

Artists at work

This article reflects the status at the time of its publication. The content may since have become outdated.

11/06/2020 Richard Phillips and Jörg Bergmeister: How mutual admiration made history for Porsche at Le Mans.

In 2019, unbeknown to almost everyone, Porsche broke one more record at the 24 Hours of Le Mans. When Project One's 911 RSR crossed the line to win the GTE-Am class, it became the first art car ever to win the world's most coveted endurance race. One year on, we've reunited the lead driver and the artist behind its extraordinary livery to reflect on their historic achievement.

New York-based Richard Phillips was already a Porsche guy and enthusiastic amateur racer when he met factory driver Jörg Bergmeister in 2012, but their journey to Le Mans victory had a long way to run. "We met after a friend of mine wrote an article for the New York Times in 2012 about my 911 Turbo and its influence on my art. I'd said that the real artists were people like Jörg and Patrick Long who I was following at the time in ALMS, and Jörg saw this and invited me to a race at Lime Rock."

The pair soon formed a firm friendship, with Phillips, who is a member of the Porsche Club of America and was racing in its championship at the time, receiving regular coaching from Bergmeister. The German factory driver and today Porsche Brand Ambassador grew to greatly admire Phillips's art, and in 2013 he invited him to design his helmet for Le Mans that year.

The helmet of Jörg Bergmeister for Le Mans 2019

"The helmet is how people identify the driver, so I've always tried to keep it very similar throughout my career," says Bergmeister. "My helmets used to be only red, blue and back, with a little gold, but Richard designed me a one-off for Le Mans which is now sitting in my house. From that point on we were saying we should do an art car together, and all the pieces of the puzzle finally came together last year. It was a dream come true for both of us."

As an artist with a love of Porsche and motorsport, this was a golden opportunity for Phillips, who had by now sampled the magic of Le Mans. "When we did the helmet back in 2013 I came to Le Mans to watch the race and just being in the garage, seeing the designs on the car, I kept thinking even then how great it would be to do that. And then in the fall of 2018 I got the call from Jörg saying 'All right Richard, the time is now!'"

Phillips was already aware of the long and illustrious list of art cars that had raced at Le Mans, but was determined to go his own way using ideas from Bergmeister's helmet as a springboard. "Generally speaking, art cars of the past have been different formulations of stripes and dots and graphics, and to me the idea of having images of well-known paintings on the car instead was exciting."

Working on the 911 RSR Art Car

Using a selection of his work from the late 90s, Phillips projected a complex 2D livery onto the car. Oversized detail images would enable people to appreciate the design at the sort of distances most race-goers would see from at the circuit. In collaboration with Porsche Digital and German livery specialists Signal Design, the 2D livery was printed at full size and then applied to the car using vinyl foiling and heat guns.

The project was ready just in time and presented to the Automobile Club de l'Ouest (ACO) in readiness for its official unveiling before the race in June. But Bergmeister was still harbouring a small concern, one that he had not wanted to share with Phillips. "I'd driven a couple of art cars before and always thought it would be really cool to have Richard do one. But the history of the art car at Le Mans is not great to say the least. I didn't want to tell Richard until after the race, but no art car had ever won Le Mans before."

The car was unveiled to the waiting media to universal acclaim. "I was very mindful of the historic importance of the art car at Le Mans," the artist remembers, "so I really wanted to make a car that

people would like. And when it was revealed, all these hardcore French journalists and photographers, even the scrutineers, they all applauded, which was so meaningful for me. But if I'd known drivers generally consider art cars to be bad luck I would have been mortified if they hadn't won!"

Fortunately, victory was Porsche's, clinching a tight battle with the closest Ferrari 488 to finish 45 seconds clear of the field after 334 laps. It was a great moment for Bergmeister, for whom this would be the last Le Mans before he retired from frontline racing to become a Porsche brand ambassador, and a career pinnacle for Richard, whose two great passions had come together in the perfect setting.

"Jörg is an artist to me," he says. "What he does in the car is beyond imagination and what I wanted to do was create a livery equal to that. Seeing the car come up through that early morning sunlight through the Porsche curves, it was so beautiful. A really special experience."

Image Sublines

Path: Artists at work/Images/img_1.jpg
Title: 911 RSR, Art Car, Le Mans, 2019, Porsche AG
Subline: The 911 RSR of Project 1 was the first Art Car ever to win the 24 Hours of Le Mans

Link Collection

Link to this article
https://newsroom.porsche.com/en/2020/motorsports/porsche-art-car-911-rsr-le-mans-2019-richard-phillips-artist-joerg-bergmeister-driver-brand-ambassador-21191.html

Media Package
https://pmdb.porsche.de/newsroomzips/34443280-47a0-4a3d-b0e4-f4568b657dc1.zip

External Links
https://gagosian.com/artists/richard-phillips/