

Gear

Bicycles are getting artsy smartys

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Striking electric/manual bike with anti-theft electronics and an arch-shaped aluminum frame swooping from hub to hub, which was originally sketched 20 years ago by Pasadena Art Center alum Marcus Hays. (Pi Mobility)

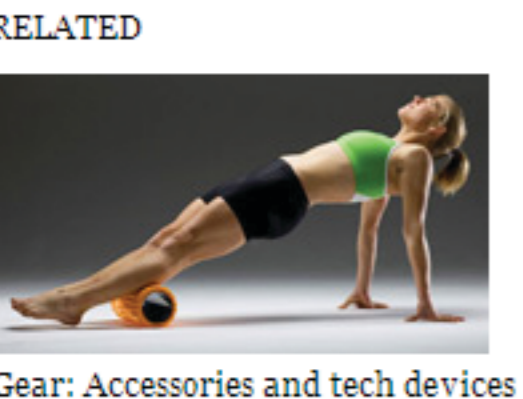
By Roy Wallack
Gear
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Creative bicycles, long a favorite subject of student industrial design contests, are busting out of art college and onto the streets. This year, there's been an explosion of creative frame designs across the cycling spectrum — road, mountain, electric, commuter — that are nothing short of sculpture on wheels. And unlike a lot of artsy inventions that are good only for mounting on a wall, these two-wheeled wonders not only work but also offer some innovative functional capabilities not seen on bikes with the century-old diamond-shaped frame.

Arc de Triumph

ROY WALLACK

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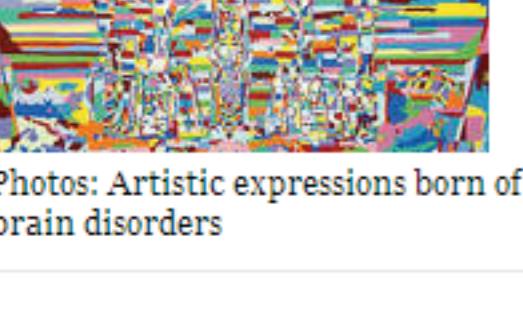
Photo: Tortola RoundTail



Photo: Biomega Boston/Puma Disko



Photo: Pops Fabrication 8 Series



Photos: Artistic expressions born of brain disorders

Pi Mobility PiCycle Sport Touring: Striking electric/manual bike with anti-theft electronics and an arch-shaped aluminum frame swooping from hub to hub, which was originally sketched 20 years ago by Pasadena Art Center alum Marcus Hays.

Likes: Stable, fast, exhilarating and attention-getting. Great for hilly commuting and recreational riding. The front-hub 750-watt motor, powered by lithium ion batteries stuffed into the arch in the seat area, has a 20-mile range at 20 miles per hour on flat ground without pedaling. Pedaling extends range to 30 miles and pushes speed above 30 mph. Batteries charge in 3 1/2 hours. Can also be pedaled motor-free. The \$5,000 model is equipped with "PiFi," an embedded Wi-Fi that monitors battery life and activates a built-in theft-recovery service that updates its location on your smartphone.

Dislikes: Very heavy at 60 pounds (but unnoticed with the motor on).

Price: \$3,000 (single-speed) and \$5,000 (eight-speed). (866) 442-1928; <http://www.picycle.com>.

Circular logic

Tortola RoundTail: Steel-framed road bike that replaces a conventional bike's rear "triangle" (the chain stays, seat stays and seat tube) with two circular rings that purportedly absorb more shock by flexing.

Likes: A solid, fast, comfy ride with head-turning looks. In my hour on it, I didn't detect more vibration dampening than on a carbon-frame road bike, but Canadian inventor Lou Tortola says the design has 60 times the vibration absorption of a normal frame. It seems logical that the deflection of rings would dissipate more shock than straight tubes that go directly to the seat from the cranks and wheel. It stays clean, as the lowered chain stays do not become scratched by the chain.

Dislikes: None.

Price: \$2,250 for frame and fork only. (866) 951-3339; <http://www.roundtail.us>.

Batmobile bike

Pops Fabrication 8 Series: Low rider-inspired steel flat-bar road bike with cowcatcher-like down-tube frame by celebrated San Jose bike designer Matt Rodriguez. Includes eight-speed drive train and parts customization by Jerry Huynh of Ladera Ranch in Orange County.

Likes: A fun, comfortable, durable, attention-getting blend of art and function. The burly 6-pound chromoly steel frame is designed to survive urban potholes, not for raw speed, yet I found it quite fast and nimble. Includes high-quality Phil Wood eccentric bottom bracket, which allows easy tightening or loosening of the chain with an Allen wrench, convenient when fixing a flat on a single-speed.

Dislikes: None.

Price: \$875 for frame only; \$1,760 for single-speed with Phil Wood wheel set; \$2,100 for 20-speed with Shimano 105 drive train. Eight-speed custom model shown is \$2,100. (408) 588-0000; <http://www.popsfabrication.com>.

Theft-proof fold-up

Biomega Boston/Puma Disko: Slick, innovative fold-up urban commuter bike from Denmark that replaces the down-tube with a double heavy-gauge wire cable that can be partially detached to secure the bike around a pole or tree via a built-in key lock. (Biomega makes the bikes, but Puma sells the tri-color version.)

Likes: Very comfortable upright riding position that uses tall handlebars and 24-inch wheels (2 inches shorter than on mountain bikes). Designed to fit in a trunk or a subway car, it quickly folds in half by releasing a lever on the top-tube. The clever down-tube cable and integrated lock work quick and effectively to protect the bike from thieves; if the wire is cut, the bike becomes unridable. A new cable repairs it.

Dislikes: None.

Price: \$1,000 for single-speed or \$1,250 for nine-speed. (617) 488-0013. In the Los Angeles area, try dealers Rolling Cowboys at (323) 570-0066 or Sporteve at (310) 838-6588. <http://www.biomega.com> and <http://www.us.puma-bikes.com>.

Wallack is the author of "Bike for Life: How to Ride to 100."

roywallack@aol.com

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