

Portfolio of Writing: Ways of Perceiving

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My exhibition showcases a design classic which embraces classic American culture. The 1959 Cadillac Coupe de Ville is an iconic piece of history whose design has never been matched by any subsequent model or car maker. I believe this car has its own unique identity and I wanted to create a space in which people could firstly see the car and then interact with its beauty and design both interior and exterior. My vision is for people to run their fingers along the huge sharp tail fins and stare into the dual bullet tail-lights as if they were looking into a mirror.

Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognises before it can speak. (Berger, 1972)

When the audience first see the car, I want them to be able to feel emotions and see the car as a design classic and a thing of beauty. The car is its own narrative and when they sit into the car and feel the leather seats and hold the steering wheel, I want to create a sense of stepping back in time. In figure 1 I did not want to create this modern space. I considered it essential to take the car back to its original roots and immerse it in a space which it felt comfortable, the Cadillac need to feel a sense of belonging in the space.



Figure 1

(Berger, 1972) says "I think the best way to view art is by seeing it for the first time, untainted by words and explanations because that it when we can make our connection with the piece." This is the exact feeling I want to create in my exhibition. This is exactly how I felt when saw a Coupe de Ville for the first time and I want to recreate that experience for others.

This first experience of the Cadillac Coupe de Ville should be memorable and long lasting. As I child I remember visiting a museum to see FAB1 Lady Penelope's car from the Thunderbirds movie. The

car was crammed into a small space with other less significant cars and the car wasn't allowed to speak for itself. I feel it needed its own space in order to showcase itself. It is with this in mind that I have designed my exhibition space.

By displaying the Cadillac Coupe de Ville I want the audience to feel and connect with a part of history, a moment in time. I want the Cadillac to be viewed alongside the cultural connections it has with film and music. The car has featured in many films and artists sing about their passion and enjoyment of riding in a Cadillac, I want this to be an integral part of the exhibition.

My exhibition space will be in the home of the Cadillac and the cultural home of the motor car with the "The Big Three motor manufacturers Ford, Chrysler Fiat and General Motors being based in the city." (Mcintyre, 2018) Detroit was the birthplace of the motor car and I feel that this is a perfect place for a design classic to be exhibited and appreciated. In 2017, more than 2 million cars and trucks were produced in the city. This is a part of Detroit history, the people who designed and built it may bring their own families and tell their own stories of what the car means to them. The Johnny Cash song One piece at a time (1976) tells the story of a worker at the GM factory who stole pieces of the car in his lunchbox each day so he could make his own Cadillac. If William Mitchell, the car's designer, was still alive I am sure he would love to show his design to students, families and car enthusiasts from all over the world.

The Cadillac will be displayed on a roadway surrounded by trees within the Belle Isle Park in Detroit. This outside space will enable the Cadillac to be seen in its original home town where it will be recognised and appreciated by visitors and the local population. It is important that those people who built or designed the car also have a reminder of Detroit as a former giant city in the manufacture of cars and the car is culturally important.

"Curating comes from the Latin word curare which means to take care" (Obrist, 2014) I believe that my exhibition will take care or look after a design classic which represents the motor industry in its former glory but is also a reminder of how we have to embrace change and the world does not stand still for long.

The job of the curator or myself as exhibition designer is to "sets up so that it becomes an extraordinary experience" (Obrist, 2014) and I want it to become an interactive space where people not only look at the car but feel it and share its history and cultural traditions.

Cormier designing spaces for cars in the VA museum designed his project on "the impact of the car as a designed object rather than purely on car design" (Cormier, 2019) I also wanted to emphasise how the car has shaped the world in which we live and link it to the city in which it is located i.e. Detroit. It is important that the car is viewed in its natural habitat, it was built to dwell in the city and I believe Detroit is the perfect place for the car to be exhibited.

Within the city on an island accessible by car and other forms of transport is the island of Belle Isle. This is a huge open space that is visited each week by families, tourists and houses a zoo and aquarium. Belle Isle is a calm and natural space within a busy city that will give visitors time to interact and appreciate the Cadillac. I envisage that visitors will spend time with my exhibition and can sit along one side of the exhibition on benches to view the car from afar.

In Belle Isle Park, the car will stand alone on a plinth and will be surrounded by an interactive screen, reminiscent of a drive in movie theatre in America. These movie theatres have appeared in many films such as Grease and I want the audience to be able to sit in the car and interact with both

movies and music as they drive along the American highway. I want them to relive a moment in and have the experience of driving a classic car and interact with a thing of beauty.

There will be a 3 sided large scale theatre screen which will play images of a rolling road and the person in the car will get a feel that they are driving down the highway making the experience interactive and they will be immersed in virtual reality. Surrounding the three-sided theatre there will be a line of trees to give the space an intimate feel.



Figure 2

Music is also an important aspect of this exhibition and the car stereo will play a timeline of music by artists such as Chuck Berry (1963) Bruce Springsteen (1980, 1984) and Train (2014) whose lyrics all use the word "Cadillac" to illustrate the importance of the car in American music culture across generations.

Alongside the theatre the exhibition will display album covers for the Cadillac songs with the lyrics highlighted together with movie posters of films such as Ghostbusters, Pink Cadillac and Mad Max Fury Road which used these iconic cars in their films.



Figure 3

My artwork is a classic 1959 Cadillac Coupe de Ville whose name is derived from the French “de la Ville” which means “of the town”. It was designed by William L Mitchell who was an American automobile designer. He was recruited to join General Motors in 1935. He later went on to design other classics such as the 1963 Corvette Stingray Coupe and the 1963 Buick Riviera.

Mitchell created a shortened version of a previous design and used the French verb “couper” meaning to cut in its new name. This marque was a shortened four wheel closed carriage with an inside seat for two and an outside seat for the driver. This smaller vehicle was designed for use in the town or city (de Ville). It was assembled in Detroit at the GM factory.

This 1959 Cadillac Coupe de Ville was a head-turner with its huge sharp tail fins and dual headlights. It had a new jewel-like grille patterns and matching deck lid beauty panels. It had new roof pillar configurations and two distinctive roof lines never seen before in a Cadillac design. It was powered by a 6.4 litre engine with a 4 speed Hydra-Matic automatic gearbox.

It was a truly a beauty before it's time. The interior was crafted from two tone leather with a matching steering wheel. Its huge bench seats were also made from the same two tone leather and different models could seat 6 people comfortably. It was an impressive 225 inches in length and used chrome both inside and out and the de Ville had script name plates on the rear fenders.

America's favourite luxury car and a design classic will be remembered by everyone who feels the soft leather seats, or runs their fingers along the chrome tail fins. I hope my exhibition brings back memories of a bygone era for some and creates new memories for others.

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