

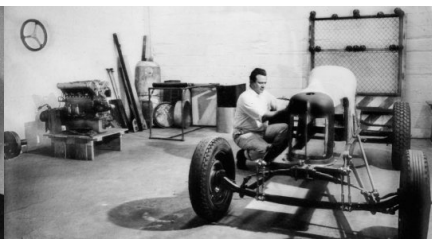
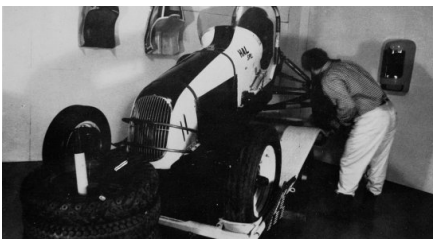
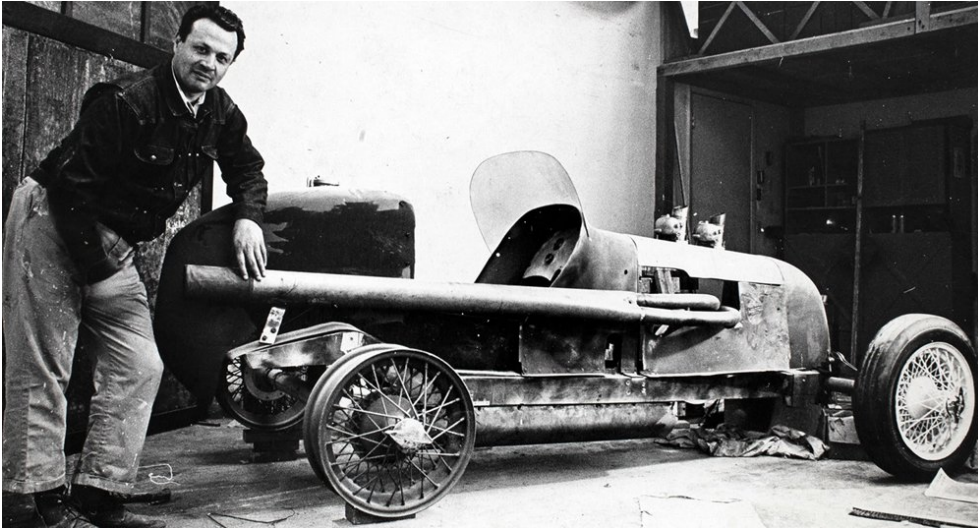
CLASSIC DRIVER

From 'Monuments Man' to dirt track racer - the tale of Salvatore Scarpitta

Lead

If anyone tries to tell you that cars aren't works of art they have probably never heard of Salvatore Scarpitta, whose career as a painter and sculptor was heavily influenced by a lifelong love of automobiles...

An automotive education



The first time Salvatore Scarpitta wielded a paintbrush as a child, it wasn't to daub colour on scraps of paper but to apply competition numbers to the V8 'midget racers' that held him in thrall during visits to California's Legion Ascot speedway races. Born in Manhattan in 1919, Scarpitta was raised in Los Angeles after his sculptor father was commissioned to create bas-reliefs to decorate the city's stock exchange. It was the 1930s, and Scarpitta had arrived just in time to become thoroughly transfixed by California's blossoming automobile culture, which he embraced by attending race meetings and getting to know the drivers and mechanics.



"When I was a kid, I hung around garages in California and I was in ecstasy," he was quoted as saying in a 1986 art journal

interview. "I loved the smells, the noises, every little detail of that world..."

Scarpitta returned to his ancestral Sicily at the age of 18 and later graduated from Rome's Academy of Fine Arts. Along the way, however, he served out the war in the U.S. Navy and became a member of the celebrated 'Monuments Men' tasked with recovering art stolen by the Nazis.

Back to the Big Apple



It wasn't until 1958 that he returned to New York, where the Leo Castelli gallery staged the first solo exhibition of the wrapped and bandaged works made from torn-up strips of canvas glued to frames that had become Scarpitta's signature – but the following year saw him turn to the world of motor racing for influence.

Harking back to his visits to California's tracks, he began incorporating racing car parts such as harnesses and exhaust pipes into his pieces, soon progressing to making sculptural replicas of cars he had seen at race meetings. One of his first was a reproduction of the Rajo Jack Special, a car named after the first African American racer in the United States.



It wasn't until Scarpitta was in his mid-60s, however, that he built and raced a fully functioning dirt tracker called the Sal

Scarpitta Special, after which he formed his own team – sponsored by the Leo Castelli Gallery.

Scarpitta at Art Basel 2016



From Thursday to Sunday (June 16-19), visitors to the Tornabuoni Art stand at Art Basel will be able to see an example of one of Scarpitta's self-built racers in the form of the Sal Arduin V8 special, together with his 'Racing Car 21' (a life-sized painting on wood), and an equally monumental installation entitled 'Sling Shot (Kenny Adam's Eve)' which Scarpitta created in 1996 in honour of one of his team drivers, Kenny Adams.

The works can be found on the Tornabuoni Art stand in Hall 2, Booth C4 between 11am and 7pm. A talk about the artist and the influence of cars on his work will take place on Saturday at 3pm in the Hall One auditorium.

Photos: Courtesy Archivio Salvatore Scarpitta under the direction of Luigi Sansone, Milan / Tornabuoni Art Gallery

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