



JAGUAR JOURNAL™

Official Magazine of the Jaguar Clubs of North America

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Car Art: Browsing and Commissioning



A different art – perfection on wheels?
Mike Cook solved lump mystery
Roger Wright odyssey

JAGUAR JOURNAL

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Art on the Move

Part 2 – Shifting into high (art) gear

By Richard MacLean

The idea for this two-part story grew out of the discovery of an original watercolor of one of the most famous Jaguars in history: the XKSS driven by Steve McQueen. Part 1 in the May/June issue of *Jaguar Journal* explored its origins from the perspective of the individuals associated with it, including Steve's wife at the time, Neile Adams McQueen. This second part describes the factors involved in commissioning 'car art,' which is a very personal thing. Photos expose reality, but art can convey emotions and memories that cannot be expressed through the exactness of the lens. Several artists explain what you should know beforehand. Finally, I describe the strange – some may say bizarre – coincidences that materialized while writing this story.

WERE MISTAKES MADE?

Part 1 referred to watercolors of the race cars owned by Bill Leyden, a Los Angeles TV game show host. One depicted the XKSS he sold to Steve McQueen. It was painted by Robert Genn, a student artist enrolled in the Art Center School, who would

later achieve fame as a Canadian landscape artist and author.

A detail on this watercolor that may have drawn reader scrutiny is the XKSS's vintage: 1959. XKSS aficionados know that this is incorrect; it is 1957. In addition, the XKSS had a blueish tone. According to factory records and Neile McQueen's recollection, it was "cream" before Steve repainted it British Racing Green. In addition, there is a 1959 photo of Bill in this OSCA with Steve McQueen kneeling next to its flawlessly painted 77 racing number, yet 277 was used on this important painting in his NBC office.

Bill Leyden was a busy man and these details may not have mattered, or maybe they were purposely done. We will never know. But they illustrate that one must work closely with the artist to get exactly what one wants, which is one of the main reasons for this article.

DEFINING THE MEANS

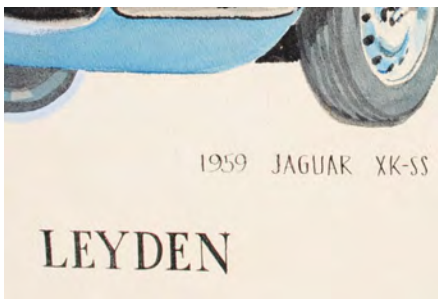
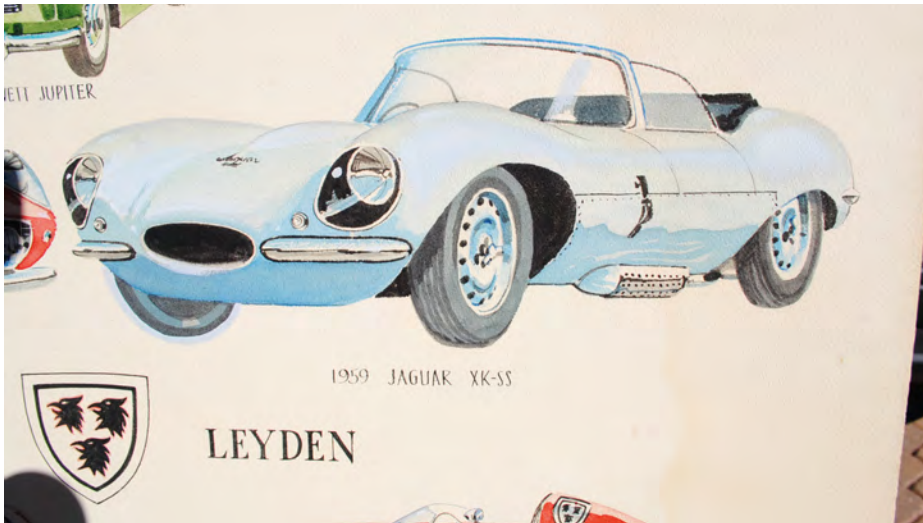
For an inexpensive image of your Jaguar that gives the illusion of art, there are 'photos on canvas'

at your local Costco. An upgrade would be to upload a photo to an 'image painting' business to have it replicated in oil by someone you will never meet, but is this really art? If budgets are tight, working with an art student or a local artist is much better than uploading photos to an art mill in cyberspace. Other options are described in the side box, Dos and Don'ts. At the risk of sounding snobbish: if you can afford a picturesque Jaguar, you can afford a real deal painting. And just as important, you should experience the steps needed to obtain authentic art.

Artist Cody DeLong describes this process, "Commissioning a painting can be a rewarding experience. It's a collaborative effort between you and the artist that requires patience, communication and faith. Faith, because you and the artist have visual ideas for the drawing which are never identical – but you have faith that these can be merged into something extraordinary. The more you like the artist's style, the easier it is to give them a little more creative license and respond to their suggestions."



XKSS art vs. photography. Which is better? The answer may be more than just a question of personal taste. Art is frozen in time, setting and dimension but subject to endless interpretation. Photos of an object can be taken over and over. The Petersen Museum photos is exact, the Lowerson painting is a mirror image.



A portion of the original March 1960 watercolor of Bill Leyden's racers. The 1957 cream-colored XKSS was sold to Steve McQueen around 1960. Note that the manufacture date and color do not match the actualities. These and other issues with the drawing might have been avoided if Leyden had worked closely with the artist. Some historians talk of Steve having owned two XKSS cars.

Cost is related to experience, reputation and the size and complexity of the finished work. For example, adding people to the image will likely require a larger work, since painting a face the size of a quarter is difficult and time-consuming. It requires an artist with extensive figurative training and as Cody states, "An artist who has spent a lifetime developing their skills, sensitivity and vision... well, that will be evident on the canvas and in the cost."

The artists highlighted in this article are internationally recognized. Arthur Benjamins, for example,

sells his works at auctions such as Barrett-Jackson. He adds an amusing perspective to the perceived cost of art: "Car bidders and owners are notoriously practical. I recall an exhibitor at one of my first shows in 1983 expressing interest in one of my large older originals on which I had placed a very low price to sell it quickly. When I asked him some days later if he still wanted to buy it, he swept his hand towards the old race car he wanted to sell, bleating that my painting equaled the cost of four tires! These days, the value of some of my originals can easily equal the cost of a full race engine – but then again, none of my paintings will self-combust, burst, blow up, crash or catch fire!"

Let's admit it. The price to value ratio of art can be twisted within the car aficionado world. A \$5,000 OEM part for your Jaguar? Not a problem! Original art of this car for \$3,000. OMG!

... AND THE CONCEPT BEHIND THE ART

Most commissioned art starts with photographs of the car and backgrounds with or without the car. The main concept sometimes cannot be easily photographed and may simply start as a mental image like Bill Leyden's idea of a 'Scuderia' or stable



Art can radiate a feeling beyond just a car's image. 'Speed!' screams from artist Bill Patterson's drawing of the Cunningham Lightweight E-Type that ran at Sebring and Le Mans in 1963. Terry Larson owns the watercolor, having received it for winning the "Spirit of Monterey" award in 2011.

of his Italian cars. Another example is artist Bill Patterson's drawing of the Cunningham Lightweight E-Type that ran at Sebring and Le Mans in 1963. It radiates speed. Terry Larson received the watercolor after winning the 'Spirit of Monterey' award in 2011.

Artists are often inspired by what they see and turn that into a memorable image, such as artist Harold Zabady's 'Iconic Beauty.' He explains, "Every year, I attend the import/kits car show in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. I always take my Canon digital camera in hopes that I will see something inspiring. I was walking up from the parking area when I spotted this Jaguar E-Type for sale. I thought, 'How could anyone let such a beautiful car fall in such disrepair?' I always wondered who purchased this car and what it looks like now." The painting is now part of a US-wide traveling exhibition, 'Realism and Hyperrealism in Contemporary Automobile and Motorcycle Painting,' through 2023.



'Night on the Town.' Some commissioned paintings are left up to the artist's imagination. In this case, artist Harold Zabady thought the XK120 radiated sophistication. What better setting than in front of the Cherry Lane Theatre, the oldest continuously running off-Broadway theater in New York City.



Few car artists have the resources and reputation for displaying their work at major car shows and auctions. Here artist Arthur Benjamins is being interviewed at the January 2021 Barrett Jackson Auction in Scottsdale, Arizona.

Harold continues, "Lenny Fiore gave me complete freedom to choose the setting that fit the cars from his collection that he commissioned me to paint. My idea was to take his XK120 out for a theater production in the summer, top-down, winding through the back roads as the exhaust note of the Jaguar permeates the air. 'Night Out' was the result."



Artist Harold Zabady created 'Iconic Beauty' because he was fascinated by how something with so much potential beauty could be in such sad shape. The painting now is in a traveling exhibit, 'Realism and Hyperrealism in Contemporary Automobile and Motorcycle Painting,' shown through 2023.

With art, it is all about the story and the emotions behind it. Arthur Benjamins amplifies this point, "My experience is that clients love a story to go with the painting they're interested in. The fact is that long after the price is forgotten, the story still lingers."

Yes, paintings can be portraits with a near-total focus on the car rather than the setting. Arthur provides an example in his 'XKO 646.' This can be especially true if the painting must fit the specifications for the commercial end-use. For instance, Moss Motors used a painting by artist John Lowerson of an E-Type for their parts catalog in 2019. John explains, "Usually my work needs to reflect something of the landscape with the vehicle as an 'incident.' Even when I work on a particular commission, clients tend to want to set the scene and sometimes specify a location and a title which I apply in this case: 'With that Little Town Flirt.' It had to be cropped for the catalog and, as a result, loses some, but not all, of the purpose."

David Stuursma, marketing manager for Moss Motors Ltd, explains why they may choose art over stock photos. "Selecting cover art for our parts catalogs is fun. Mostly we use

photography, but occasionally, we select automotive artists such as John, whose work our customers might enjoy. We believe that an artist's interpretation of a 'motoring moment' can resonate deeply and spark our customers' imagination. So, I suppose you can say that Moss Motors supplies the means, or should I say the parts, to turn inspirations into reality."

THE PROCESS

Step one in creating an image that matters requires focused thought as to what story you want to tell or what mood to convey to the viewer. The preceding examples deliver messages, "I'm fast; I have racing buddies; I need a home and some help; I'm sophisticated and like the theater." A more limited message is, "I'm a beautiful Jaguar."

Once you figure this out, it may be time to pick someone who can deliver this message. This step can be a challenge, especially if you are on a limited budget. Arthur summarizes today's artist landscape, "The last ten years has seen an unbelievable influx of new 'artists' who believe that their path towards riches is to pick up a brush. The world is overrun with superb and true artists who achieve very little or no success because their selling and social media skills are lamentably lacking, or they are happy to stay in the background. On the other hand, there are 'artists' that have little talent and merely copy from photographs, but who sell non-stop." In other words, "caveat emptor."

My partner, Rita, and I wanted to say in a commissioned painting of my '67 XKE... "Road trip!" The emphasis was on the road (i.e., the landscape), not the roadster. We wanted the Jaguar parked near interesting rock formations and far-off mountains.



Some customers choose to commission a painting of a particular part of their Jaguar. In this Arthur Benjamins example, the focus is on the front and badges of an XK120 (tag changed for privacy here).

That’s why we selected the Arizona landscape artist Cody DeLong, who is one of less than two dozen artists invited to the ‘Celebration of Art’ event, a landscape extravaganza in the Grand Canyon. Prescott’s Granite Dells with Arizona’s San Francisco peaks visible in the distance met the setting essentials. Photos were taken. Cody drew a concept sketch. We followed the dos and don’ts. We are happy with the outcome and especially the process.

Working with Cody was fun. The oil painting came to life through phone calls, meetings in Sedona and Cottonwood, Arizona, sketches, exchanges of ideas and revisions. That experience would have been lost if we were ‘working’ with some unknown artist with no established portfolio. Furthermore, if the artist’s track record is proven (i.e., you trust their style and quality), these interactions do not necessarily have to be face-to-face. For example, UK-based John Lowerson describes an interaction “across the pond” with a customer in the States who envisioned a painting of his Austin Healey Sprite Mk I.

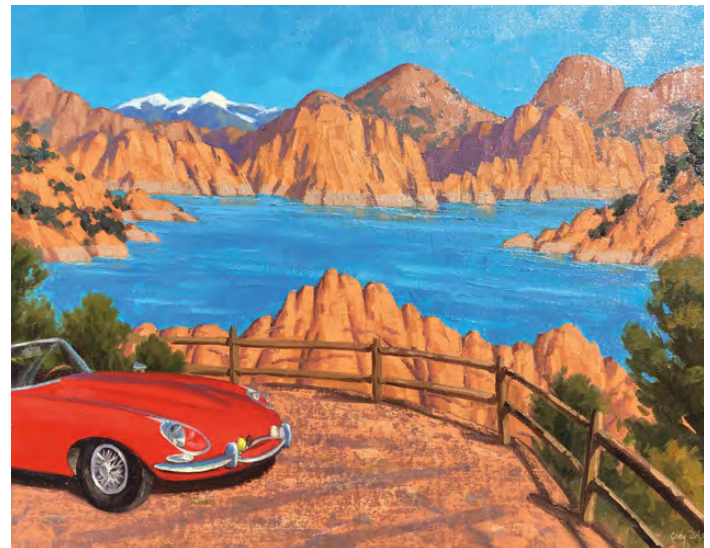
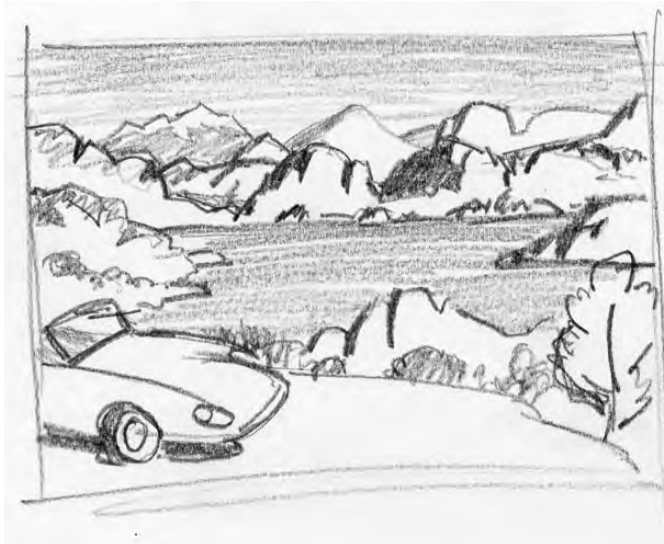
“He wanted a watercolor with his ‘Frogeye’ in a street in England based on the blending of a black and white 1975 photo of him with an earlier Sprite and a 2020 photo of him with his latest car only with a superimposed ‘70s vintage British number plate. I

solved the problem of colorizing the background by using a Street View from Google Maps. What had started as two strangers bumping into each other from opposite sides of the Atlantic swiftly turned into a positive relationship as I got to grips with his hopes.”

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These articles would not have been possible without the support of the following individuals and artists (in alphabetical order):

- Leslie Kendall, chief historian at the Petersen Automotive Museum;
- Terry Larson, classic Jaguar collector and restorer;
- Pat and Bill Leyden III, sons of Bill Leyden Jr.;
- Neile Adams McQueen, performer and first wife of Steve McQueen;
- Steve Moyer, publicist for Neile McQueen;
- Alexander Petrucelli, senior account executive with Kahn Media;
- David Stuursma, marketing manager for Moss Motors Ltd. 🇸🇬



The commissioning process starts with an overall concept and photographs of essential elements that deliver the message to the viewer. The artist (Cody Long in this case) then amalgamates these ideas into one or more rough sketches to ensure that everyone is on the right track before beginning the work.

The author commissioned artist Cody DeLong to paint ‘Road Trip!’ in 2021. The chosen focus was on the landscape of the Granite Dells in Arizona, not the author’s ‘67 XKE roadster. At this overlook in Watson Lake, the San Francisco Peaks can be seen 70 miles to the northeast on a clear day. Thus, the image draws one’s attention to the mountains in the distance and the imagined road to get there.

Source: Richard MacLean.

<i>Artist</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Available Through</i>
Arthur Benjamins	Peoria, Arizona	www.1pilgrimstudio.com
Bill Patterson	Bulverde, Texas	www.billpattersonart.com
Cody DeLong	Porto, Portugal	www.codydelong.com
Harold Zabady	Camp Hill, Pennsylvania	www.hzabady.com & www.plusonegallery.com
John Lowerson	Tyneside, UK	www.saatchiart.com

THE DOS AND DON'TS OF COMMISSIONING ART

Follow these basic rules for commissioned art, and you should get what you want. If you buy finished art, many of these rules still apply. The key is to understand the message/story behind the art and the limits and advantages of the medium in which it was done.

DOS

- Put a lot of thought into the message the art should deliver to the viewer. Write it down and be specific.
- Find an artist who meets your needs and can deliver the message and the medium (e.g., acrylics, oils, ink and watercolor) that you want.
- Review the artist's portfolio to ensure it matches your needs. Then, tell them why they are being considered.
- If you cannot find a local artist that can deliver what you want and cannot afford internationally recognized artists such as the ones in this article, consider MadeMay or Artwork Archive Discovery as a possibility. Proceed cautiously.
- Provide some Internet or stock images to help define what you are looking for in style and medium.

- If you have in your mind a location where it will go in your house/garage/man cave/she shack, provide some photographs to the artist. Then, make a blank cardboard cutout of the framed art you envision and see how it fits into the surroundings.
- Require a formal contract. This keeps the process professional and sets the parameters and expectations for timing, cost, deposits, reviews and revisions. If they do not have one, make one.
- Expect to pay for a detailed sketch and, typically, a deposit of 50% upfront.
- Discuss the size, color palette requirements and anything that should be edited out of the original reference.
- Include these requirements in the contract along with the approval process and any rights to the finished image or your name associated with it for advertising purposes by the artist.
- Keep in touch with the artist to ensure they are headed in the direction you want within the timeframe specified.

DON'TS

- Assume that an artist is willing to accept your commission or will engage in a significantly reduced price.
- Hold back essential details until after the work has started. If you make significant revision demands, the price may change.
- Act rude, impatient or arrogant. You may have the money, but artists do not necessarily need to put up with any ego issues.
- Assume that no permits or releases will be necessary to take background photography, especially if the final art might be sold or used for commercial purposes.
- Be vague about what you need. Artists are not mind readers.
- Tell the artist, "I trust your judgment," and give them freedom, only to complain at the end and demand changes.
- Wait until the last minute to check in on progress. If the artist is on the wrong track, significant revisions would be expensive, delay the commission and ruin the relationship and experience.