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CALENDAR weekend

IF this Saturday you spot a black Saab next to you on the freeway with clouds of colored smoke escaping from the windows, or a Ford Bronco with what appears to be a luxuriant crop of mushrooms sprouting from the ceiling, don't panic. It's just art.

Sonja Vordermaier, a 33-year-old German installation artist, gave 15 artists, including herself, a simple assignment: Make something that fits inside your own car and says something about the role of the car in a sprawling American city like Los Angeles.

The smoke-spewing Saab, the fungus-infested Bronco and 13 other cars — including a Honda CRV with a 90-foot-long picnic-ready Afghan blanket and a Volkswagen Beetle inscribed with the thoughts of ordinary Angelenos — will form a “Carmada,” leaving en masse from the Schindler House in West Hollywood. Cars will gradually peel off and go their separate ways, reconvening at a downtown hangar at the end of the day for a party and a chance for the public to view the projects.

The same cars that the artists use every day as transportation have been transformed into mobile art installations that make statements about Angelenos' complicated relationships with the machines they spend so much time inside of.

“It's definitely a car culture and tight in space. There's barely any greenery. We're crammed in around the car culture as opposed to the other way around,” said “Carmada” artist Dawn Kasper, 29, who planted a real garden in the bed of her pickup truck because she, like many young Angelenos, can afford a car but not a house with a yard.

In her native Germany, Vordermaier had been thinking about doing a car-based installation project, but “Carmada” didn't fully take shape until a trip to Los Angeles, when she noticed that Americans relate differently to their cars than do Europeans.

When people spend hours each day in their cars, sometimes eating there, applying makeup there or storing their belongings there, the cars can become almost like a second residence.

“Here the car is more of a psychological

15 artists reinvent their wheels

The MAK Center takes a new look at L.A. car culture and the traveling exhibit.

By CINDY CHANG
Special to The Times

room than for Europeans, who just use it like a machine. Here it's a living space,” Vordermaier said.

On the basis of her “Carmada” proposal, Vordermaier was awarded an artist's residency at the MAK Center for Art and Architecture at the Schindler House. For the last six months, she has been living at the Schindler-designed Mackey Apartment House and recruiting local artists to participate in “Carmada,” as well as designing her own “Carmada” project. (The Bronco overrun by mushrooms — representing the rather creepy triumph of an organic invasion over a life-

less pile of metal — is hers.)

For MAK Center director Kimberli Meyer, the way that “Carmada” blends with its surroundings — many of the cars are indistinguishable from ordinary cars at first glance — is a comment on Los Angeles' decentralized nature, which makes it hard to figure out where the action is.

“What's kind of wild is that they start at one place, then they wind up in a parking lot, wind up in traffic, and it's hard to understand which of the thousands of cars on the road have art in them. What's weird about it is that the show itself is almost invisible,” Meyer said.



TRUCKIN': Dawn Kasper's “Carmada” contribution is a real garden planted in the apartment dweller's only plot of land.

‘Carmada’

What and where: Cars disperse from Schindler House (835 N. Kings Road, West Hollywood) at 11 a.m. and reconvene at a downtown hangar (1168 E. 5th St., L.A.) at 7 p.m. for a party. Photographs and video will be on view at Schindler House from Sept. 6 to 10.

When: Saturday

Info: www.carmada.org; (323) 651-1510



OFFERING SOUND TRANSPORTATION: Nicole C. Russell is accepting sign-ups for rides in a car that will feature an odd soundtrack.

SOME of the artists have unique agendas for their Saturday afternoon drives. Allyson Spelacy plans to retrace the path of British architectural historian Reyner Banham in his 1972 documentary “Reyner Banham Loves Los Angeles.” Nicole C. Russell will pick up people at their homes (she's accepting sign-ups at www.carmada.org) and take them for a ride in a silver Saturn equipped with a peculiar soundtrack.

In addition to Saturday's daytime driving and evening viewing, photographs and video of the “Carmada” projects will be on display at the MAK Center from Sept. 6 to 10, when the three other MAK artists in residence will also present their projects.

“When all the cars are parked together, it's like a big exhibit, but everyone is still dependent on himself,” Vordermaier said. “They'll scatter like a storm, be like little fish in traffic, then they'll merge again.”

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