

**MAKE MODEL MARK**

GREG JONES

The subtle contours of our cars broadcast an entire set of socio-economic messages about wealth, class, and taste. What is captured and presented in this series of photographs is this system of differentiation, one that is readable today by anyone living in the West. Oddly, this semiotic system operates today against a backdrop of an automotive industry that manufactures products of increasing homogeneity, both in terms of form and color. In 2004, for example, roughly a third of all cars produced in North America, South America, Europe, and Asia were silver or gray. These colors, reminiscent of the stainless steel and the utilitarian gray paint of industrial machines, evoke the *idea* of utility, as in the *de rigueur* stainless steel kitchen appliances of luxury homes. Yet, in both cases, this gesture toward functionality remains at heart an aesthetic one.

Within these theatrics of utility, the smallest differentiating details are imbued with ever greater meaning—the work once done by exaggerated fins and extravagant colors is now accomplished with the merest curve of metal and rubber. It is possible to imagine a genuinely utilitarian approach to designing cars in the future, but this would mean not only transcending our current consumer attitudes but in fact a wholesale reassessment of our modes of organization and production. To a viewer living in this hypothetical future, the images from my 2005 series “Make Model Mark” would be illegible, except as historical artifacts of a society in which such minor differences once held enormous significance.

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opposite: 406

overleaf left: *Lupo*

overleaf right: *CLK320*