

Reef encounter: undersea adventures with an air-cooled 911

09/12/2022 The collaboration between two Polish artists that turned a historic Porsche into an unearthly installation.

As the sun rose over the Polish port city of Gdynia one morning last summer, a large crowd gathered on the dockside to gaze up at a strange yet familiar form. Suspended high overhead was the unmistakable outline of an early 911, its faded red bodywork almost completely covered with a dense tangle of coral and seaweed.

What the bemused onlookers were witnessing was not, despite initial appearances, the overdue recovery of a long-lost Porsche. Instead, it was a unique art installation created for the annual art festival 'Gdynia Design Days' by conceptual artists Ada Zielinska and Rafal Dominik. Playing with the 2022 festival's themes around the ocean and climate change, the artists created a fantastical vision of an artificial reef, using a real air-cooled 911 and a dream-like narrative imagining how this precious car might have been abandoned to the Baltic for several generations.

“The story started when Porsche invited us to prepare an installation for Design Days,” recalls Zielinska. “Rafal and I wanted to do something that connected Porsche to the sea and took some inspiration from Damien Hurst’s exhibition at the Venice Biennale in 2017, which displayed ancient artefacts apparently taken from the ocean that were covered in coral. People are creating reefs with old cars and sunken ships today and we thought it would be interesting to use a classic 911 in a similar way, and to display it right by the sea itself.”

Finding the car for such an extraordinary artistic journey

The first challenge was perhaps the greatest: to find the car for such an extraordinary artistic journey. Marek Sworowski, Marketing Director at Porsche Poland, began searching for a suitable subject, using the company’s contacts around the country to source a Porsche whose owner could bare to see it turned, albeit temporarily, into an artificial reef.

“It was hard to find someone who would allow us to do this to their car,” Sworowski concedes with a smile. “We narrowed the search down to contacts we had whose cars were just about to go in for restoration work, and when we found a 1973 911T it seemed like the perfect choice. Whatever it was covered in, everyone would recognise that traditional 911 shape.”

The artistic process would see Zielinska and Dominik creating artificial coral structures using 3D printing and crushed seashells, bonding the finished forms to the car’s surface over a painstaking and intensive two-week period. When finished, the car was unrecognisable from the sleek and pretty F-Series Touring that, up until a few days before, had been quietly awaiting its restoration to factory perfection. “The owner had so much trust in our approach,” adds Sworowski, “and he really believed in the project. He just asked us not to actually put his car in the sea!”

Reveal at the Gdynia Design Days Festival

When the finished piece, entitled ‘Sunken Romance’, was first revealed at the Gdynia Design Days festival, hoisted over the harbour by a crane, onlookers were understandably taken in. “A lot of people were quite shocked,” Ada admits, “and really thought it had been taken out of the sea. People were running towards it from all directions, pulling out their phones to take photos.”

The installation quickly became an internet sensation among fans of Porsche and the wider artistic community, but after the festival concluded, the car was soon stripped of its coral coating and returned to its owner for the restoration work to begin. The success of the project, however, prompted Zielinska to contact Porsche again and suggest creating a short film that imagined the origins story of ‘Sunken Romance'. The result, directed by Zielinska and Dominik Panasiuk, is a surreal cinematic exploration of forbidden love, between mermaids and mortals, between vintage cars and their devoted drivers. You can watch it here.

Video

https://newstv.porsche.com/porschevideos/230995_en_3000000.mp4

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