art — be it [yarnbombed lamposts](#) or [front yard sculpture](#) — the heads that have appeared on defunct parking meter posts there are particularly striking. Reminiscent of heads on a stake, with some vaguely sacrificial undertones perhaps?



"Reflector head" has been stolen

The heads, which are made of cement and ceramic, are the work of artist [Lynne-Rachel Altman](#) who lives in the Elmwood and has a studio in East Oakland.

The idea sprang from a conversation Altman had a few months ago with her 14-year old daughter who complained that she couldn't find a place to park her bike on College Avenue because they had removed the parking meter heads when they installed the new parking machines.

"My family joked about reinstalling new heads," says Altman. "I had been sculpting heads for my sintered glass ["empty head" series](#) and decided that I would use my skills to make a few heads for my daughter and her friends to lock their bikes on. I wanted the work to bring joy to people who saw them, as well as to provide a safe place to park a bike."

Altman made two cement, and two ceramic heads in her studio. Because she didn't receive any funds for the project, she primarily used materials she already had on hand. And she incorporated bike parts and imagery so people would know they were for bikes. Altman installed the cement ones a few weeks ago and the ceramic ones last weekend.

Not all the heads have survived. Earlier this week someone ripped the ceramic "reflector head" off from its pole, but Altman plans to make more soon.

"Ideally, I would like to receive funding and some institutional support so I can make them out of metal and weld them to the steel posts," she says. "In the meantime, I am doing what I can to provide additional bike parking and add some joy to the streetscape."



Lynne-Rachel Altman says she's eager to "add some joy to the streetscape"

Altman was one of the artists who applied to create [a piece of public art for the remodeled Claremont Branch library](#). She was not selected, but sees the head installations as going some way to making up for that letdown.

"I was particularly interested in the library project because I grew up in the Elmwood and am now raising my own family here as well. The process of applying for the library project was disappointing, but it made me eager to create something special for my neighborhood."

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Deb • 2 years ago

Fantastic DIY solution to those of us who have lost our bike parking. Thank you. The cynic in me though thinks bike thieves will simply take one crack with a hammer to the ceramic head and be off with the bike. Think I'll wait to use them when the head is metal and welded onto the pole.

^ [v] • Reply • Share ›



Moonmaid50 → Deb • 2 years ago

LR is a wonderful artist & person!!!

1 ^ [v] • Reply • Share ›



Joanne Horn • 2 years ago

sorry, a not so brilliant move by myself

^ [v] • Reply • Share ›



Joanne Horn • 2 years ago

Another brilliant art attack by LR Altman!!

^ [v] • Reply • Share ›



Guest • 3 years ago

Awesome. Congratulations for "using your head".

^ [v] • Reply • Share ›



Guest • 3 years ago

awesome. Congratulations for "using your head".

^ [v] • Reply • Share ›



Bill • 3 years ago

A wonderful idea - I can see dozens of heads mounted on poles. Perhaps some of the current Republican leadership in Congress or other "enlightened" politicians. I mean in cement of course.

^ [v] • Reply • Share ›



Pwll • 3 years ago

Terrific! What a great idea!

^ [v] • Reply • Share ›



BBnet3000 • 3 years ago

Lovely, though as far as I can tell the owner of that bike has made a mistake in locking to it.

^ [v] • Reply • Share ›



Lilas12 • 3 years ago

these are beautiful! Thank goodness Berkeley still has it's artists. They are the ones who keep it Berkeley.

1 ^ [v] • Reply • Share >



Berkeleywalker • 3 years ago

Take a look at the sinister cousins of Altmans meter heads. These automaton-topped "meters" are in Prague and create quite a forbidding scene. Each one is different: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/7...>



1 ^ [v] • Reply • Share >



concerned citizen • 3 years ago

I don't think my imagination is working overtime, but I think Berkeley Public Library should reconsider. These heads are modern-day gargoyles and now that the Claremont branch is almost completed, these head sculptures could be added to the structure. And why not North Branch, West and South branches too? Gargoyles are useful as rain spouts. Read on: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/G...>

^ [v] • Reply • Share >



Lindsey Jones • 3 years ago

I'm glad someone is doing this. I thought of getting various metal sculptors together years ago to

do DIY parking meter toppers after all the bike parking friendly heads were removed, but I never followed through. I call upon the artist community and and crafty welders to just do it. If we wait for city sanctioned art it will take forever and could still be distasteful to many.

^ [v] • Reply • Share ›



TizziLish • 3 years ago

I love this artistic solution to increasing places to park bikes, altho I can easily foresee complaints. There are always complaints when someone just does something.

I have an inelegant solution to add to the bike parking challenge? could the city drill holes a few inches down from the top of the now-abandoned parking poles, so bikers could put their bike locks through the holes?

Keep up the art on top, by all means. Heck, I'd love to see a rotating arts series that allowed artists to art bomb commons space all over the city, so long as the art did not intrude into the right of way of pedestrians or cars and egress/ingress to stores. Why not soak our common space with art? And if it is rotating, if some don't care for the art, well, it will be like the bus downtown: there will be new art in twenty minutes.

Hurrah for this effort.

And, for the record, I don't really like the heads I see here but so what? I love it anyway.

1 ^ [v] • Reply • Share ›



Charles_Siegel → TizziLish • 3 years ago

They could drill holes and use them to attach a cross bar near the top of the meter, so bikes could park at meter posts without worrying that someone could lift the bike off the meter. Or they could put a bulb on the top. Or, easiest of all, they could have left the meter heads on top but removed their innards; I believe they did that in one neighborhood in New York. (Just the holes would not work as well, because bikes and locks are different sizes and not everyone could reach the same holes.)

There is a picture of a bike parked at a meter pole with a head on it, but I doubt if that is safe. I think someone could just lift the bike off, and push the head off as they were doing it.

The city could invite artists to weld sculptures to the tops of meter poles, creating safe bike parking.

^ [v] • Reply • Share ›



The Sharkey → TizziLish • 3 years ago

Have you seen these? Maybe not as practical, but hecka cute.

<http://www.xmarkjenkinsx.com/m...>

^ [v] • Reply • Share ›



Bruce Love • 3 years ago

Brilliant!

^ [v] • Reply • Share ›



Gskalx • 3 years ago

I love these.

^ [v] • Reply • Share ›



D. H. Parks • 3 years ago

I eagerly await the first yarnbombed meterhead.

4 ^ [v] • Reply • Share ›



Eric Panzer → D. H. Parks • 3 years ago

I not-so-eagerly await the first person who complains that they aren't [Pick one or more: City-sanctioned, safe for children, aesthetically pleasing, non-toxic, securely fastened, durable, sufficiently representative of Berkeley's diverse community.]

2 ^ [v] • Reply • Share ›



The Sharkey → Eric Panzer • 3 years ago

I'll be first - I think they're creepy looking.

2 ^ [v] • Reply • Share ›

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