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Dutch Artist Brigitt Reuver's Photorealistic Car Paintings

You'd be forgiven for thinking at first glance that Brigitt Reuver's work involves some sort of trickery. After all, how could anyone craft a painting of a car that looks *that* realistic? How could anyone capture not just the appearance, but the very essence of a piece of machinery using a few brushes, a bit of acrylic paint, and some high-end canvas?

But the portraits of supercars and classic cars Reuver makes aren't Photoshopped snapshots; they're one-off works of art, made by human hands and eyes. Even more astoundingly, the hyper realistic pieces come from the hand of someone who's been in the professional art world for less time than it took Michelangelo to complete the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.

"I've only been painting for two and a half years now," the twenty-seven-year-old Dutch artist, who went to school for psychology and media design, says.

That's not to say Reuver wasn't bitten by the creative bug at an early age. As a child, she took to pen and paper readily, drawing early and often. On the advice of her parents, however, she choose not to study art, instead heading off to university to rack up several degrees and get what she now calls a "grown-up job." But before long, she says, she realized she needed to follow her heart into the art world before the boredom and monotony of the office life her folks suggested began to feel suffocating. Leaving her work with only a broad sense of wanting to pursue a creative path and having long felt drawn to automobiles, she decided to take a stab at painting one—and in her own words, everything just clicked.

"It sounds very cheesy," she says, "but it was kind of a destiny moment."

It was also, she would later discover, a return to form. While moving recently, "I found my old sketchbooks," she says. "Turns out I've been drawing cars since I was around four."

Back in those days, she was sketching supercar *mélanges*—sleek red speed machines inspired by the Lamborghini Countachs and Ferrari Testarossas she saw in video games. These days, however, she's painting cars like the Ford GT, the Jaguar XKR-S, and the Ferrari LaFerrari—a 950-horsepower hybrid speed machine—whose prospective buyers have to be invited by the carmaker to be able to purchase it—which currently sells on the used market for three million USD or more.

This in spite of, by her own admission, no deep well of automotive enthusiasm until recently. Her interest in cars may date back years, but years of grinding away in other fields left her with little time to learn the ins and outs of motor vehicles. So over the last couple years, "I've been catching up with crazy speed," she says. "My friends are getting very annoyed with my car talk."

Reuver's process these days is a bit more involved than scribbling on sketchpads. Each piece takes around two to three months from start to finish, she says. Usually, she and the photographer she works with, An-

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sho Bijlmakers, will visit the subject vehicle in person to discuss the project with the car's owner, figure out which angles to emphasize, and take reference photographs. Then it's off to start painting—a process that can take two hundred and fifty hours or more. Newer artistic technologies like airbrushes or digital manipulation could make it faster, she says, but that would mean losing the classical portrait style that comes with using traditional brushes.

It is not, as you might imagine, an easy process. "The first week [of a new project], I'm really excited," Reuver says. "The second week, I'm ready to throw it out a window." But the added time and energy spent doing it the old-fashioned way are integral to her paintings' hard-to-define qualities that separate a picture from a piece of art.

"If you stand in front of the real painting," she says, "you will feel it."

In the art world, however, talent without inspiration gets you nowhere. The magic in Reuver's pieces comes from her eye for the beauty in the horsepower-laden beasts. "My artwork really focuses on the design end of things," she says. Aerodynamics draw her eye in, as well, she says. "The lines, the reflections—there's a lot of skill in developing a car."

The appeal extends beyond just the shape of the sheet metal, though. Reuver says she sees liberty in the lines. Growing up in the middle of nowhere, the automobile came to represent the possibility within mobility. "For me, cars have always been [about] freedom," she says. "If you have a car, you can go

anywhere."

One glance at her Instagram account is enough to tell that her career has helped bring her across Europe, and a trip to Shanghai is likely on tap for the near future, she says, though she has her eyes set on the United States, where the first painting she ever sold wound up. "[It] might be interesting to come to America," she says. "That's on my to-do list."

Also on the potential list of action items, she says: setting up an online auction for the pieces she's done on spec. So far, the artwork she's sold has largely been to owners of high-end cars who've commissioned portraits of their babies; however, she also has several pieces she did for no one in particular, which she says she might be willing to sell to the public. (While she's not willing to discuss how much the pieces sell for, "if you know the way they're made," she chuckles, "you can infer that they aren't very cheap.")

Still, while the future may be bright for this young artist, it's not without issues. It can be tricky, she admits, being a female artist working in the automotive realm, which is dominated by men—many of whom carry their own stereotypes about women. That said, it can also be an advantage, especially when trying to get noticed in the name of advancing a career. "In a room of a hundred old, gray car guys, I'm the only young blonde woman there," she says.

"Besides," she quips, "the car world is the first place I've been where there are no lines for the ladies' room."

The Possibility

MOCKERS