

Buckle Up, Buttercup: Artist Werner Bronkhorst and the Porsche 911 S/T

01/05/2024 Australian contemporary artist Werner Bronkhorst captures Porsche sports cars in his work. But it's what he makes them convey that matters most.

"Wow! That was incredible," exhaled Werner Bronkhorst as he climbed from the passenger seat of the Porsche 911 GT3 RS. His wide-eyed expression said more than his words. Heart still racing, he turned to thank Porsche Cars Australia's Chief Driving Instructor, Luke Youlden, who had just completed a particularly fast lap of Melbourne's Albert Park Grand Prix racing circuit. "This car is amazing! Thank you!"

Watching Werner step from the Signal Yellow GT3 RS was like seeing him emerge from one of his own paintings. The Sydney-based contemporary artist, famed for his abstract creations involving sports car imagery, had just enjoyed the full 386 kW / 525 PS primal thrill offered by the brightly coloured, motorsport-derived 911. As a guest of Porsche Cars Australia during the recent 2024 Formula 1® Rolex

Australian Grand Prix, this was the first time he had experienced the flagship 911 in its familial habitat. But it was more than a joy ride; it brought to life the inspiration for his latest artwork.

Creating opportunities

“This is a very special project,” he said, referring to his latest large charcoal-and-acrylic canvas, a custom piece he created for Porsche Cars Australia. “This is the first time I’ve officially collaborated with Porsche. I usually focus on older cars so creating this special artwork of the new 911 S/T combines a celebration of Porsche, 60 years of the 911, and the essence of its appeal in the sports car world.”

‘Buckle Up, Buttercup’ is a highly detailed charcoal sketch of the new 911 S/T cornering at speed. The artwork’s title is headlined across the front in thick, acrylic paint in a shade that echoes Shore Blue, the same colour that formed the basis for the entire interior design of the Porsche Pavilion trackside hospitality building, which welcomed more than 800 guests during this year’s Formula 1® Rolex Australian Grand Prix.

Werner’s creation was showcased on the Porsche Pavilion’s main wall during the four days of this year’s Australian Formula One event. It was a constant magnet for guests. It also attracted a flurry of bids. Werner generously created his one-of-a-kind artwork with the purpose of supporting the Make-A-Wish Foundation, the global children’s charity that grants life-changing wishes to young people with critical illnesses.

“Having my own children I know how important it is to see kids grow up and have their wishes fulfilled.”

Werner was part of fulfilling the wish of 21-year-old Tayla during this year’s Formula 1® Rolex Australian Grand Prix. Her wish for a Formula One Journalist Experience with Make-A-Wish saw her interview Werner about ‘Buckle Up, Buttercup’, were they discussed his process, inspiration and how his career started.

Capturing nostalgia

‘Buckle Up, Buttercup’ perfectly represents one of the two distinct styles in Werner’s artistic oeuvre. Like his other artworks capturing sports cars, such as his recent ‘911. What’s Your Emergency?’ collection, his precise black-and-white sketches communicate a car’s athleticism and attraction. They also evoke feelings of nostalgia. But perhaps their most powerful effect is how they convey and sense of speed and amplitude, something the late Australian art critic Robert Hughes ascribed to the work of pop art legend James Rosenquist.

The messages he paints over the top of them – always in thick, textured letters – contain clever messages. They are a strong and effective conceptual art mechanic. But for Werner, they are a form of anti-art’.

“Cars are so ingrained in our society they have their own terminology,” he says. “The text I use relates to this but it’s also a play on words.

“I involve literature with these artworks to convey the sense that, even though you’re looking at an artwork, you’re also reading it. I’m forcing you to read the artwork and forcing you to understand what it's about, even if you can make the links on your own.”

Werner also made a special crate to house and transport his unique 911 S/T-inspired creation. It’s even painted in Shore Blue and has a Style Porsche ‘63’ racing roundel to acknowledge the first year of the 911.

Bidding for ‘Buckle Up, Buttercup’ ended at the finish of this year’s Australian Formula 1® Rolex Grand Prix race. It was purchased for AUD $27,000 by a guest from Singapore.

Family influence

Growing up in South Africa, Werner’s early connection to Porsche was almost inevitable.

“My uncle was an architect and, for him, it was important to have a car that looked good and functioned well,” he says. “My family’s background is German and Porsche was the natural choice for him. He started collecting them and then restoring and selling them. I learned a lot about Porsche through him, especially on road trips and the odd lap around a racetrack.”

Werner recently revisited those memories with some time in the 718 Cayman Style Edition, a car he says embodies everything he admires about Porsche.

“I love the essence of the design. It is in a league of its own.”

It’s an opinion that squares nicely with his creative process and his artistic influences, which include Andy Warhol and Keith Haring.

“Art consumes me. I just love telling a story about something I know a lot about, and I just so happen to know a lot about Porsches. I also know how I feel when I look at a Porsche and when I make a drawing of a Porsche.”

It’s this injection of feeling that adds a certain magic to his creations. It transcends their mix of accurate representation and unexpected messaging. And seeing him emerge from the yellow 911 GT3 RS would make you think he climbs inside the canvas to create them.

Info

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