

CLASSIC DRIVER

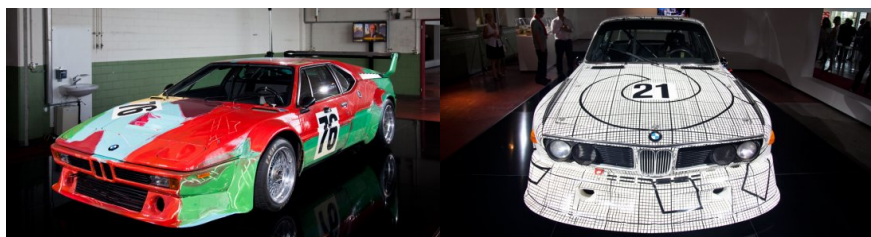
Hervé Poulain and his BMW Art Cars in Zurich

Lead

In 1975, he commissioned the first BMW Art Car, establishing a powerful link between motorsport and art. Last week, Hervé Poulain exhibited his legendary Art Cars in Zurich for one night only – so Classic Driver went along...

In the mid-70s, at the height of the oil crisis, the idea of a crossover between cars and art was almost unthinkable. Yet French racing driver and auctioneer Hervé Poulain saw fit to bring these two worlds together, commissioning American artist Alexander Calder to paint a 3.0 CSL (which incidentally had a 3.5-litre engine) for its campaign at the 1975 24 Hours of Le Mans. The eye-catching car was an instant hit, and the following year saw Poulain line up at La Sarthe in a 'graph paper' CSL designed by Frank Stella. In 1977, a BMW 320i Turbo received the pop-art treatment from Roy Lichtenstein and, in 1979, Andy Warhol famously daubed a Group 4 BMW M1 in his unkempt wisps of wonder. The BMW Art Car phenomenon was alive, the most recent form of which was realised by the Jeffs Koons M3 GTR that took part in the 2010 Le Mans race.

Zurich welcomes art legends aplenty



Six of the famous rolling canvasses – the first four cars and the M3 GTR being joined by Jenny Holzer's 'Protect me from what I want' V12 LMR – were the star guests at a one-night-only exhibition held by BMW Switzerland at the future Meilenwerk, soon to open in Horgen on the shores of Lake Zurich. Also present was Hervé Poulain, today an auctioneer and co-owner of French auction house Artcurial. Describing his time behind the wheel of the 750HP Calder-CSL of 1975, Maître Poulain philosophised: "Speed is something noble, she gives us life." We haven't heard a better justification for motorsport in a long time.

Photos: Jan Baedeker for Classic Driver © 2014

Gallery

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