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Lapo Elkann Does Custom Cars for L.A. Art Exhibit, Talks Tech and Personalization in California



Lapo Elkann is spending the summer in California exploring what he loves most: cars and customization, plus technology and entertainment. On Saturday night, he showed off his latest project: two custom cars he brought for Adam Lindemann's art exhibit, "Piston Head II: Artists Engage the Automobile."

The show, which opened at Lindemann's Venus gallery in downtown Los Angeles' Arts District on Saturday and is on view through Sept. 10, is the

followup to the "Piston Head" exhibition at Art Basel Miami in 2013, which also explored the intersection of art and cars. The latest exhibit contains new and existing works by César, Katherine Bernhardt, Matthew Day Jackson, Olivier Mosset, Richard Prince, Sterling Ruby, Peter Shire, Keith Haring, Will Boone, Lawrence Weiner and Jonas Wood, among others. Ruby, Wood, Boone and Kenny Scharf were among those present at Friday's private viewing and Saturday's opening.

Fine automobiles run in Elkann's blood; the Agnelli family scion formed his own customization house a few years ago called Garage Italia Customs, which has the means to trick out any mode of transportation. As Elkann explained,

“Personalization is far more interesting than fashion. It’s a broader and more growing industry and the motion industry is very wide, so customization of cars is natural and personalizing with art, creativity and materials you can do anything. In the future maybe we’ll be doing space shuttles. Today there is the opportunity to build, create and customize your own items and I believe the fashion industry is getting into it now. I started it 20 years ago with the Fiat Cinquento democratic customization and the Ferrari Tailor-Made program. When I finished that, I said, ‘One can do more.’” Delving into the art world, he said, “was a great opportunity to work with a friend and collector like Adam and to put art onto and into the cars.” He noted the motion personalization industry is worth \$597 billion.

Garage Italia Customs personalized an Alfa Romeo 4C painted with Hokusai’s “The Great Wave Off Kanagawa,” merging elements of Italian and Japanese culture. The hand-painted depiction of a tsunami wave dominated the roof and rear of the car and is meant to be a metaphor for the feelings experienced while driving it. The interiors are upholstered with Kurabo denim and koi-patterned cream Foglizzo leather and the steering wheel and handbrake handle are covered in the manner of wrapping the hilt of a katana (a samurai sword).

The creative hub also worked on a BMW i8 painted with Giacomo Balla’s “Street Light.” The plug-in hybrid sports car is decked in a Futurism art theme. Balla’s 1909 oil painting was applied to a film which was custom-wrapped around the car. The interior upholstery catches the light and is made by Solaro, a fabric used for suits.

Elkann is also producing a car show for television, the details of which are to be revealed soon. “It’s around music, art, women, men, design because motion speaks to everyone. It’s a necessity. Then there’s a pinnacle where you have the most beautiful cars.” Elkann will be speaking publicly about his new business at the Concours d’Elegance car show in Pebble Beach later this month, and privately with tech companies in Silicon Valley, saying, “It’s the love of my life and the joy of my life and it’s my new business.”