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Programme of Study: Graphic Design

Module: ADDA4023 – Ways of Perceiving

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Task: Curate an Exhibition - Words: 1,326

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Through the Years exhibition

The purpose of this exhibition is to honour the car's lasting heritage, innovation, and artistic merits. Every car on show conveys a tale of creativity and aspiration, of evolving tastes and fashions. As once stated by design critic Stephan Bayley, *“Automobiles are arguably the most significant practical applications of art in our culture, a rolling sculpture that embodies design, engineering and aesthetic expression.”* (Bayley, 2009).

The exhibition embraces that idea — that cars are more than machines; they are reflections of the eras that birthed them.



Figure 1 - (Olivier Ouadah, 2013, Louvre)

Because of its beauty, popularity, and calm atmosphere, the historic grounds of the Louvre in Paris are the site of the Through the Years exhibition. The Louvre, which is home to some of the greatest artwork in the world, provides the ideal setting for showcasing cars as independent cultural and creative icons. As architectural critic Witold Rybczynski once noted, *“The setting of an object can alter our perception of it completely.”* (Rybczynski, 2001).



Figure 2 - (Gooding & Company, 2023, Ford Model A)

Figure 3 - (Bonhams Cars, 2018, Cadillac Model 30)

Figure 4 - (Bonhams Cars 2013, Rolls-Royce 40/50hp Silver Ghost)

The exhibition's entrance is this collection, which marks the beginning of the car's changing history. The world became louder, faster, and suddenly much closer together, and it depicts that moment. In addition to being cars, early machines such as the Ford Model A, Cadillac Type 30, and Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost were promises of change that altered how people perceived time, space, and freedom. Dan Neil argues that "The car isn't just a mode of transportation; it's a passport to a new way of living" (Neil, 2011).

Critically, these cars mark the beginning of mobility culture, reflecting ideas of technological determinism. Compared to modern cars, they could initially seem to be simple and slow. Beneath their humble exteriors, however, is something far more ambitious: a daring story ambition and entering a world that is faster and more free. Despite their technological flaws, these cars reflected the spirit of adventure and hope of a nation prepared to conquer historical limits.



Figure 5 - (The Art Newspaper, 2024, Mercedes-Benz Uhlenhaut Coupe)

Figure 6 - (DK Engineering, 2021, Ferrari 250 GT SWB)

Figure 7 - (Heritage Classic, n/a. Aston Martin DB4 GT)

The golden age of motorsport is thought to have been the 1950s and 1960s, when the world's fastest cars had to be real cars. During this time, manufacturers had to produce homologated versions for the general public in order to race: aggressive, purpose-driven cars that somehow managed to strike a balance between brutality and grace. Historic GT Racers immerses visitors in this era. This era, which embodied a new concept of movement, freedom, and danger, made it difficult to distinguish between the racecourse and the open road.

Cars in this collection, such as the Mercedes-Benz 300 SLR Uhlenhaut Coupé, Ferrari 250 GT SWB, and Aston Martin DB4 GT, are symbols of the ideal form-follows-function,

in which engineering determined design and aerodynamic necessity sculpted beauty. These cars, which were based on the modernist idea that "form follows function," gave performance, handling, and speed precedence over decoration. However, ironically, their practical use resulted in some of the most loved car designs ever. As Stirling Moss noted, "*Movement is tranquillity*" (Moss, 2015).



Figure 8 - (Auto-Blog, 2020, Aston Martin DB5 Goldfinger Continuation)

Figure 9 - (Hagerty, 2021, Back To The Future DeLorean)

Figure 10 - (Classic, 2019, Pontiac Trans-Am 'Knight Rider' KITT)

This exhibition honours the time when cars evolved from simple machinery into legendary things. These pieces examine cars that became enduring cultural icons by combining engineering and narrative. Here, the Aston Martin DB5 from Goldfinger, the

DMC DeLorean from Back to the Future, and KITT, the Pontiac Firebird Trans Am from Knight Rider, take centre stage.

Critically, these cars are important because they show how media and technology worked together to change public opinion. Matt Taylor states, "Cinema made the car a fantasy object, a machine not just for movement, but for freedom, transformation, and adventure," (Taylor, 2013).

These cars serve as an example of how design is about more than just form or function since they extend beyond transportation and join a larger context. They still draw people's notice now and, in the process, they formed cultural identity as much as any character or plot.



Figure 11 - (Baltana, 2020, Dodge Charger R/T)

Figure 12 - (Bonhams, 2012, Shelby Mustang GT500KR Fastback)

Figure 13 - (Cars, 2023, Chevrolet Camaro SS 427)

The next exhibit dives straight into the heart of a louder, faster, wilder America.

In the 1960s and early 70s, car makers weren't chasing luxury. It was a time when the only thing that really mattered was how fast you could tear down a straight road and how much noise you could make doing it.

For a lot of young people, these cars were a way to push back against the rules, to show that they didn't want to follow the slow, safe paths their parents had laid out. They were loud, proud, and impossible to ignore — a rolling middle finger to authority. As Penny Sparke puts it, "Design is not simply about making things look good; it's about shaping human behaviour and reflecting social values" (Sparke, 2004). And muscle cars absolutely did that. But they weren't perfect.

In a way, they mirrored the era they came from: confident on the outside, but a little chaotic underneath. That's part of why they're still so fascinating today. They weren't about balance or refinement.



Figure 14 - (StupidDOPE, 2024, Porsche 959)

Figure 15 - (Hot Cars, 2021, McLaren)

Figure 16 - (Bonhams Cars, 2020, Bugatti Veyron)

These exhibits are a collection which marks a turning point where ambition, science, and design collided to create machines that redefined the limits of possibility. Design in this era moved away from bold styling for its own sake and instead focused on pure function, every surface had a job to do. It fits with what high-tech design theory talks about: the idea that structure and performance should shape how something looks.

As Lawrence Burns puts it, "The best automotive designs achieve beauty not by decoration, but by solving problems elegantly" (Burns, 2018).

In theory, this change reveals a larger picture about how culture was evolving as well.

The supercars of this era began to symbolise something different from the emotion and

defiance of previous super cars. That peculiar combination of wonder and terror is what we refer to as technical sublimity.



Figure 17 - (Hot Cars 2022, Hummer EV)

Figure 18 - (Car & Driver, 2011, Tesla Model S)

Figure 19 - (Elektrek, 2023, Rimac Nevera)

The final piece of the collection, featuring the GMC Hummer EV, Tesla Model S, and Rimac Nevera, shows that the age of the electric car is here.

Design today feels different.

It's not just about looking good or going fast anymore. Designers now have to think about efficiency, energy and sustainability. As Tim Brown puts it, *"Design thinking today must prioritize human needs and the planet simultaneously"* (Brown, 2009).

Electric cars like the Tesla Model S proved you didn't have to sacrifice speed or style to drive something better for the planet. The Rimac Nevera takes that even further, showing that electric power can still feel crazy, fast, and a little terrifying.

But at the same time, cars like the Hummer EV show how complicated the story still is turning a symbol of excess into an "eco-friendly" machine raises hard questions about whether simply rebranding big consumption really solves anything.

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