

THE ART OF MOTORING

There's no denying that a high-performance automobile is in itself a work of art, but a variety of vehicles are finding other roads into a range of art forms. Giselle Whiteaker explores the relationship between cars and art.



Rear view of the BMW M3 GT2 Art Car by Jeff Koons



Cadillac Ranch in Amarillo, Texas



Carhenge, near Alliance, Nebraska

In the middle of a cow pasture along Interstate 40 near Amarillo, Texas, a row of ten Cadillacs rise from the ground. The vehicles are half-buried, nose-down, in the dirt, supposedly at the same angle as Egypt's Great Pyramid of Giza. They are a colourful mass, coated in graffiti, which is added to by the hour by visitors who make their way to this somewhat obscure roadside location. The Cadillacs have been more or less in the same location since

1974. Called *Cadillac Ranch*, the cars are presented as a public art installation – a rural sculpture created by artist Hudson Marquez and architects Chip Lord and Doug Michels. They've now been in the ground as art longer than they were on the road as cars.

This is just one example of many, where cars have driven into the art world, whether it's in folk art, high art or as moving canvases. It's not all old, beaten-up wrecks,

either. In the Museum of Old and New Art, a somewhat eclectic art collection held in Tasmania which is also the largest privately funded museum in Australia, an overstuffed red Porsche Carrera commands a dramatic location on one of the darkened floors. The Porsche is a creation by Austrian artist, Edwin Wurm in a critique of consumer culture and the Western obsession with material objects. It's also a sad, yet novel, view of the sleekest of cars. Entitled *Fat Car*, everything about the sporty vehicle is obese; from its bulging leather seats to its sagging, puffy body.

Back in America, just north of Alliance, Nebraska, a group of vintage American automobiles rise in a familiar shape. Created by American artist Jim Reinders, who spent some time in England, 39 automobiles painted grey have been erected in a formation that assumes the same proportions as Stonehenge. The sculpture is a memorial to Reinders' father who once lived on the farm where *Carhenge* now stands. It's frighteningly accurate, evoking a sense of déjà vu for anyone who has been to both places.

Less mystical is the miniature of *Carhenge* found in The World's Largest Collection of the World's Smallest Versions of the World's Largest Things. This travelling attraction's home base is the tiny town of Lucas, Kansas, but more often the museum-bus is found tootling along the highways and byways. The creation of artist Erika Nelson, the brightly painted museum contains all manner of miniatures, copies of the quirky 'world's largest' attractions, including the plate-sized copy of *Carhenge*.



Mammoth made from strips of car tyres in Slab City, California

America certainly has its fair share of these kinds of art installations, including Swetsville Zoo, a collection of animals in Fort Collins, Colorado, built by ex-farmer Bill Swets from car parts and other machinery. Head into the Californian desert to an off-the-grid community called Slab City and if you look hard enough you'll find a woolly mammoth made entirely of shredded truck tyres. Car art is not limited to the U.S., though – Miina Akkijyrkka of Finland specialises in car-part cow sculptures; French-born American artist Arman's *Long Term Parking* sees sixty automobiles stacked in concrete in the Parc de sculpture Le Montcel in Jouy-en-Josas, France; Australian artist James Corbett sculpted a sheep from spark plugs. The list is endless.

Even BMW got in on the act with the BMW Art Car Project, introduced by French racecar driver and auctioneer Hervé Poulain, who wanted to invite an artist to create a canvas on an automobile. In 1975, he commissioned American artist Alexander Calder to paint the first BMW Art Car, a BMW 3.0 CSL which Poulain raced in the 1975 Le Mans endurance race.

Since that humble beginning, many other renowned artists have used a BMW as their canvas, including David Hockney, Jenny Holzer, Roy Lichtenstein, Frank Stella, and Andy Warhol. To date, 17 official BMW Art Cars make up the collection. "In the beginning the cars were raced. Since then, some of the Art Cars have been used in advertisements to show that BMW is a player in the arts," says Thomas Girst, who has been in charge of the BMW Art Cars project since 2004.

Of course, it's not only known artists who express themselves via cars. There's an entire art car movement, largely centred on America, with the cars used as mobile expressions of the artistic need to create. When Erika Nelson is not driving her museum bus she drives an art car, complete with carousel horses in the truck bed and tarred toy dinosaurs on the bonnet, with the inscription "Burning dinosaur bones." "You have to know how the law works," Nelson explains, pointing to the sheaf of arrows poking out of the tail of the vehicle. "For example, the ends of these have to be painted red. Then you're fine."

A car artist who takes the time to read the rules, at least in America, can find plenty of ways to express themselves legally through their vehicles.

It may seem an odd concept, but even the less artistically inclined send a message through their choice of vehicle. So whether it's cars as artworks, cars as canvases or cars as our chosen mode of transport, we use our automobiles as expressions of ourselves. Some just have more to say than others.



Erika Nelson's art car



BMW Art Car by Jeff Koons