

Moments of happiness: the art of Chris Labrooy

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15/12/2020 Journey into the surreal with the Porsche-loving digital artist Chris Labrooy.

In a pristine barn conversion with panoramic views over rural Aberdeenshire, in Scotland, Chris Labrooy struggles momentarily to sum up how he makes a living. “It’s really difficult to describe what I do,” says the 40-year-old Scotsman. “I get up in the morning and make pictures. It’s a lifestyle that gives me a lot of freedom to pursue different ideas. I have called myself a digital image maker working at the intersection of art and design. Does that sound a bit vague?”

It is difficult to pigeonhole Labrooy because his work is largely without precedent. Having studied product design at the Royal College of Art, the young graduate became increasingly absorbed by the digital realm, combining his knowledge and understanding of tactile objects with a growing fascination for the surreal.

“I transitioned into the digital world after seeing the advances in technology there,” Labrooy explains. “I moved from making tangible, physical objects to making photorealistic images. What I managed to do in the digital world was capture those objects – render them in a realistic way – but with CGI and all these new digital tools there was no limit to my imagination. I could create any environment and place any single object into that context.”

Labrooy’s past work will be familiar to many Porsche fans, using as it often does classic 911 cars transposed into dreamy, desert landscapes. Palm Springs is a favourite source of inspiration, as is mid-century architecture. But his calling card is the unexpected and occasionally ridiculous. “I like to juxtapose different elements and am always searching for those moments of happiness. Something like an inflatable flamingo or a swimming pool really symbolise happiness for me, so I always like to have those elements in my images and animation.”

The intense heat, dryness and vivid colour of Labrooy’s work is a far cry from the often cold and harsh environment of his home in remote Scotland, so much so that it seems like the digital sphere acts as a form of escapism. He admits that the contrast is essential, and that if he had not moved home after a spell living in California, it would not feature so heavily in his work today. But where do the cars fit in to all this? An air-cooled Porsche seems like a strange muse for an artist whose work is at once so modern and otherworldly.

“I’ve always been into cars, ever since I was a small boy,” Labrooy says. “I’d play with them, then I would draw them, then drive them in computer games. Even as a youngster I was fascinated by the design of cars. I remember seeing an episode of Top Gear where they went to the Royal College of Art and from the next day onwards I was telling my friends that that was where I wanted to go. To study car design.”

The reality of art college saw Labrooy side-tracked into painting and sculpture and cars were all but forgotten for a while, but an increasing focus on product design meant they would make an inevitable return. “Of all consumer products,” he says, “cars are the ultimate object of desire. They are such complex things, with unique and very specific identities.”

With his unusual aesthetic sought out by big international brands such as British Airways, Nike and Apple, Labrooy was eventually able to indulge his passion for the automotive in the physical realm as well, buying a 981 Cayman with a PDK transmission. “I ran that car for two years,” he remembers, “but I wanted more. I looked through the classifieds and eventually bought a 981 GT4.”

Having a Porsche on the drive would become a major influence on Labrooy’s work. “Once I owned a Porsche I became more aware of the brand and its motorsport pedigree, and really curious about the 911. It’s a very soft, rounded shape that’s a highly capable, high performance sports car at the same time. The 911 has a unique, almost eccentric personality. When I’m making my images, the cars are like actors in a way, and the 911 is like an A-list Hollywood star, with all this depth and versatility."

Today, Labrooy is the proud owner of a 718 Cayman GTS 4.0 (**718 Cayman GTS 4.0 (WLTP)*:** Fuel consumption combined: 10.9 – 10.1 l/100 km; CO_2 emissions combined: 247 – 230 g/km; CO_2 class:

G), a dazzling flash of Guards Red against the deep greens and earthy browns of Aberdeenshire in autumn. “It’s the perfect car for my lifestyle,” he says. “Because I work from home I don’t have to commute, so the majority of my driving is for pure pleasure and the Cayman is ideal for that. We’re blessed with amazing roads here and its compact enough to really fit the environment and the landscape.”

So the GTS provides another vivid and visceral dreamscape for Labrooy, not unlike the digital world he inhabits during his working day. “Often I’ll get up really early on a weekend, about 05:45, and just go for a drive when it’s nice and quiet,” he says. “The Cayman is an amazing aesthetic experience where you have all these different sensations – through the wheel and through the seat. And then there’s sound of course. What's not to love about a flat-six engine?”

Info

You can discover more of Chris Labrooy's work at www.chrislabrooy.com and follow him on Instagram @chrislabrooy.

Consumption data

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*Further information on the official fuel consumption and the official specific CO_2 emissions of new passenger cars can be found in the "Leitfaden über den Kraftstoffverbrauch, die CO_2-Emissionen und den Stromverbrauch neuer Personenkraftwagen" (Fuel Consumption, CO_2Emissions and Electricity Consumption Guide for New Passenger Cars), which is available free of charge at all sales outlets and from DAT (Deutsche Automobil Treuhand GmbH, Helmuth-Hirth-Str. 1, 73760 Ostfildern-Scharnhausen, www.dat.de).

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